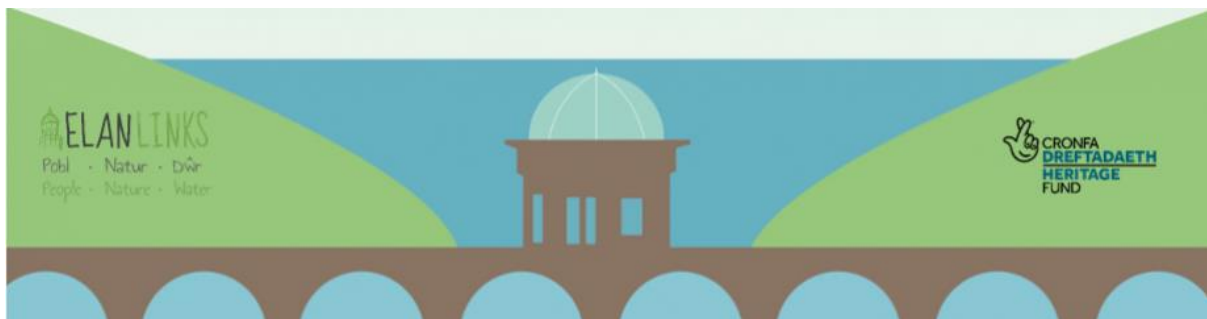

Final Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme

Version 1.1 – Issued 20th June 2024



Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Glossary of abbreviations	6
Executive Summary	7
1. Introduction	11
2. Methodology	16
3. Scheme-level progress	18
3.1 The Elan Links partnership	18
3.2 Governance, management and expertise	20
3.3 Scheme resources	21
3.3.1 Human resources	21
3.3.2 Non-staff resources	24
3.4 Project monitoring	25
3.5 Promotion and stakeholder engagement	25
3.6 The volunteer experience	31
3.6.1 Recruitment	31
3.6.2 Support	32
3.6.3 Retention	34
3.7 Training and mentoring	34
4. Secure and safeguard Elan's heritage – natural heritage projects	37
4.1 Healthy bogs (project 1a)	37
4.2 Dry heath management (project 1b)	40
4.3 Improving our woodland (project 1c)	43
4.4 Rare birds of Elan (project 2a)	47
4.5 Rare species of Elan (project 2b)	51
4.6 Elan hay meadows (project 3a)	54
4.7 Elan rhos hay (project 3b)	58
4.8 Elan rams (project 3c)	60
4.9 Elan cattle (project 3d)	62
4.10 Elan wethers (project 3e)	64
5. Securing, safeguarding and enabling access to Elan's heritage	65
5.1 Safeguarding Elan's historic environment (project 4)	65
5.2 Increasing access to Elan's archaeological and built heritage (project 5a)	71
5.3 The Engineer's House (project 5b)	74

5.4 Cwm Clyd Farmstead (project 5c).....	75
5.5 Elan Links: people to collections (project 6)	77
6. Increasing benefits for people from Elan – Inspiring and engaging people.....	84
6.1 Interpreting Elan (project 7a).....	84
6.2 Elan interactive (project 7b).....	90
6.3 Artist residencies (project 7c).....	96
6.4 Engaging and innovative events (project 7d)	103
6.5 Friends of Elan (project 8).....	110
6.6 Making the most of Elan (project 9).....	114
6.7 Investing in Elan (project 10a)	116
6.8 Elan empowers (project 10b).....	123
6.9 Experience Elan (project 10c)	127
6.10 Tap into it (project 11).....	130
7. Progress towards outcomes and legacy.....	135
7.1 Introduction.....	135
7.2 Securing and safeguarding Elan’s heritage.....	135
7.2.1 Important habitats restored and enhanced (identified in the LCAP).....	135
7.2.2 Key species conserved (identified in the LCAP)	137
7.2.3 Sustainability of Elan’s traditional high nature value farming improved.....	138
7.2.4 Key built and ancient heritage sites protected to safeguard and maintain their condition into the future.....	140
7.2.5 Access and sustainable use for Elan’s built heritage	141
7.2.6 Elan’s diverse cultural heritage recorded, ensuring accessibility and benefit into the future.....	142
7.3 Increased benefits for people associated with Elan	143
7.3.1 Engaging and innovative ways of narrating Elan’s heritage to a wider audience developed, to increase the impact of Elan’s heritage	143
7.3.2 The range and number of people experiencing Elan as visitors, volunteers and learners increased	145
7.3.3 The range of recreational opportunities and ways to enjoy Elan improved	147
7.3.4 More difficult to reach individuals engaged such that skills learned, confidence built, sense of achievement gained and a sense of the natural environment experienced	147
7.3.5 Increased understanding of the importance of sustainable lifestyles for nature and society.....	148
7.3.6 Project legacies secured.....	149
7.4 Additional lessons learned	153
7.5 Progress towards NLHF outcomes	155

8. Conclusions and recommendations	158
Annex A – Elan Links logic table	168
Annex B – Research framework.....	174
Annex C – Sample topic guide for semi-structured interviews	177
Annex D – Artist in Residence evaluation workshop	179

Acknowledgements

This evaluation was carried out by Dr Alun Hughes (20 Degrees) and Alison Powell (Arcadis) with the support of Sam Woodward, Georgia Day, Helen Capelin and Emma Lockley.

They would like to acknowledge the support and co-operation of a wide range of participants in this evaluation. These included volunteers, landowner and community group representatives and the team from Elan Links – past and present. In particular, we would like to thank the members of the Elan Links team for responding to our questions with patience and good humour.

Glossary of abbreviations

CARAD	Community Arts Rhayader and District
CPAT	Clwyd–Powys Archaeological Trust
DCWW	Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EVT	Elan Valley Trust
LCAP	Landscape Conservation Action Plan
MAC	Midlands Arts Centre
NLHF	National Lottery Heritage Fund
NRW	Natural Resources Wales
RAG	Red – Amber – Green risk rating system
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
TAIS	Tourism Amenity Investment Support (Welsh Government / ERDF funding)

Executive Summary

The final evaluation of the Elan Links Landscape Partnership Scheme drew on interviews, surveys and observation of over 200 Scheme stakeholders. These included members of the Partnership Board, delivery team, volunteers, representatives of collaborating organisations and project participants. These primary research findings supplemented a significant body of monitoring and management information made available to the evaluation team.

The evaluation first explored the activities and processes by which the Scheme operated during its lifetime. This was undertaken at a Scheme level and then at a project level. The difference made by these activities, and progress towards project level outputs, built upon the accounts of project activities.

Scheme-level considerations identified excellent practice and experiences in areas such as people development and delivery of major events. Challenges included recruitment and retention to specialised, part-time posts in a sparsely populated area of Wales. Stakeholder engagement and promotion of the Scheme and its successes could have been improved. The findings around volunteering identified examples of good practice but volunteering was hampered overall by the pandemic and capacity limitations in volunteer management for much of the Scheme's lifetime.

The pandemic had a significant effect on the Scheme. It came as projects were gathering momentum, effectively requiring a restart for many projects in 2022. Activities requiring public participation were particularly affected, but the Elan Links team were largely able to recover momentum, aided by a Scheme extension for 2023/24.

The outcomes of the Scheme were largely achieved, with useful lessons learned and significant legacy secured.

Significant progress was achieved in restoring or enhancing habitats for the benefit of nature. Learning was substantial through demonstrator projects and was successful in engaging land managers (EVT and tenant farmers). The land managers of the Elan Valley became well-positioned to take advantage of agricultural grants through the emerging *public money for public goods* agenda and the wider funded response to the climate emergency.

Short-term gains for the benefit of rare species were limited, with outcomes for curlew only just emerging as the Scheme finished its work. Nevertheless, there was much to celebrate. The mindsets of those managing and working the land were changing in favour of high nature value work. Moreover, the logic of the Scheme suggested

significant work on habitat restoration should improve the potential for rare species to benefit as time goes on.

The traditional high nature value farming demonstrator projects were important. They identified some approaches that were beneficial to nature, which tenant farmers would deliver if supported by sustainable agriculture payments. Work on hay meadows and use of cattle in the Valley were highlights of the approach. The demonstrator projects were also of value in ruling out other approaches, such as wethers as traditional meat, and Rhos hay as bedding or winter feed. While the ram scheme failed to deliver the intended outcomes for the Elan Valley Welsh Mountain breed, the project proved to be one of the best ways of engaging tenant farmers who had largely opted out of the Scheme initially.

The archaeological work of the Scheme proved to be a highlight for many. The number of new monuments and sites recorded was both substantial and significant. This engaged people living in the Valley and attracted widespread interest from volunteers. The training given to volunteers was exemplary, leaving a highly engaged and capable group of archaeology volunteers who continued to support archaeological work into 2024.

Access to and the condition of historical sites was improved. Innovative techniques such as the creation of CGI films and using Minecraft to engage audiences that could not reach or might not immediately appreciate historic sites were of particular note. The number of people attending the archaeology and history festival in 2023 was significant.

Aligned with this idea of increased visitor opportunities was an improved offer for visitors in terms of recreational activities and interpretation. The selection of bike trails, orienteering courses and walks fitted with the outdoor experience in the Elan Valley landscape advocated by some local land managers. The strategic plan for access and recreation agreed by DCWW and EVT offered potential benefits for visitors into the future.

Projects intended to improve the sustainability of Elan's built heritage suffered from underestimates of restoration costs. In part, this was due to cost escalation arising from supply-chain challenges during the pandemic. However, insufficient feasibility work was also a factor, leading to instances of redeveloped buildings that only partially met the needs of intended users.

The archive was secured, catalogued and enlarged. Some elements were accessible to the public. A final piece of work would enable full access. Ideally, this would tie to the National Archives. While this would maximise the potential access, the findings also made clear that the greatest interest may be local.

The effect of the Artists in Residence programme was wide ranging and brought significantly more impact than anticipated by some stakeholders at the beginning of the Scheme. The findings made clear that the residency programme had a global reach in the arts community and the diversity of artists involved enabled a wide range of local stakeholders to be engaged. The findings suggested artists engaged during a residency continued to raise the profile of Elan beyond the lifetime of their residency.

Arts-based projects formed one of two themes that particularly raised the profile of the Valley:

- Nature recovery work / high nature value farming featured on an episode of BBC *Countryfile* and in a film showcased at COP26
- The Watershed exhibition and smaller collaborations at MAC / Cannon Hill Park raised the profile in Birmingham.

It seemed likely that nature recovery work / high nature value farming will continue in the Elan Valley through EVT but more generally within the farming community if supported by Welsh Government and NRW. Promotion of EVT's ongoing work will keep the agricultural community in the minds of policy makers, opening opportunities to influence emerging policies.

The mid-term evaluation suggested Elan could be for the arts what Hay-on-Wye has become for literature. The findings of the final evaluation led to a slightly more nuanced view, that Elan could be the Cheltenham of Mid Wales, i.e. a place where there are multiple festivals in an annual calendar but where the residents and wildlife are left undisturbed to live a quieter life outside of those festival periods. The proposed approach could lead to both cultural and economic benefits for the wider area of Mid Wales.

Efforts to engage people in Birmingham and the wider Midlands proved particularly challenging because the Partnership had limited links into the area's networks. It was not until the collaboration with MAC was developed that progress gathered momentum. In hindsight, a member of staff based in the area or at least a Birmingham partner in the Scheme would have been beneficial.

Scheme legacy was substantial. The findings identified tangible legacy in all aspects of the Scheme. Some of the less tangible legacies may prove of equal or greater value in the long term. There was a greater openness from key stakeholders to think differently, in particular amongst land managers. The findings suggested the Partners had improved confidence to tackle major developments and put forward significant projects for the benefit of Mid Wales. At a more individual level, trainees from harder-to-reach groups had their confidence boosted.

21 recommendations were made. They had two primary foci: ensuring the legacy from Elan Links was maximised, and drawing out lessons learned for partners to guide future project development and management.

1. Introduction

The Elan Links: People, Nature & Water Landscape Partnership Scheme (Elan Links) was delivered by the Elan Valley Trust (EVT) in partnership with Community Arts Rhayader & District (CARAD), Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, (DCWW), Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Tir Coed. The Scheme was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) with a grant of £1.6m towards a total Scheme value of £3.4m. The match funding was made up initially of substantial cash contributions from EVT, DCWW, a grant from the Arts Council of Wales and non-cash staff and volunteer time. Additional grant funds were leveraged into the Scheme during its lifetime, as will be related in the main report narrative.

While the Elan Valley has a rich and varied history, perhaps the defining moment shaping the current landscape was when the Birmingham Corporation secured an Act of Parliament in 1892 for the compulsory purchase of the Valley¹. Subsequently, the Elan and Claerwen rivers were dammed and a gravity-fed aqueduct system transports 360 million litres of water across 73 miles to Birmingham each day².

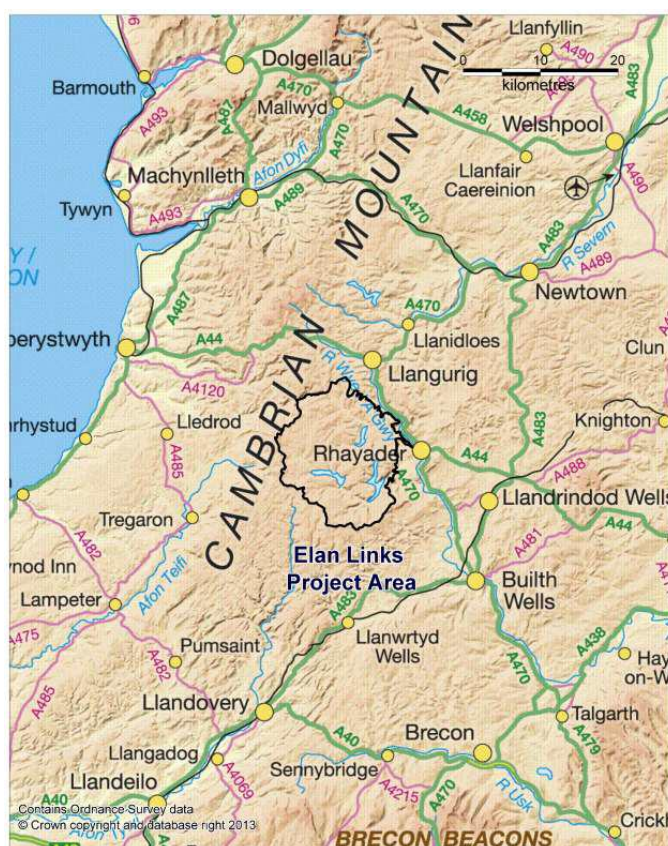


Figure 1.1 – Scale and position of the Elan Links area³

The Elan Links Scheme covers an area of 209 square kilometres which includes the whole of the original Birmingham Corporation Estate boundary, the watershed of the Elan, with the addition of Cwmduddwr Common to the east, plus the SAC woodland at Carngafallt⁴.

¹ BBC (2016) 'Why Birmingham's water comes from Wales', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-37472263>, accessed 26th May 2024.

² Elan Links (2018) 'What is Elan Links?' – publicity leaflet for the landscape partnership scheme.

³ Elan Links: People, Nature & Water (2017) 'Landscape Conservation Action Plan', Chapter 2, p14.

⁴ Ibid, p13.

The Scheme had a succinct yet wide-ranging vision to:

“safeguard the unique and varied heritage of Elan while significantly enhancing outcomes for people, communities and heritage for the long term”⁵.

The Scheme had two aims with 12 associated objectives. The 26 projects making up the Scheme mapped onto these aims and objectives, as summarised in table 1.1⁶. At the time of NLHF grant approval, the Scheme also mapped onto a series of objectives of the fund, that:

- Heritage will be
 - a) better managed
 - b) in better condition and
 - c) identified / recorded.
- People will have
 - a) developed skills
 - b) learned about heritage
 - c) volunteered time.
- Communities will
 - a) have negative environmental impacts reduced
 - b) have more and a wider range of people engaging with heritage
 - c) have a local area / community which is a better place to live, work or visit.

The structure of the report follows the logic of the Scheme. Chapter 2 outlines the methodological approach followed by the evaluation team. Chapter 3 considers the inputs to the Scheme and Scheme-wide activities or processes. Chapters 4 to 6 look at the activities undertaken and the difference these made to each project within the Scheme. Chapter 7 builds upon previous chapters to provide an assessment of Scheme outcomes, lessons learned and legacy generated. The final chapter draws conclusions based on the body of findings presented and makes recommendations based on the learning.

Outputs were RAG rated for each project in chapters 4 to 6. While outputs were helpful indicators of progress, achievement of Scheme-level outcomes were the key measures of success. The RAG rating was applied according to the following definitions:

⁵ Elan Links: People, Nature & Water (2017) 'Landscape Conservation Action Plan', Chapter 5, p157.

⁶ Ibid, pp157–169.

Green – A target output was achieved or exceeded by the end of the Scheme.

Amber – An output was within 15% of target by the end of the Scheme, or a target may have been achieved but there was weak evidence to support the case for achievement.

Red – An output was less than 85% of target by the end of the Scheme, or there was no evidence to form an opinion on progress.

Table 1.1 – Link between Scheme aims, objectives and projects

Aim	Objective	Project
1 Secure and safeguard Elan heritage	1 Restore and enhance important habitats as identified by the landscape character action plan	1a Healthy bogs 1b Dry heath management 1c Improving our woodland
	2 Conserve key species as identified by the landscape character action plan	2a Rare birds of Elan 2b Rare species of Elan
	3 Improve the sustainability of Elan's traditional high nature value farming	3a Elan hay meadows 3b Elan rhos hay 3c Elan rams 3d Elan cattle 3e Elan wethers
	4 Ensure key built and ancient heritage sites on the Estate are protected to safeguard and maintain their condition into the future	4 Safeguarding Elan's historic environment
	5 Access and sustainable use for Elan's built heritage	5a Increasing access to Elan's archaeological and built heritage 5b The Engineer's House 5c Cwm Clyd Farmstead
	6 Record Elan's diverse cultural heritage, ensuring accessibility and benefit into the future	6 Elan Links: people to collections
2 Increase benefits for people from Elan	7 Develop engaging and innovative ways of narrating Elan's heritage to a wide audience to increase the impact of Elan's heritage	7a Interpreting Elan 7b Elan interactive 7c Artist residencies 7d Engaging and innovative events
	8 Increase the range and number of people experiencing Elan as visitors, volunteers and learners	8 Friends of Elan
	9 Improve the range of recreational opportunities and ways to enjoy Elan	9 Making the most of Elan
	10 Engage with more difficult to reach individuals and provide training skills and opportunities that will build confidence, a sense of achievement and a sense of the natural environment	10a Investing in Elan 10b Elan empowers 10c Experience Elan
	11 Increase the understanding of the importance of sustainable lifestyles for nature and society	11 Tap into it
	12 Enshrining legacy at every turn	Cross-cutting theme

The NLHF set out the following approved purposes within its grant offer letter to provide a succinct overview of the Scheme:

- 18,000 plus hectares of semi-natural habitat more resilient
- 1,037 hectares of habitat managed to deliver favourable conservation status
- 40 of Elan's most at risk built and archaeological sites safeguarded
- Increased public access to 6 different heritage sites at Elan
- Renovation and new uses for 2 historic buildings
- Creation of an online archive
- An enhanced collection of materials and oral histories
- Innovative and engaging interpretation facilities
- Improved range and quality of recreational facilities
- New audiences and wider range of people engaged
- 1,500 harder-to-reach individuals from local communities have engaged with the heritage of Elan
- 160 young, educationally disadvantaged people, NEETS, young offenders, the unemployed and those receiving ESA will have received training in the natural environment
- 1,000 people from harder-to-reach groups from the Birmingham area will have benefited from a retreat at Elan
- 8 smaller / community projects / events in the Birmingham area
- 10,000 people from the communities of Birmingham and the Midlands area are more aware of where their water comes from through a campaign to raise awareness about their water quality, sustainability and sensible use of a precious resource. Of these people, 2,500 visit Elan for the first time
- High visibility acknowledgement of the National Lottery Heritage Fund on site, online and in all activities
- Develop and deliver a plan for how you will use your project to thank National Lottery players for their support.

20 Degrees Consulting Ltd, in partnership with Arcadis Consulting UK Ltd, was awarded the contract to independently evaluate the Scheme. The evaluation commenced in August 2018 and continued until April 2024. There were three phases:

- Baseline review
- Mid-term evaluation
- Final evaluation.

The baseline review was completed in April 2019. The mid-term evaluation report was finalised in June 2020. This report represents the final evaluation, which includes findings from previous evaluations so that there is a single document charting progress of the Scheme.

2. Methodology

The LCAP provided a framework for monitoring and evaluation⁷. This included a helpful stakeholder view of ‘what success looks like’ at both project and scheme levels. A high-level summary theory of change was also included. The evaluation team supplemented this work by developing a high-level logic table for the Scheme ([annex A](#)) and a research framework was developed from the logic model. This is reproduced in [annex B](#). These formed the basis of a rigorous and evidence-based evaluation, reflecting good practice recommended by UK Government in the Magenta Book⁸. It has enabled the evaluation team to structure data collection and analysis logically.

As the evaluation framework suggested, a mixed method approach was most appropriate. Findings informing the evaluation came from a mix of monitoring information and primary research conducted by the evaluation team.

Quantitative data and photographs were largely collected through the Scheme’s own monitoring system. The work of project officers was critical in this regard. These officers collected qualitative findings also through feedback within surveys completed by project participants and pinboard comments completed by visitors.

The following monitoring / management information was provided by the Elan Links team:

- The Elan Links second stage proposal to NLHF, LCAP and NLHF grant award letter
- Sample minutes and papers from Partnership Board meetings
- Quarterly project-level progress reports from Q1 (January–March) 2018 to Q4 2023
- Access to online evidence folders underpinning outputs.

The evaluators received the Elan Valley e-newsletter. This tended to include notifications of developments and upcoming events related to Elan Links. The Elan Valley website and associated social media sites were also monitored.

Primary research included a mix of face-to-face, virtual (Zoom / Teams) and telephone interviews with all members of the Elan Links team. These took place throughout the lifetime of the Scheme in a variety of semi-structured and unstructured formats.

⁷ Elan Links: People, Nature & Water (2017) ‘Landscape Conservation Action Plan’, Chapter 7, pp219–243.

⁸ HM Treasury (2020) ‘The Magenta Book – HM Treasury guidance on what to consider when designing an evaluation’, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>, accessed 26th April 2024.

Representatives of partner organisations and wider stakeholders – including artists, farmers and volunteers – were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. An example topic guide for delivery team interviews is provided in [annex C](#).

Site visits were carried out throughout the period of the evaluators' involvement (excluding the pandemic period) to enable observation, participation and engagement with participants:

- Ram Scheme return day, 2nd April 2019 – five shepherds; filming of activities took place
- Creative Elan: Make your own mythical creature workshop, 16th April 2019 – 11 children and a similar number of parents
- Creative Elan: Drawing by moonlight, 19th April 2019 – 10 participants
- Lower plant surveys and ID training day 2: Lichens, 10th December 2019 – 11 participants
- Sustainable Woodland Management course day 3, 21st January 2020 – nine participants and two tutors
- Sustainable Woodland Management course – day 18, 11th March 2020 – 10 participants and two tutors
- Catch-up with sample of delivery team, 21st April 2022
- Catch-up with sample of delivery team, 6th September 2022
- Scheme Manager's leaving party – catch-up with delivery team, 27th October 2022
- Legacy workshop facilitated for Scheme partners, 22nd March 2023
- Festival of Archaeology and Heritage, 29th July 2023 – Discussions with exhibitors and sample of visitors, the latter using a survey
- Review and legacy workshop facilitated for stakeholders of the Artists in Residence programme, 6th December 2023 (online). The outline for the workshop can be found in [annex D](#).

A total of 102 interviews were undertaken across a broad range of Scheme stakeholders.

Where case studies were developed, interviewees gave permission for their interviews to be used in this way. Although the majority gave consent for their real names to be used, a consistent approach of using pseudonyms was adopted.

3. Scheme-level progress

3.1 The Elan Links partnership

The partnership was made up of five partners:

- Elan Valley Trust (EVT) – Lead partner. The Trust was formed in 1989 by Dŵr Cymru to ‘*protect much of the publicly acquired estate from the vagaries of privatisation*’⁹. It enjoys a 999-year lease of much of the lands of the Estate and operated prior to Elan Links with a core team of four plus 2.5 farming staff¹⁰. The Trust’s objectives were to promote conservation and appropriate public access, and to disseminate information about the Estate.
- Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) was a not-for-profit water and sewerage company providing for over three million people¹¹. It was the fourth-largest company in Wales with 3,000 staff.
- Community Arts Rhayader and District (CARAD) was a volunteer-led not-for-profit that ran arts and heritage projects in Mid Wales. It operated two buildings: Rhayader Museum & Gallery and an arts and theatre venue. Two part-time administrative / finance officers supported the unpaid trustees. The organisation had no core funding and therefore operated from admission fees and project-based grant funding¹².
- Tir Coed described itself as connecting people with land (tir) and woods (coed) by delivering outdoor training, learning and wellbeing programmes outdoors across Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys¹³. It was a not-for-profit organisation with a clearly articulated engagement model, developed over 20 years, and delivered by a team of 21 staff plus a wide pool of freelance tutors¹⁴.
- Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is the largest Welsh Government Sponsored Body¹⁵, employing around 2,400 staff across Wales with a budget of £266

⁹ Quotation from Elan Valley Trust (2015) ‘Elan Valley Trust’, <https://www.elanvalley.org.uk/about/elan-valley-trust>, accessed 28th April 2024.

¹⁰ The headcount increased further from February 2019 when the Penbont House Tea Room opened.

¹¹ Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (2024) ‘About us’, <https://corporate.dwrcymru.com/en/about-us>, accessed 24th April 2024.

¹² CARAD (2022) ‘About us’, <https://carad.org.uk/about-us/>, accessed 24th April 2024.

¹³ Quotation from Tir Coed (2024), <http://tircoed.org.uk/>, accessed 24th April 2024

¹⁴ Ibid, <http://tircoed.org.uk/about-us#our-team>, accessed 24th April 2024.

¹⁵ NRW (2024) ‘Our roles and responsibilities’, <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/what-we-do/our-roles-and-responsibilities/our-roles-and-responsibilities/?lang=en>, accessed 24th April 2024.

million¹⁶. Its wide-ranging interests include environmental monitoring and protection, forestry and flood defences.

The lead partner, EVT, acknowledged that Elan Links was the first collaborative project of such a scale that it had worked on. Previously, it had operated by reinvesting the rents paid by tenant farmers and through agricultural subsidies provided by Welsh and EU governments.

The Partnership was formed to take forward Elan Links, so there was limited history of co-working prior to the Scheme. The different scales and interests of the organisations led to very different operating cultures and priorities. While the Elan Valley and Rhayader District was the main area of focus for some partners, for others Elan Links was one scheme amongst many requiring their attention. Almost by definition, EVT and DCWW sometimes had competing priorities, given their different remits in the same geographic area.

Representatives of the Partnership acknowledged that balancing their competing priorities and cultures could be challenging at times. Nonetheless, all recognised and respected the positions of others, finding that they all had something to learn from each other.

“That broad partnership of different partners was a good one, because it made us aware of different aspects of how the Valley is running and made partners aware of things other than land management. So, of how you could look at the Valley in a creative way or, you know, all the other different ways that you can look at a landscape.”

Scheme Partner

By the time of the final evaluation, partners reflected that they had gained a better understanding of the other partners over the six or seven years of development and delivery.

“I did get the impression that everyone thinks that they know now what needs to be done. You know, it’s taken that long to work out really good ways of working and what needs to be done.”

Scheme Partner

¹⁶ NRW (2024) ‘Business Plan 2023–24’, <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/what-we-do/strategies-and-plans/business-plan-2023-24/?lang=en>, accessed 24th April 2024.

3.2 Governance, management and expertise

The mid-term evaluation identified a Partnership Board where attendance was good and all felt comfortable to contribute, feeling that their voice would be heard¹⁷. Additional representatives of local organisations had joined the Board to broaden insights. Some weaknesses were identified in the timeliness and extent of Board papers, which could amount to some 200 pages of project reports. Some of the Board sub-committees had not met, most notably Built & Ancient Heritage and Monitoring & Legacy.

The positive features of the Board persisted into the second half of the Scheme and some improvements took place in line with recommendations of the mid-term evaluation. For example, changes started by the original Scheme Manager were continued by their successor, such as board reports summarised, with previously extensive reports being replaced by a few pages. The focus moved from reporting on the previous three months of activities to looking forward to the new period of delivery. However, while the Natural Heritage sub-committee continued to meet, other sub-committees did not restart after the pandemic.

Reflecting on the development of the Board, some felt it had matured to some extent. The partnership was pulled together for the Scheme and at the outset, the organisations represented had no experience of working together. In practice, this tended to mean the Board listened to reports in the early years of the Scheme, rather than steering its direction.

“Perhaps in hindsight the board could have been stronger and should have been stronger. I don’t think the board was necessarily kept informed by the management structure in what its expectations were. It was almost a report each board meeting of what we’ve done, not what we are going to do. And sitting on the board, I think there wasn’t enough accountability amongst the board members to control the direction of the project.”

Partner representative

Nevertheless, Board members did bring their expertise to bear on the work of the Scheme.

“Everybody got on well together [...] there wasn’t anybody who was really trying to dominate. [...] Where there were areas where a particular board member needed to be in the lead of it, then they were brought in at that stage. So, artists

¹⁷ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) ‘Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme’. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, pp17–18.

in residence, for example. [...] they brought in CARAD because of their expertise. [...] So, people were drawn in as their particular specialisms.”
Partner representative

3.3 Scheme resources

3.3.1 Human resources

Staff changes were significant throughout the Scheme. Table 3.1 summarises the level of staff churn. As will be seen throughout this report, high levels of staff changes presented both challenges and opportunities.

Several interviewees noted that recruitment and retention of staff in Mid Wales was a general challenge, and not confined to this Scheme. Mid Wales is a sparsely populated area. Consequently, the pool of potential applicants for any post tends to be more restricted than in areas of higher population density. All posts associated with Elan Links were fixed term, which is not uncommon for project work, but most posts were also part-time. Most leavers took up full-time, permanent positions elsewhere.

COVID-19 played a part in staff turnover, potentially. The Scheme Manager intentionally furloughed staff to conserve project funding, even when some staff felt they could have continued working. There was notable staff churn from April 2020 through to early 2021, with a batch of four new staff starting in December 2020.

Table 3.1 – Summary of staff changes

Role (percentage of F/T contract)	Comment
Scheme Manager (100% initially, reducing to 80%)	The first Scheme Manager was in post through the development phase of the Scheme in 2017. A Deputy Scheme Manager joined on 1 st February 2022. When the first Scheme Manager left in October 2022, the Deputy was promoted to the Scheme Manager role.
Administrator (60%)	The first administrator left in April 2022, with the post filled by summer 2022.
Natural Heritage Officer (60%)	The first post holder left in September 2020 and a second post holder started in December 2020.
Access & Recreation Officer (40%)	Increased to 60% from July 2018 until 31 st March 2019, when it reverted to 40%. The officer left in May 2019. The role was filled by the Project Officer post holder from November 2019. That role holder left in April 2020. A new post holder started in February 2021 but left after six months.
Volunteer & Training Coordinator (100%)	The first post holder reduced their hours to 80% from December 2018 and left in early 2021. The second post

	holder was already employed within the Tir Coed team at Elan, so enabled continuity.
Cultural Heritage Officer (40%)	The initial appointee left after two months. The second appointment was made in July 2018 and the position increased to 60% throughout that year. The post holder left in March 2022. The post was not replaced but oversight passed to the archivist. However, the previous post holder remained as a volunteer for one day per week and still oversaw the oral history elements of the Scheme in practice.
Archivist (between 10 and 30 hours per week)	Commenced February 2019. Reduced hours in September 2019 such that the post was essentially vacant from then rather than at the formal departure of the post holder in November 2019. After various unsuccessful attempts to recruit, an archivist was appointed in late 2020. Working hours were extended to two, then three, days per week, then to 30 hours per week by the final quarter of 2022 to cover some of the vacant Project Officer's work. This post holder left in April 2023. The final post holder joined as a volunteer in March 2023 and was able to take up the post in May 2023 until the end of the year.
Volunteer Engagement Officer (40%)	Commenced March 2019 and left in December 2021.
Project Officer (100%)	The first post holder left in October 2018. The second post holder started in November 2018 but left in December. The third post holder started in December 2018. The role was split when the post holder took on the Access & Recreation role in November 2019. This reduced the contribution to the Project Officer role to 60%, with the remainder filled by a secondee from Tir Coed with the support of the Scheme Manager. The 60% post holder left in April 2020. The fourth post holder started in December 2020 and left in mid-2021. Two Engagement, Education and Events Officers took up post in June 2022. One focussed on archaeology and history (30 hours per week), while the other focussed on arts.

The first Scheme Manager joined the Scheme during its development, so brought continuity and in-depth understanding of the Scheme during the delivery phase. While this individual had a range of useful experiences, it was the first Scheme of such scale and complexity that they had managed. The second Scheme Manager brought a

different approach, with devolved budgets for project officers and reporting for the Partnership Board that focussed more on the big issues requiring Board decision-making rather than detailed reports of past activities.

Team members tended to have their own projects on which they worked. While this may have promoted ownership of individual projects, some suggested it did not promote matching of individual strengths and skills. One member of the team suggested that the approach discouraged co-operation, however unintentional this might have been, as time-pressurised officers tended to focus on their projects. Nevertheless, the findings did include examples of both co-operation and mutual support.

Both Natural Heritage Officers brought passion and commitment to their work. Whereas the first tended to have a contractual approach in their engagement with farmers, the second post holder tended to be more collaborative, gaining greater buy-in.

Access and recreation projects had their delivery timescales contracted significantly when the Scheme gained additional, time-limited TAIS funding, as will be discussed later. The Access & Recreation Officer had their working days increased from two to three per week to support this delivery. Nonetheless, consents, such as planning permission, tend to work to fixed timelines. This placed pressure on the post holder and other staff in delivering within the constraints of the funding window. Most of the planned access and recreation work planned for the Scheme had been completed by the time the TAIS-funded aspect of work had been delivered by 31st March 2019.

Staff structure and turnover had a significant effect on volunteering. Recruitment by the Volunteering & Training Coordinator tended to focus exclusively on people involved in training through the Elan Invests project. Initially, other volunteers tended to be recruited by the Natural Heritage Officer's collaborations with organisations such as the RSPB or through CARAD's long-standing volunteer base, drawing from Rhayader and surrounding areas. The Partnership recognised the limitations of these approaches and established a two-days-per-week post of Volunteer Engagement Officer. The breadth of volunteering increased during this period, until COVID-19 struck. When the Volunteer Engagement Officer left, volunteering returned to the remit of individual project officers. The results will be explored in [6.5](#).

The archivist role was specialised. The rurality of Elan impacted on recruitment for this role, delaying progress in archiving during the first half of the Scheme. Fortunately, a capable candidate took up post from late 2020 through to early 2023.

The mid-term evaluation identified significant challenges associated with the Project Officer role. Post holders were expected to be strategic marketers, tactical

marketeers and events managers. A recommendation was to split the role between marketing and events management and add additional capacity, if possible¹⁸. Recruitment of marketing professionals proved challenging; however, experienced and capable Engagement, Education and Events Officers did take up posts in 2022. The Arts-focussed officer was retained at the end of the delivery phase in December 2023 to support legacy development within CARAD in the first half of 2024. The Archaeology-&History-focussed officer formed a Community Interest Company and was able to take forward final aspects of delivery for the Scheme in 2024 through that vehicle.

The number and turnover of staff during the lifetime of the Scheme was noted by all partners but had a particular effect on EVT's world view:

"There was a fair staff turnover, which in hindsight is expected, because they were short-term contracts. They were just a different field than the Trust was used to, and I was used to. We're land agents. You join a job and you might be there for ten years, whereas project funding, they are a bit more, two, three years, then they go on to a new project."

Representative of EVT

3.3.2 Non-staff resources

Capital projects were problematic. Budgets for restoration and redevelopment of the Resident Engineer's House and Cwm Clyd Farmstead proved too small, as will be rehearsed in chapter 5. While problematic in their own right, these buildings were intended for use by other projects.

Restoration of the Resident Engineer's House was meant to provide accommodation for Artists in Residence and potentially educational groups. The lack of this facility's availability led to problems for DCWW in securing an alternative property in order to fulfil its obligations to Elan Links. While potentially problematic, ultimately COVID-19 proved a greater problem for retreat groups from Birmingham than delays to restoration of Cwm Clyd Farmstead.

Bridging the budget deficit for Cwm Clyd Farmstead was made possible in part by attracting additional TAIS funding for access and recreation work, freeing additional NLHF funding for Cwm Clyd. While this TAIS funding was positive, it did have the unintended consequence of focussing the efforts of the Access & Recreation officer into a significantly reduced timescale.

A change in the way budgets were managed took place in 2022 when the Scheme Manager and Administrator changed. Spend had been controlled centrally, but records

¹⁸ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, pp79–80.

were somewhat opaque, so individual project spend was not immediately obvious to the new team. The new Scheme Manager and Administrator worked with project officers to develop devolved budgets and ensured their approval by NLHF.

3.4 Project monitoring

The mid-term evaluation noted that a simple progress tracker, developed at the baseline stage, for project outputs was not being updated. This made monitoring of the 202 project-level outputs used by the Elan Links team challenging. The Scheme Manager was effectively using quarterly officer reports amounting to some 200 pages per quarter as the monitoring system. The baseline evaluation had recommended use of a simple tracker within a single workbook of interlinked spreadsheets to create a dashboard of key indicators (one or two per project).

Despite a further recommendation at the mid-term evaluation to ease the burden of quarterly reporting by making use of a progress tracker, that recommendation was not taken forward. In practice, the quarterly reports remained the mainstay of the Scheme monitoring system.

The high volume of staff churn on the Scheme led to some discontinuities in collection of monitoring information. In all probability some outputs, particularly linked to volunteering, were higher than recorded.

There was a concerted effort in the final year of the Scheme, after the change in Scheme Manager and Administrator, to create files of evidence underpinning achievement of outputs. Staff turnover and inconsistent record-keeping meant that some gaps remained in that evidence trail.

3.5 Promotion and stakeholder engagement

The majority of promotional events took place at a project level and will be explored in subsequent chapters.

The launch event promoted the Elan Links Scheme to a select group of stakeholders, and the Scheme celebration event in December 2023 invited a wide range of volunteers, partners and stakeholders. Beyond this, there were relatively few Scheme-wide promotional events beyond attendance at Rhayader Carnival, the Elan Valley Show, Pont yr Elan Show and the Royal Welsh Show.



Figure 3.1 – The Elan Links stand at the Elan Valley Show, August 2019

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q3, 2019)

Social media posts about the Scheme through X (Twitter) and Facebook tended to focus on single aspects of the Scheme, typically promoting an upcoming event or celebrating a success from one of the Scheme's projects.

The mid-term evaluation found variable appreciation that Elan Links was a wide-ranging scheme. Residents of Rhayader and the surrounding district tended to know about the breadth of the Scheme only if they had been engaged in its development consultations. Others had no more than a vague notion that the Scheme had something to do with nature and history.

Understanding improved during the second half of the Scheme. Nevertheless, interviewees tended to recall those aspects of the Scheme that directly interested or impacted them. Tenant farmers interviewed were aware of the nature-based projects and projects that affected the landscape, such as bike tracks. A sample of archaeology volunteers each tended to identify one or two other types of projects in the Scheme. However, collectively they identified all types of projects, from archiving to artist residencies to nature-based survey work.

The need for stakeholder engagement was clear from discussions with members of the local community:

"So, I suppose when the Elan Link started, I think maybe a lot of the community felt it was something that Welsh Water and the Elan Valley Trust were doing. [...] And then for the first few years, I think it took a while for the project to get going. And it sort of felt like it was more a tick list, which made people feel a little bit

disengaged. [...] And I think the community felt like they were maybe taking stuff away because it was a little bit cold. [...] I sort of went along with that feeling of they're not really asking us, sort of thing."

Member of the community reflecting on early views of the Scheme

Tenant farmers felt at the beginning of Elan Links that they had not been consulted during the development of the Scheme. Unfortunate timing also meant that a rent increase was instituted just before the Scheme was approved and farmers were invited to get involved in delivery. There was a perception amongst farmers that rents were rising to pay for the Scheme. As a result, most tenant farmers were opposed to Elan Links at the start of the delivery phase and did not wish to engage.

Overcoming these initial hurdles through effective stakeholder engagement was a major achievement noted by many stakeholders.

"I think prior to this on the natural environment, maybe it was more siloed. You know, it was very much the landowners doing their thing and the farmers doing their own thing, and there was a bit of conflict. [...] I think this really has helped to get people talking, get people thinking differently and working together better with the Elan Trust and Welsh Water and just trying to sort of bridge some gaps or conflict that may have existed in the past."

Member of the Partnership Board

Promotion of Elan Links projects largely focussed on securing participants for events / activities and recruiting volunteers. For example, the periodic Elan Valley e-newsletter contained updates on Elan Links in every issue. Typically, early updates focussed on forthcoming events or calls for volunteers. Exceptions tended to relate to the Artists in Residence, where readers were provided with introductions to the artists at the start of their residency and an overview of their experience through a written account of an interview at the end of their residency. As the Scheme's projects started to deliver results, sharing insights into what had been achieved became a growing feature of articles.

"It's only because we'd signed up to the newsletters and because we like the Elan Valley as a tourist destination, really, that we were so aware of what was going on. If you're not really aware of the area already, you might struggle to find out what the area can offer, and what's going on."

Volunteer, Elan Links



CIPIO ELAN

ENCAPSULATING ELAN

A FREE 5 day Resin Table Course

Cwrs Tabl Resin 5 diwrnod AM DDIM



Something a bit different from Tir Coed, this November we are working with 'Made By Hand' to create a bespoke Resin Coffee Table, from Ash milled in the Elan Valley.

Gan fynd â'n gwaith gwneud bwrdd i'r lefel nesaf, y mis Tachwedd hwn rydym yn gweithio gyda 'Made By Hand' i greu Bwrdd Coffi Resin pwrpasol, o Ash wedi'i felino yng Nghwm Elan.

for more information please contact
am fwy o wybodaeth
cysylltwch â
Gayle:powys@tircoed.org.uk




Figure 3.2 – Example of a flyer encouraging event participation

Source: Elan Links Facebook, 17th October 2023

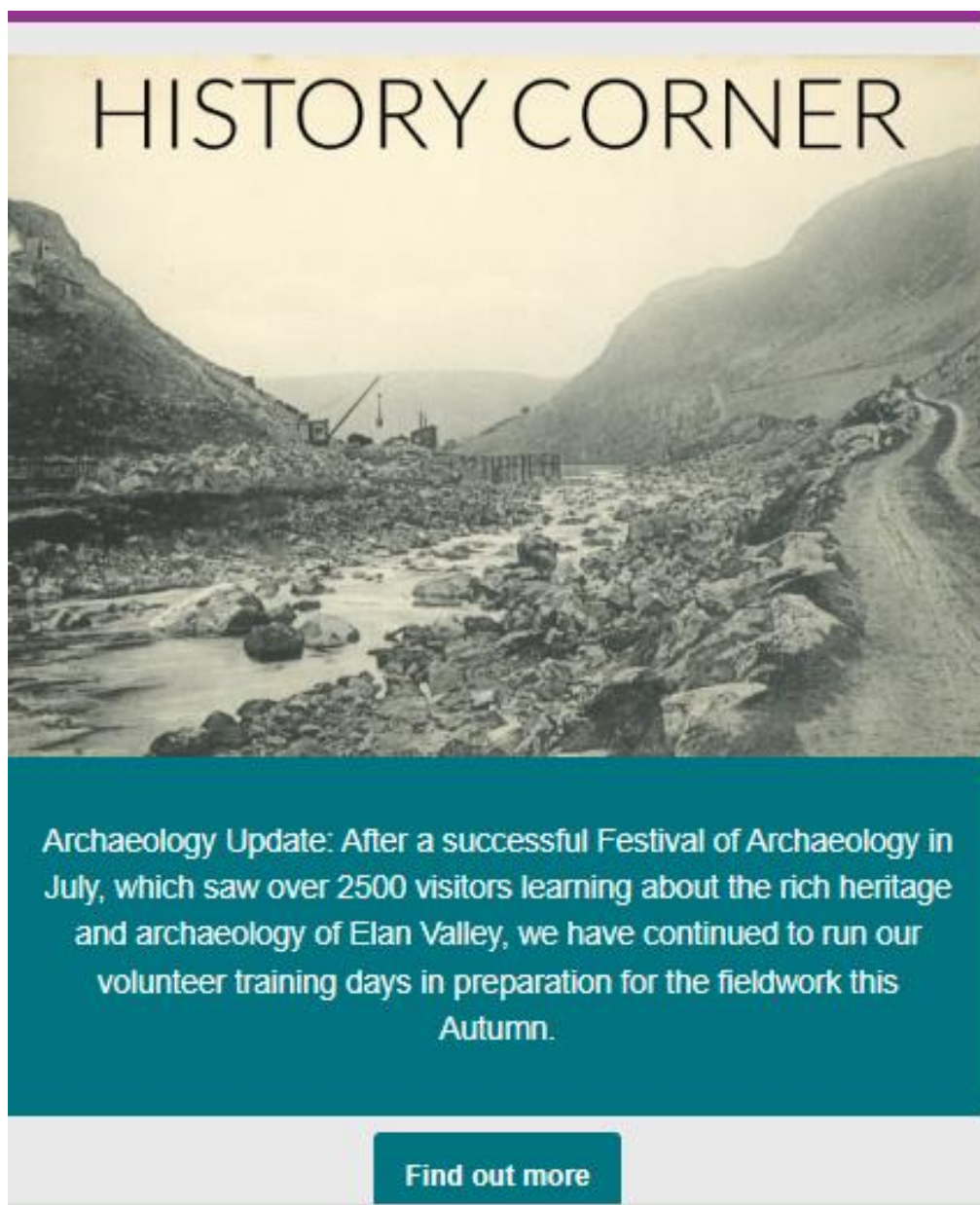


Figure 3.3 – Example article within Elan Valley newsletter

Source: Elan Valley Newsletter, October 2023

Focal points for physical stakeholder engagement were the DCWW Visitor Centre in the Elan Valley, CARAD in Rhayader and Midlands Arts Centre / Cannon Hill Park in Birmingham.

A section of the exhibition space in the Visitor Centre was available to Elan Links, although the available space was reduced following a COVID-19 period refurbishment. In addition to general information about the Scheme, regular displays featured artistic outputs, including poems, photographs and artefacts created by the Artists in Residence and local participants, such as an exhibition by young photographers in late 2023.

Exhibitions, workshops and presentations were delivered also at CARAD. Examples ranged from a presentation by Trysor on the archaeological monuments of the Valley (see [5.1](#)) to an event bringing performance aspects of Watershed contributors to Rhayader and the Valley (see [6.1](#)).

Midlands Art Centre hosted an Artist in Residence jointly with the Elan Valley, and mounted a major exhibition from the wider Artists in Residence programme, the Watershed (see [6.10](#)). MAC was based at Cannon Hill Park, providing a notable link to the Elan Valley due to the model of the Elan Valley Reservoirs located there.

While creative activities tended to focus on these three locations, attempts were made to broaden the range of touchpoints for stakeholders in Elan / Rhayader. Local hotels and public houses were used as locations for meetings of the historical society, gatherings of volunteers and the end-of-Scheme celebration event. A local letting agency was used to secure accommodation for overnight retreats (see [6.9](#)).

The mid-term evaluation noted examples where last-minute promotion of creative activities contributed to disappointing attendance figures¹⁹. This stemmed from changing Project Officers, some with little prior experience of event management and promotion. This was not an issue from 2022 because the two Engagement, Education and Events Officers were both very experienced, as attendance at the Watershed exhibition and the Festival of Archaeology and Heritage of 2023 showed (see [6.4](#)).

Stakeholder engagement as part of the natural heritage theme was multi-faceted. Tenant farmers formed an important group, given the linkage of the natural heritage projects with their activities or the land which they worked. Significant time was devoted to engaging with farmers, both as a group and individually. In part, this was necessary as most tenant farmers were unhappy at the start of the Scheme. As previously mentioned, they did not feel that they had been consulted sufficiently during the development phase, and some believed that increased farm rents were being used to fund the Scheme. Moreover, some felt antipathy towards the Scheme as it was seen as celebrating the flooding of the Valley for the benefit of Birmingham.

Engagement took place with multiple organisations. This was commonly to secure agreement for a particular course of action within the natural heritage theme, for example Cwmdauddwr Commoners Association in the Dry heath project; or to secure natural heritage volunteers through organisations such as Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, the RSPB and the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland. Projects led by Tir Coed (see [6.7](#), [6.8](#) and [6.9](#)) formed links with significant numbers of community organisations, ranging from schools to groups supporting vulnerable members of society.

¹⁹ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p25.

3.6 The volunteer experience

3.6.1 Recruitment

Recruitment of natural heritage volunteers came about initially through engagement of the Natural Heritage Officer with organisations such as the Radnorshire Wildlife Trust and the RSPB in the early years of the Scheme, which created links with a small number of people who were highly committed to the natural heritage agenda. The appointment of the Volunteer Engagement Officer further extended the range of partner organisations. Tir Coed training participants undertook a range of woodland management and access activities within their courses, so arguably their participants fulfilled the remit of volunteers.

Volunteer recruitment stopped during the pandemic and the focus was on retaining volunteers, rather than recruiting more. However, recruitment was needed when COVID-19 restrictions ended, as some of the key natural heritage volunteers did not return. The loss of the Volunteer Engagement Officer put the onus of recruitment on a newly appointed Natural Heritage Officer. Although attempts were made to recruit volunteers through natural heritage training courses, participants enjoyed the training but were less open to volunteering. Instead, a small number of key volunteers were engaged. One was a local celebrity ecologist and the other was a tenant farmer committed to the environmental agenda. Together with the networks of these champion volunteers, other volunteers were recruited for event-based or time-limited volunteering activities.

“So, the British Bryological Society decided to come and do their centenary event in the Elan Valley and record lichens, which are a key species in several of our projects. And they also wanted to do something called a drawdown survey, which is when the reservoir water levels go down and you record all the rare things that start to colonize the edges of the reservoir. And these are all volunteers. It’s not as though we haven’t had any volunteer activity. It’s just that sometimes when I’ve got a project like Cattle or Heathland or Bogs, I haven’t got volunteers out there doing the work.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Early cultural heritage volunteers supported oral history work, development of the Town Trail and archiving. They were typically linked to CARAD’s long-established volunteer base. Again, the Volunteer Engagement Officer was able to widen the range of recruitment channels. Regular updates of volunteering opportunities were provided to the local office of PAVO²⁰ at Rhayader and advertised within the monthly Elan Valley e-newsletter.

As with all other projects, cultural heritage volunteering stopped during the pandemic. When COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, the value of an established volunteer base

²⁰ Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations

was readily apparent, as the loss of volunteers within this theme was far less than observed in the natural heritage theme.

Archaeology and history volunteering only took place in the latter stages of the Scheme. Volunteers were mainly recruited through promotion via the Elan Valley website and Facebook page. The volunteering opportunity was linked to an archaeology training course. Those not recruited via those means indicated that word of mouth had directed them to the opportunity, typically via a member of the Elan Links team or a partner in the Scheme.

"I spotted the advertisement for heritage sort of archaeology volunteering opportunities on the, I think it was the Elan Links Facebook page and thought, 'Oh, this is just a perfect opportunity to get involved in something that I really enjoy and it's right on my doorstep.' So that's how I started."

Archaeology volunteer

3.6.2 Support

Training for volunteers was a notable feature throughout most of the Scheme, except during the pandemic period. Unlike many projects, Elan Links did not embrace online training during the lockdown, perhaps because staff were furloughed. One example of online training was recorded during this period, and that was delivered by a different project (see [6.4](#)).

Case study 3.1 is reproduced from the mid-term evaluation. It illustrates the extent of volunteer training and what it meant to a participant.

Case study 3.1 – Training within the Natural Heritage theme

Anna had undertaken several conservation jobs around the UK and was keen to develop her skills and secure a more permanent position. *"I've been involved [in Elan Links] for about 12 months. I saw a lichens course led by Ray Woods I was interested and got involved. I followed the Elan Links Facebook page"*

Subsequently, Anna was involved in Elan Links natural heritage projects on a weekly basis until the COVID-19 lockdown. *"I did some peat bog surveys and also some grass surveys. They [Elan Links] gave me a couple of days' mountain safety training, so that I'd be safer for peat bog surveying. They've given me peat bog, grass identification and bird survey training."*

When interviewed, Anna was engaged in a lichens identification course. *"It's incredible that this course is free. [The tutor] teaches on lifelong learning courses at the university. It would be £120 for this course there. This is a really high-quality volunteering experience. It is high quality training. A lot of other volunteer organisations might just offer some tea and cake."*

Anna was grateful for the volunteering experiences through Elan Links. *“There’s a lot of competition for [paid] work [in conservation]. I’ve done professional quality surveys that I can take into a job.”*

The mid-term evaluation suggested that appropriate support was provided to a wide range of volunteers across natural and cultural heritage themes²¹. These findings indicated that the knowledge, skills and confidence levels of the volunteers had been raised.

The findings of the final evaluation suggested that positive training interventions persisted for volunteers. As already noted, natural heritage training was welcomed. The issue was converting enjoyment and interest in training into willingness to volunteer.

Training was a key element of engaging archaeology volunteers in the latter stages of the Scheme. Participants in this training were keen to put their learning into practice. All participants interviewed were very positive about their experience, as exemplified by case study 3.2.

Case study 3.2 – A good experience for a volunteer archaeologist

A volunteer reflected on their experience of archaeology training and work in the field.

“I didn’t quite know what I was going to expect. I thought it was going to be, I don’t know, ‘Just do this, do that’. But the guys that were involved, they’re experts, and the way they delivered it was fantastic. Really great.

I remember being at uni because I did a bit of heritage management, which is separate from archaeology. I remember having a module on archaeology, just basically giving me the brief background, and I sat training with the guys from CPAT and I was just like, ‘Wow, now it all makes sense’. [...] Yeah, it was really delivered well. It was really hands on. [...]

They brought in examples of real life paperwork that they would be doing. Yes. You could see why they needed to be recorded and then what way things needed to be sort of measured. [...] Yeah, so you could see it all from start to finish, really. And it makes you appreciate why you need to do things in a certain way, because archaeology just goes, it goes down layer by layer, isn’t it, when you dig in? [...]

I think a lot of volunteers I have heard go out on voluntary archaeology days and have not had an ounce of training before they’ve got on site. And I think that was really key

²¹ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) ‘Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme’. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p27.

before starting on anything. Why and what you were doing things for and how important it is not to damage anything, because archaeology is a damaging process. Once it's gone, it's gone. So, I think that it was really good that we had the amount of training we got. [The Engagement, Education and Events Officer] had used, obviously, some of the grant money then for equipment on site. So, we had all the materials we needed from buckets, little shovels, big shovels, brushes, knee pads. We even had a wheelbarrow because we had to get rid of locked earth, tarpaulin. So, there's all sorts."

3.6.3 Retention

The mid-term evaluation reported efforts by the Volunteer Engagement Officer to retain the interest of Natural Heritage volunteers, particularly through the winter months when field work stopped²². Such efforts included coffee afternoons, enabling volunteers across themes to meet and share experiences and enthusiasms. Unfortunately, the pandemic and then the loss of the Volunteer Engagement Officer meant that these communal activities stopped. Retention of volunteers then became the responsibility of individual Scheme officers. The findings suggested that success in this respect relied on regular communication with the volunteers about upcoming volunteering opportunities and ensuring that volunteers had a fulfilling experience. Interviews with volunteers suggested that they did find their experiences rewarding. For some, it reignited dormant interests and a passion for the Elan Valley.

"I've always had a connection to the Elan Valley through my childhood. [...] I haven't spent so much time up there in a long time. But for me, yes, it reignited that sort of link that I've got up there. But also, I discovered things I didn't even know were there. I didn't even know there was, like, Roman earthworks up there. I didn't know that the history of the area went back that far. [...] Now I'm like, 'Oh, there's lots more I can go and see now', because I thought I'd exhausted it. You do the footpaths, you do the normal walks, and then you see the history. But now I know there's so much more I haven't seen. So, I'm planning on doing some upland walks now to go and see if I can locate some of these other sites."

Archaeology volunteer

3.7 Training and mentoring

Volunteer training was considered above. Training of harder-to-reach individuals from the areas in and around the Elan Valley and Birmingham will be considered in [6.7](#) and [6.9](#).

Additional training was embedded in several projects. In particular, training was aimed at farmers to support high nature value practices. Typically, such training took the form of on-site sessions at farms to see what other farmers had undertaken; or, in some

²² Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p29.

instances, trips out of the Valley, for example to see GPS cattle collars for the first time.

An area of personal and professional development that came through strongly as a theme in interviews was through time spent with the Artists in Residence, either in workshops, one-to-one engagements or sometimes helping the artists to stage exhibitions. Creative people from the locality provided a strong message of having been inspired by the presence of the Artists in Residence. Stories included individuals re-engaging with art after having lapsed for several years, and people seeing their landscape differently. Case studies 3.3 and 3.4, reproduced from the mid-term evaluation, illustrate these themes.

Case study 3.3 – An artist reconnected and developed

Carys described her life in the past few years as quite isolated. She focussed on being a mother and, although she studied for a degree as an adult, she *“didn’t do anything for a long time”*. CARAD introduced her to Elan Links, which she described as ‘a lifeline’.

The Artists in Residence programme *“has been brilliant as it has brought artists into the area, and we’ve had the chance to meet people that have worked internationally”*. Carys and her partner took some of the Artists in Residence around the area and learned how they worked and interpreted the Valley.

Carys described how she fell in love with oil painting again after doing a workshop with one of the Artists in Residence. She described the workshop as *“a really nice opportunity to meet other artists in the area with similar interests”*. One painter was there *“who lives just down the road”*, but Carys had never known she was an artist.

Carys suggested that involvement had given her confidence in what she does and developed her way of working. *“It’s helped me to see things with a more professional attitude, I think, you know, seeing how other people work and what other people’s attitude to their work is. Sometimes you think you’ve got to have one discipline, whereas actually you can work on multiple different levels – you can be multi-disciplined.”*

Case study 3.4 – Seeing the Elan Valley afresh

David runs a family business in Rhayader, where he was *“born and brought up”*. One of the Artists in Residence came to talk as he was keen to meet with locals who knew something of the history of the area. David was known in the locality as someone who engaged in illustration or design work in his spare time. The artist was developing a book about the Elan Valley and got David involved by contributing some illustrations.

“I’d say he’d [the artist had] been here for a few days and got used to the area and got his own perspective on things. Seeing it from a visitor’s perspective was really

interesting. It's been drummed into us about the building of the dams and how it was such a monumental occasion and what it did for the local areas. But we don't look any further back than 100 years really."

Through discussions with the artist, it became clear to David that the history of the dams was only one element of the area's history. *"I will often greet visitors in the shop and advise them what there is to do, but I don't usually get to know them or their perspectives. The time spent with [artist] was a privilege."*

4. Secure and safeguard Elan's heritage – natural heritage projects

4.1 Healthy bogs (project 1a)

4.1.1 Project aims

This project, led by EVT, sought to improve the nature conservation status of areas of blanket bog on Elan's upland plateau, benefitting land that was damaged by peat erosion and ingress of *Molinia caerulea*.

4.1.2 Delivery and difference made

The healthy bogs project started at the same time as the Welsh Peatland Project (WPP), funded as part of Welsh Government's Sustainable Management Scheme²³. WPP wanted to undertake peat restoration surveys in part of Elan. This translated into benefits for the healthy bogs project.

Initially, there was greater interest from tenant farmers than the minimum necessary to fulfil the restoration area target. By the mid-term stage, a restoration plan and written agreement was in place for Abergwesyn boundary works. It was anticipated this would re-wet c.28 hectares and cut *Molinia* from c.6 hectares on one farm (Rhiwnant). Delivery of this restoration plan was linked to the Peatland Code accreditation stage and was to be funded by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) under the WPP. A second site (at Claerwen) of 19 hectares had a costed restoration plan and Peatland Code accreditation documents approved by June 2020. This site was also to be funded by NRW for delivery during 2021.

Survey work for these sites was undertaken by volunteers working with the Natural Heritage Officer, a link with the Friends of Elan project. There was synergy between the healthy bogs work scheduled at Rhiwnant Farm and the rare birds project (see [4.1](#)).

"We drove to Claerwen, then drove for 45 minutes off road to a farm before walking for two hours – including three river crossings – before we got to the survey site. I had not realised how much of the Elan Valley exists beyond the tourist trail."

Volunteer peat bog surveyor

Work on these projects was severely impacted by the pandemic, with the project at Rhiwnant being cancelled by WPP. Attempts were made to revive this project, but funding was not secured. However, over the winter of 2020/21 more than 70 hectares of peatland at Claerwen SAC had gullies reprofiled and dammed. The project management was funded by NRW and the work was delivered by the EVT. This land was accredited as a Peatland Code site. A film was produced by NRW using stills of

²³ <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/projects/welsh-peatlands-project-sustainable-management-scheme-0>

the Claerwen restoration and was used at the COP26 Conference in Glasgow in November 2021, giving the project an international audience.



Figure 4.1 – Dams at Claerwen SAC created within a gully reprofiled by diggers. Water was held back, preventing the peat from drying out and eroding.

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q1, 2021)

The sub-project to enable farmers to manage the bogs through controlled grazing showed success. GPS collars enabling cattle to be contained in certain areas of land without the need for fencing were purchased with support of the Welsh Nature Networks Fund, and four farmers were trained in their use. One farmer purchased a machine to support bog restoration following a visit to RSPB Lake Vyrnwy to see peat restoration taking place, while another farmer was pivotal in generating interest in peat surveying, leading to EVT applying for a grant to enable tenant farmers to support peat surveys on their land.



Figure 4.2 – (left) Cattle on the open hill at Henfron, wearing GPS collars to enable targeted grazing of bog, and (right) farmers and stakeholders observing restoration techniques at Lake Vyrnwy

Sources: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q2, 2022 and Q1, 2022 respectively)

Henfron Farm was a front runner in controlled grazing. A bog survey in summer 2022 showed early indicators of success, relative to a baseline 2020 survey. Statistical analysis revealed a small difference between control and grazed areas, in terms of biodiversity in *Molinia*-dominated bog. The Natural Heritage Officer noted that only a small fraction of the bog surveyed in 2020 had been grazed and corresponded to an area with relatively low peat depth. Moreover, a drought in 2022 meant that conditions were significantly different. As a result, the farmer was being encouraged to graze a larger area of the bog and to repeat the survey in 2024. Nevertheless, golden plover were reported breeding on the grazed peatland ‘for the first time in years’²⁴.



Figure 4.3 – (left) Bog asphodel, a key bog indicator species, at restored bog at Henfron following two years of targeted cattle grazing, and (right) bog training day at Ty Mawr Farm in July 2021

Sources: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q3, 2022 and Q3, 2021)

Peat surveys took place on six farms in the early months of 2023, supported by the National Peatland Action Programme²⁵. Training was delivered in bog surveying techniques and plant identification in February and March 2023 in support of this. A further training day in bog plant identification took place at Penglaneinon bog in July 2023.

“She was a really good teacher, really enthusiastic. And you learned not just about how to identify lichens and mosses, but what makes a healthy peat bog and things like that.”

Participant in bog plant identification training

Repeat visits by the Elan Links team to the Claerwen SAC site enabled monitoring of progress relative to the baseline study. Although some dams and bunds had been breached and several areas had not re-vegetated by the time of the final evaluation (potentially due to the previous two unusually dry summers), overall the bog

²⁴ Reported in the Quarterly monitoring report (Q2, 2023).

²⁵ <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/uk-strategy/wales>

restoration proved successful. Logically, this should translate into increased carbon storage and sequestration, and improved water storage and quality.

BBC *Countryfile* filmed an episode in the Elan Valley, partly based around the bog restoration work, and this was aired on 10th December 2023²⁶. It showcased some of the more innovative approaches to bog restoration:

“So, we’ve been doing some bog restoration in a very different way on one of the farms with the tenants. And he’s been fencing off an area, virtually. We’ve started to use cattle collars and he’s been restoring bog by cattle grazing. So, they’ve been eating the long grasses to try and reduce the dominance of that molinia grass to allow other bog plants to come through.”

Member of the Elan Links team

4.1.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comment
All Elan Links farmers informed about the project	
20 hectares of eroded and degraded bog better managed / restored	Target exceeded – 108.5 ha of bog restored and better managed
Molinia control studies leading to a PhD	Activity not taken forward
10 people trained in bog management skills	Target exceeded – 12 people trained, with six of these being tenant farmers, i.e. capacity built where it was most likely to create an enduring legacy
2 stakeholder days	Target exceeded – 3 stakeholder events held
Biodiversity monitoring undertaken	
Interpretation to a wider audience	Short film on peat monitoring produced in October 2023 and <i>Countryfile</i> filmed on Hengae in late November 2023

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

4.2 Dry heath management (project 1b)

4.2.1 Project aims

Elan’s dry heath supports important flora and fauna populations and was used extensively for livestock grazing at certain times of the year. Invasive species, such as bracken and conifer, were having a detrimental impact on parts of the heathland, while a uniform age profile of heather was making it vulnerable to heather beetle and reducing the diversity of heathland species. The project sought to clear invasive

²⁶ BBC (2023) *Countryfile*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001tch0/countryfile-elan-valley> accessed 3rd May 2024.

species from parts of the heathland and vary the age profile of heather. Work focussed on two areas at Cwmdauddwr Common and heathland under EVT management at Penygarreg Farm.

4.2.2. Delivery and difference made

Surveys to inform the management plan were undertaken by PONT during the second quarter of 2019²⁷. Cwmdauddwr Commoners Association engaged positively through a series of meetings to help shape the management plan, which was completed by early 2020. This management plan covered conifer renewal and heather and bracken management.

The relationship between the Elan Links team and Cwmdauddwr Commoners Association was noted by representatives of the latter group as being positive. The Association was an active group, already undertaking elements of bracken management due to incentives through the Single Farm Payment system. This project extended the area of heathland management beyond those areas which were the easiest to manage.

Initial delivery of the management plan had been anticipated in spring / summer 2020 but was delayed by the pandemic. However, approximately seven and a half hectares of degenerate heather were cleared on Cwmdauddwr Common during the summer of 2021 and 159 conifers were removed. A contractor removed bracken during 2020 and 2021. Conifer removal also took place on Penygarreg during 2021 and a volunteer training event took place at this site during summer 2021. A review by the Natural Heritage Officer and a NRW Officer in early 2022 suggested that the remaining heather did not warrant further cutting that year.

A further review by a NRW Officer in the final quarter of 2022 suggested that no further heather-cutting was justified at Cwmdauddwr. A 50% target for degenerate heather, a common target in standards monitoring, had been achieved. A further cut would have resulted in temporary habitat loss over a relatively large area, where a good diversity of species were observed. Indeed, bilberry and pioneer heather was apparent in an area cut some seven years earlier. Moreover, it was believed that the heathland was likely to be degraded bog with peat at 20–30 centimetres in depth.

A survey of the managed heathland area in summer 2022 identified greater diversity of species relative to unmanaged areas of heathland, suggesting that the management approach was appropriate and successful.

Work at Penygarreg progressed in late 2022 and early 2023, albeit in a slightly different way from that envisaged in the original LCAP. Additional funding was brought into the

²⁷ PONT is a not-for-profit organisation working across Wales to support conservation and grazing. Further details can be found at <https://www.pontcymru.org/>, accessed 5th June 2020.

project from the Nature Networks Fund (round 1)²⁸. 198 non-native conifers were felled / pulled, 6.63 hectares of bracken were bruised, and cattle grazed the heath for the first time.

A stakeholder day was held for the Cwmdauddwr heath in summer 2023. This looked at all works completed over the previous five years, primarily bracken control undertaken by Commoners, heather-cutting and conifer removal. A total of 215 conifers had been removed from Cwmdauddwr and 17.2 hectares of bracken had been bruised between 2020 and 2023.

A stakeholder day was held in July 2023 at Penygarrreg. This focussed on the rationale and effects of conifer removal and cattle grazing.



Figure 4.4 – (left) Senescent heather prior to cutting and (right) Cwmdauddwr heather-cutting (August 2021) showing contrast with the uncut area

Sources: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q2, 2021 and Q3, 2021)

4.2.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comment
All Elan Links farmers informed about project	
73 hectares of dry heath restored	Target met – restoration took the form of conifer removal, bracken brought under control and heather managed through bruising / cutting
Management plan produced	

²⁸ The Nature Networks Fund was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This Fund aimed ‘to strengthen the resilience of Wales’ network of protected land and marine sites, supporting a green recovery for nature and communities’, <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/closed-programmes/nature-networks-fund>, accessed 30th January 2024.

5 people trained in practical heathland management skills	
2 stakeholder days with 10 people attending ²	Targets exceeded – 3 stakeholder days attended by 27 people
Biodiversity monitoring undertaken	
Volunteering activity undertaken	The pandemic timing was the primary reason for lack of volunteering on this project. Re-establishing a team of volunteers post-pandemic proved challenging (see 3.6 and 6.5)
Interpretation to a wider audience undertaken	

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

4.3 Improving our woodland (project 1c)

4.3.1 Project aims

Elan Valley woodlands form the core of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), underpinned by various Sites of Special Scientific interest. They are also part of Plantlife's Important Plant Area, especially for their lower plant interest. This woodland landscape is filled with veteran trees.

The project focussed on building the resilience of this ancient woodland network, securing appropriate woodland conditions for much of the special wildlife within it, and increasing woodland connectivity in order to buffer and enhance the habitat and create a vision for woodland management. This translated into three main objectives:

- Thin out the dense undergrowth of small trees, bramble and bracken
- Eradicate rhododendron (invasive species)
- Introduce sustainable grazing.

The focus was on a series of woodlands managed by the RSPB, EVT and DCWW.

4.3.2 Delivery and difference made

Two areas amounting to 32.5 hectares in Cwm yr Escob wood and Cae Melyn wood pasture were targeted for management by the RSPB. They undertook a programme of halo thinning around veteran oaks and pollarding of ancient trees in Cae Melyn, plus bramble and bracken control, from winter 2018 to spring 2022. This resulted in open woodland with reduced bracken enabling light to reach ground flora and lichen. A small herd of cattle grazed both the wood and wood pasture in later summer, trampling bracken and thus preventing tree regeneration from overwhelming the woodland.



Figure 4.5 – Cattle at Cwm yr Escob – sustainable grazing management

Source: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q3, 2022)

In 2020 the RSPB also developed a 200-year woodland management plan for the Elan Valley. This divided the Valley into 12 manageable landscape sections. Elan Links, working with complementary projects, was able to start work on several of these sections:

- Troed Rhiw Draen section – A large area of ffridd was fenced off to enable natural tree regeneration. Pigs may be used initially to clear bracken and create better conditions for seed germination.
- Henfron section – Natural regeneration was planned for the area around Cwm Methan lead mine by removing sheep grazing. This followed a survey for metallophyte lichens which found a large number of rarities which would be damaged by tree growth and the resultant shading.
- Tynllidiart section – LIFE Celtic Rainforests are planning to graze Glannau with ponies. Extensive fencing was planned to contain the ponies and exclude sheep, enabling natural tree regeneration.
- Penglaneinon section – EVT cattle have been brought to graze Coed Lan Fraith in winter.
- Ciloerwynt section – Around 50 trees, a mix of rowan and hawthorn, were planted in ffridd on Ciloerwynt.
- Cnwch section – DCWW planned to extend the woodland cover from Cnwch to Dolymynech by fencing off the area from sheep.

Cnwch, Penygarrreg and Cwm Coel woods were owned and managed by DCWW. Tender responses for woodland management works in 2019 proved unaffordable, but the RSPB, as a partner in the LIFE Celtic Rainforests project, was able to take over

the management of Cwm Coel (19.78 hectares) and the whole rhododendron eradication programme. The eradication programme was completed by the end of 2023, while woodland thinning is ongoing as the Celtic Rainforests project continues throughout 2024 and 2025.

DCWW rangers undertook thinning of Cnwch (13.63 hectares) and Penygarreg (7.96 hectares) woods. Extra funds were injected to help with the extent of management needed in Cnwch, which had only six days allotted in the original works programme. Tir Coed trainees stepped in on at least two of their 12-week courses to help out with the halo and general thinning, and this was completed by the end of 2023. Fencing of the boundaries of Cnwch and Penygarreg was completed in both woods by local contractors in 2021 to stop sheep trespass. DCWW have also agreed to continue management of all of their woodlands in the long term.

Careful consideration was given to sustainable grazing of the three DCWW woodlands. The lower section of Penygarreg could not be grazed for health and safety reasons and the upper section would be damaged by cattle due to its wetness. There was not enough ground vegetation in Cnwch to support cattle, so it was agreed to allow sheep grazing in small numbers and for short periods. A large footfall of tourists and dogs at Cnwch created challenges for cattle. Nevertheless, DCWW indicated a long-term plan to graze the whole length of Cnwch woods, in collaboration with the RSPB and a tenant farmer.

Woodland at Neuadd Fach was under the management of EVT. The original plan had been to improve the infrastructure, control the bracken and introduce grazing with cattle or ponies in the main stand of woodland. However, a NRW Officer was concerned that bracken control would destroy young regenerating trees, plus it was discovered that the wood was in a grazing exclusion option under Glastir. EVT therefore agreed to put cattle in Coed Lan Fraith instead.

Public engagement in Cnwch Wood was positive. Two Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) training days in woodland plant identification and monitoring were held. A walk and Great Birdwatch took place as joint events with the RSPB. An Elan Valley Scarce Plant Hunt was held to record rare ferns, mosses and vascular plants.

A local celebrity ecologist, Ray Woods, volunteered to advise on woodland management for lichens and pollarding of veteran ash trees with rare lichens regarding ash dieback. He experimented with lichen translocation from dying ash trees to old stands of hazel and veteran oaks. A significant time will be required to determine whether this was successful.



Figure 4.6 – (left) Woodland plant identification and management training (May 2021) and (right) local naturalist Ray Woods leading a woodland walk

Sources: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q3, 2021 and Q2, 2021)

4.3.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
109 hectares of woodland in better ecological condition for their identified priority wildlife	There was an error in the LCAP. Target woodlands only added up to 84.53 ha. 73.37 ha were restored and put into better management, i.e. 87%.
42 hectares of rhododendron cleared	
73 hectares thinned	At the time of the final evaluation, the Celtic Rainforests project continued to work on 19.78 ha at Cwm Coel.
9 hectares of bracken cleared	Target exceeded – monitoring information indicated that 42.22 ha were under improved bracken management
8 hectares of native oak planting	Although only 3.2 ha of oak were planted, SSSI consents required berry-rich tree planting instead. Monitoring information indicated 14.2 ha of mixed oak and berry-rich tree planting, plus 12 ha of ffridd were fenced to allow natural tree regeneration.
81 hectares in woodland under sustainable grazing practices	75.33 ha (93%) achieved, on advice that Penygarrag Wood was too wet to graze
A management plan for the woodland landscape laying out management for the next 25 years and a vision for the next 200 years	

4.4 Rare birds of Elan (project 2a)

4.4.1 Project aims

The Elan Links area is a traditional stronghold for upland breeding birds such as golden plover, red grouse, curlew, merlin, whinchat, skylark and ring ouzel. This was recognised by designation as a Special Protection Area (SPA) across much of the area. This project sought to improve key habitat areas and make interventions, such as enclosures around nests, to contribute towards improved breeding success of upland bird species.



Figure 4.7 – Curlew chicks

Source: Elan Links Instagram, 9th July 2022

4.4.2 Delivery and difference made

This project adopted an innovative outcomes-based approach initially: instead of paying land managers for undertaking specific activities, the approach drew on the skills and knowledge of land managers, with incentive payments tied to outcomes. Advice was taken from the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism about the approach as they had run demonstrator projects in this manner across Europe. Dartmoor Farming Futures also provided a representative to discuss the approach with Elan farmers in the first year of the project. The mid-term evaluation indicated that this approach proved to be time-consuming overall²⁹.

When the second Natural Heritage Officer took over the role, she took the view that the approach was too unwieldy and did not suit the timeframe. As a consequence,

²⁹ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, pp33–34.

tenant farmers were given payments for management activities, although outcomes remained the objective.

As will be seen from consideration of each species, there was strong overlap between this project and the restoration of healthy bogs considered in [4.1](#). Moreover, the RSPB provided technical information to feed into a bracken and ffridd management plan prepared by PONT and ensured linkage between this rare birds project and the woodland improvement project considered in [4.3](#).

Curlew

Works included annual surveys, Molinia cutting, bog restoration and nest protection. NRW provided additional support for fencing, as did the RSPB through the Networks for Nature Fund. Although the pandemic slowed work in 2020/21, additional impetus was injected in 2022.

Bog restoration of 70 hectares of land on Claerwen helped to improve potential feeding ground for curlew. Hirnant was a key site for curlew and received regular Molinia management. Rhosmeheryn was another key site for curlew, and had both Molinia cutting and cattle grazing introduced to improve nesting and feeding habitat. Curlew surveys took place every year, with eight breeding pairs identified in the Important Upland Bird Area (IUBA), an increase from the previous estimate of six. Nests were identified and fenced each spring, but predation meant that chicks were not thought to have survived. However, eggs hatched from two nests in 2023 and parent birds were observed as late as October. This was viewed as a likely indicator of successful breeding (thought to be five chicks).



Figure 4.8 – Curlew eggs from a nest found on Hirnant

Source: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q2, 2022)

The Natural Heritage Officer attended and contributed to regular Gylfinir Cymru / Curlew Wales³⁰ meetings to report progress and exchange good practice advice.

Monitoring of breeding and nest protection of curlews will continue in 2024, with an RSPB donor supporting a proportion of the work with funding.

Red grouse

The intended works in support of this species had proved unviable by the end of 2019. Chemical treatment to create a 450-hectare tick control zone raised concerns about water quality issues and agricultural improvement of common land. Resources allocated to this species were reallocated to other species, as bird surveys proved to be significantly more time consuming than originally envisaged.

Golden plover

Surveys took place annually for this species. An adult calling was occasionally reported by farmers or a destroyed nest was recorded, but no evidence was found of successful breeding. A breeding pair was recorded in spring 2023 at Henfron where grazing had been introduced in support of bog restoration. This was viewed by the Natural Heritage Officer as encouraging. Similarly, bog restoration on Claerwen and Hengae improved habitat for golden plover, potentially increasing chances of successful breeding in future.

“One pair was heard in spring on the farm where we’d done bog restoration, so that was really positive. But we don’t know whether this pair managed to nest and whether the chicks managed to hatch and fledge, we don’t know that. But that was like the first time in years that Golden Plover had come back to that area and we had been doing the restoration work there. So that was good.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Ring ouzel

Volunteers mostly took on the survey work for this species, using a sound recorder. No ring ouzel were recorded in the Valley from 2018 to 2021. However, passage birds were recorded photographically in 2022 and 2023. This encouraged the Natural Heritage Officer that they might stay and breed at some stage.

Activities to improve habitat for ring ouzel included:

- planting of scattered berry-rich trees on two farms, offering autumn food attractive to ring ouzel
- a farm where ring ouzel once bred had been mucking pastures regularly in autumn to encourage soil invertebrates, an important food source
- Penygarneg was identified as already having good habitat for this species, so required no additional management.

³⁰ Gilfinir Cymru / Curlew Wales – <https://www.curlewwales.org/>

Merlin

Surveys for this species took place annually. A nest containing young was found at the edge of the Towy Forest in 2021. Merlin were regularly reported by farmers and EVT staff but appeared to breed outside the Valley. The Natural Heritage Officer reflected that a lack of prey species, for example skylark and meadow pipit, due to the condition of the grassland, may have been a deterrent to breeding in the Valley.

Habitat improvement in support of merlin included tree-planting in 2021, in places where they had traditionally been observed. The Natural Heritage Officer reflected that it would take many years for the trees to grow to a sufficient size for use by merlin.

Dunlin

This species was not formally a target species for this project. Nevertheless, the Natural Heritage Officer felt that the Elan Valley was important for this species. Up to three breeding pairs were identified using a sound recorder and one nest was found in 2022 by the Natural Heritage Officer and a contractor. Habitat work to support curlew was potentially of value to dunlin also.

4.4.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
All Elan Links farmers informed about project	
40 hectares better managed for curlew	Target exceeded – 13.2 ha in better management in the IUBA and 70 ha of bog restored in the Claerwen SAC
40 hectares better managed for golden plover	Target exceeded – over 30 ha managed by cutting and grazing, with 94 ha of bog restored on Claerwen and Hengae.
450 hectares tick control zone for red grouse	Proved unworkable due to unintended negative consequences to water and land of chemical treatment required
30 hectares better managed for ring ouzel	Target exceeded – 33.4 ha
30 hectares better managed for merlin	A series of issues outside the control of the Elan Links team prevented progress. The Natural Heritage Officer estimated that 5–10 ha were better managed for merlin.
'Bird farmers' group – 4 stakeholder days with 10 farmers attending	3 stakeholder days to date with 8 farmers attending
10 people trained in farming for birds	

Interpretation to a wider audience	Throughout Scheme lifetime, from display at Pont Elan show, articles in Elan tenant farmer newsletters and social media posts about ring ouzel in 2022 and for National Curlew Day in 2023
Bracken & ffridd management plan	

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

4.5 Rare species of Elan (project 2b)

4.5.1 Project aims

This was a monitoring and recording project. It sought to use trained volunteers and professional conservationists to survey, identify and monitor rare species and their habitats to inform future safeguarding measures.

4.5.2 Delivery and difference made

The mid-term evaluation reported helpful links having been formed with local organisations, including Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, Rhayader by Nature and the Biodiversity Information Service (BIS) for Powys³¹. These links led to a small but committed group of natural heritage volunteers who were trained in topics ranging from lichen identification to hill safety. However, the COVID-19 pandemic stopped volunteer work until the second quarter of 2021. The Volunteer Engagement Officer left the Scheme in 2021 and was not replaced. Consequently, individual Scheme officers needed to recruit and manage their own volunteers. The committed group of natural heritage volunteers pre-COVID were unavailable post-pandemic. It proved challenging to recruit a new cohort of natural heritage enthusiasts who were able to volunteer.

Six volunteers were trained in May 2021 and a further 15 in June 2021. A range of further training days were held for volunteers in the third quarter of 2021 and throughout 2022, with three meadow days in July, a bog day in July and a heathland day in August. This enabled surveys across the project areas.

The programme of training and surveying courses which took place in the summer of 2022 included a Tir Coed ecology course on grassland species identification and monitoring on Penglaneinon, with another on the bog at Pont ar Elan, plus courses on small mammals and butterflies. Volunteer numbers at these events ranged from three to eight attendees.

³¹ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p34.



Figure 4.9 – Monitoring heathland condition on Heathland Plant identification and Monitoring Training Day (August 2021)

Source: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q3, 2021)

"I really appreciated the time given by others and their expertise. I learnt a lot and am using the skills and knowledge gained to practice my ID of all sorts of things. I was already a User of LERC but I'm now able to submit even more records as I'm recognising so much more!"

Participant, Tir Coed Ecology course (2022)

Despite this volunteer input, monitoring of the natural heritage projects was largely managed by the Natural Heritage Officer, the Peatland Officer and paid contractors during 2022 and 2023. Nevertheless, significant voluntary support was provided by a local ecologist and an EVT tenant farmer. Additional valuable voluntary contributions were made by the Bryophyte County Recorders for Radnorshire and Breconshire and the Shropshire Lichen Group.

A high point in volunteering in 2023 was the input from a cohort of expert volunteers to update the Elan Scarce Plant Register.

"So, we had four target areas, really remote parts of the Elan Valley, where we gathered together a group of, on average, eight volunteers each time. And we went out to these remote locations and recorded and tried to find as many of these rare plants as possible. And so that's a very good example of where I really was supported by volunteers and experts. And I think that will roll on."

Member of the Elan Links team

Overall, the project undertook monitoring of the following species:

Birds

This formed the Rare Birds of Elan project discussed in [4.4](#). Significant monitoring effort was provided throughout the lifetime of the Scheme through a mix of volunteers, RSPB staff, the Natural Heritage Officer and contractors.

Mammals

Water vole surveys took place in 2023 to complement the peatland restoration work and to monitor the health of bogs.

“We’ve got water vole evidence all over the Valley. And this has fitted in very well with peatland restoration because, you don’t want to damage water vole habitat when you’re doing peatland restoration, but also having restored your peatland, you’ve made a much better habitat for water vole.”

Member of the Elan Links team reflecting on a survey report into water voles and bogs

A workshop on American mink control took place for the rangers, farmers and EVT staff in December 2023. This invasive species poses a major threat to water vole and riverine birds such as the grey wagtail and dipper. Eight people attended the workshop, forming a basis for a legacy action to monitor and eliminate this invasive species.

Invertebrates

Contractors surveyed key sites for the small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly in 2022, yielding positive results. A contractor surveyed key species-rich meadows and pastures for bees and wasps in 2023. This complemented a large in-bye survey, reportedly giving good results. A volunteer surveyed sites for damselflies and dragonflies, again in 2023.

Fungi

Waxcap training and surveys took place in 2022 on in-bye land. Further surveys were planned for early 2024. A volunteer ecologist recorded smuts and rusts in the Valley

³².

Lichens

Lichens were a focus at the start of the project, and this focus was re-established post-pandemic in 2021. Significant volunteer survey work took place in 2022 and 2023.

³² Smuts and rusts are fungi. Further information can be found at Morrow, M. (2023) ‘Rusts and Smuts’. Libre Texts – Biology, [https://bio.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Botany/A_Photoscientific_Atlas_for_Botany_\(Morrow\)/03%3A_Fungi_and_Lichens/3.06%3A_Basidiomycota_\(Club_Fungi\)/3.6.04%3A_Rusts_and_Smuts](https://bio.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Botany/A_Photoscientific_Atlas_for_Botany_(Morrow)/03%3A_Fungi_and_Lichens/3.06%3A_Basidiomycota_(Club_Fungi)/3.6.04%3A_Rusts_and_Smuts), accessed 4th February 2024.

Bryophytes (mosses, liverworts and hornworts)

A bryophyte training day in support of the healthy bog project was held in winter 2023. Most of the associated survey work took place with volunteers in 2023, culminating in the British Bryological Society centenary event.

Vascular plants

Surveys to update the Elan Scarce Plant Register took place in 2023, as already noted above. The Breconshire and Ceredigion Vascular Plant County Recorders also supported the work.

All survey data and associated reports were provided to BIS, adding to the wider records of the area. Survey findings also informed management plans for heathland, woodland and in-bye land. Tenant farmers all received individual reports detailing each meadow and pasture, enabling informed management in future. This will be particularly pertinent given the move to the Welsh Government Sustainable Farming Scheme.

4.5.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
Monitoring to enable evaluation of the Natural Heritage projects	
Elan BAP (Biodiversity Action Plan) updated	Management plans in place
New records for the Local Record Centre (LRC)	
30 'supporting your natural heritage' days, to include the monitoring of other natural heritage projects, with 300 people attending over the 5 years	Targets exceeded – 47 supporting and 314 attending
100 volunteers trained in specialist biodiversity monitoring skills and nature conservation actions (50 of these attending Tir Coed courses)	Targets exceeded – 124 incidences of volunteers trained, with 64 attending Tir Coed courses)

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

4.6 Elan hay meadows (project 3a)

4.6.1 Project aims

Although 97% of traditional wildflower meadows have been lost in the UK, Elan is home to many upland hay meadows, including a coronation meadow. Scientific studies suggested that occasional liming and application of farmyard manure would enable these meadows to thrive.

4.6.2 Delivery and difference made

There was limited progress in 2018 other than to secure agreement from two farms and outline agreement from a further two. Limitations in survey capacity meant that surveys had to be pre-scheduled across a range of projects. A dry summer in 2018 led farmers to cut their hay earlier than normal. Unfortunately, this meant planned survey dates fell too late.

However, by March 2020, botanical surveys and soil analyses were complete. Three farms had agreed contracts for enhanced management and discussions were ongoing with two further farms.

ELAN LINKS
Pobl • Natur • Dŵr
People • Nature • Water

**ELAN NATURE
NATUR ELAN**

Elan Valley Hay Meadows
Dolydd Gwair Cwm Elan

Come to the Elan Valley and help save threatened habitats
Dewch i Gwm Elan i helpu i achub cynefinoedd dan fygythiad

Hay Meadow Survey Training Days
12th & 13th/06/19 9.00am – 5.00pm
Dwirnodau Hyfforddi Dolydd Gwair

Join us and the experts in the hay meadows of the Elan Valley.
No previous experience necessary, just enthusiasm.
Come along and learn some new skills.

Ymunwch â ni a'r arbenigwyr dolydd gwair Cwm Elan.
Nid oes angen profiad blaenorol, dim ond brwdfrydedd.
Dewch draw i ddysgu sgiliau newydd.

Meet at Elan Links Office / Cwrdd yn Swyddfa Elan Links
Elan Village, Rhayader. LD6 5HP

Booking Essential / Rhaid archebu lle
bonna.williams@elanvalley.org.uk
01597 811527

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water **CAITAD** **Cymdeithas Cymunedol Rhayader** **TIR COED** **CRONFA DREFTADAETH HERITAGE FUND**

Figure 4.10 – Volunteer training opportunity

Source: X (Twitter), 2021

After delays from COVID-19 and consideration of the best approach by NRW, the 2020 surveys resulted in each farm being able to request consent from 2022 for liming if the soil pH dropped to 5.5 or below. One farm decided not to proceed as they were an organic producer, but others carried out liming and some also undertook mucking of the meadow. A combination of extreme weather conditions in 2022 and 2023 and the

relatively short time between liming in 2022 and surveying in 2023 meant that no conclusions could be drawn about efficacy.

Seed broadcasting and green hay strewing from donor sites took place on some of the meadows over a three-year period. A Logic seed harvester was purchased for farms in 2021 to harvest their meadow seed and either enhance poorer areas of swards, create new meadows or sell the seed. At least two farmers used this piece of equipment, with one having sold seed. The harvester was demonstrated at two meadow events run by the Scheme.

“It was a SSSI meadow. So, it’s got like yellow rattle, it’s got meadow vetchling, common bird’s-foot-trefoil, common napweed, eyebright, milkwort, not salad burnet, great burnet. And I think he had some of the very special wood bitter-vetch.”

Member of the Elan Links team reflecting on seed harvested from a meadow

An In-bye Management Plan was developed, based on detailed surveys of all meadows and pastures in 2022. The Natural Heritage Officer reported that this was well received by EVT tenant farmers. The work was followed up in 2023 with surveys of the most flower-rich meadows and pastures for bees and wasps (see 4.1). An Elan meadow flower guide was written and distributed to tenants in 2022.



Figure 4.11 – Flowers of the Elan Meadows

Source: e-booklet available at <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/67188322/flowers-of-the-elan-meadows>

Bracken control started in meadows on Penygarrag and Penglaneinion in 2023. Due to concerns over potential nesting birds in meadows, an RSPB Officer trained EVT Estate staff and volunteers before bracken bruising commenced as a condition of NRW consent. An EVT Estate Officer walked ahead of the flail to check for nests.

From 2021, Meadow Management Days were held at three different farms: Troed Rhiw Draen, Henfron and Llanerchycawr. Good attendance was reported. As an example, scything was demonstrated at one of these events, primarily as a tool to manage bracken in more difficult areas.

"I went to one of the seed collection open days, and I think that was a good turnout. [...] And it was good discussions, and it felt like the farmers, they were joking, but they suddenly could see all this wildflower seed actually is worth money. It's not just about being pretty. This has got some value, monetary value as well. So it was delightful to see the farmers joking about, 'I'm going to charge you 15 quid for that handful of seed in my hand', and stuff like that. I felt that joined up things very well, really. I felt the atmosphere of the day was really good. And as I say, landowners came from outside the Valley as well, so it had a wider learning."

Natural Environment Consents Officer

The Natural Heritage Officer felt that this project had been successful not only in re-engaging some farmers with aspects of traditional, high nature value farming but also in encouraging some farmers to participate in Elan Links projects. As the quotation above suggests, relationships were being built by the Natural Heritage Officer and farmers through such events.

"I've drawn more tenants on board with this project. And so, one guy who wasn't having anything to do with the projects, one of the farms, has actually become engaged not only with meadows, but with other aspects of the projects."

Member of the Elan Links team

While there was clearly engagement, a tenant farmer put forward an apparently confounding view to participation:

"Well, we're all in an environmental scheme, which paid quite well for hay meadows in the Elan Valley. Hay meadow reversion. And we have been for 20 years. So, there isn't a farmer in the Elan Valley who wants to convert a hay meadow, a field, into a traditional hay meadow, who, if he wanted it, he would have done it and he would have been getting paid £250 extra from the Welsh Government under their schemes."

Tenant farmer

In reality, both perspectives were likely to be correct, given that the project sought to improve the condition of hay meadows, rather than to convert fields into hay meadows.

4.6.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
12 hectares of hay meadow under favourable management	Target exceeded – 24.15 ha achieved
In-bye field management plan	
10 people trained in hay meadow management skills	Target exceed – 24 trained A further 10 volunteers were trained in meadow monitoring skills (a subset of management)
2 stakeholder days with 10 people attending	Targets exceeded – 3 stakeholder days with 32 attendees
5 demonstrating and volunteering days with 10 people attending	Targets exceeded – 11 days held with 45 attendees
All Elan Links farmers informed about project	
End-of-project report with recommendations for future management of Elan's hay meadows	
Interpretation to a wider audience	Various social media posts and newsletter articles throughout the lifetime of the Scheme, including <i>Flowers of the Elan Meadows</i> e-booklet

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

4.7 Elan rhos hay (project 3b)

4.7.1 Project aims

Historically rhos hay was cut in August / September on the open hills, and used as feed and bedding for cattle and sheep during the winter months. Only one or two farmers still continued this tradition. The practice was beneficial for nature by ensuring greater diversity of management on the open hill and was thought to have potential economic benefits for a farmer if a suitable use could be found for the cut hay. This project encouraged rhos hay production by farmers and delivered farm-scale investigations into the best ways of making and using the hay to generate a more economic and sustainable product.

4.7.2 Delivery and difference made

Initial farmer interest in this project was positive. Wider interest from the National Trust provided further encouragement. However, by the mid-term evaluation, testing of the rhos hay from three farms indicated it had limited nutritional value to sheep or cattle. One farmer suggested:

"The process is borderline useless."

Tenant farmer

A volunteer continued to explore potential uses of rhos hay, helpfully ruling out uses lacking practical value. The pandemic stalled discussions with Aberystwyth University about developing horse feed from Molinia / rhos hay, and discussions about a trial were ongoing at the time of the final evaluation.

However, the entrepreneurial tenant farmer of Henfron identified the potential for biochar, a soil enhancer using a mix of Molinia, dung and sheep's wool. This proved successful and translated into a new business stream³³. This drew wider interest following coverage on BBC Radio 4's *Costing the Earth* programme.

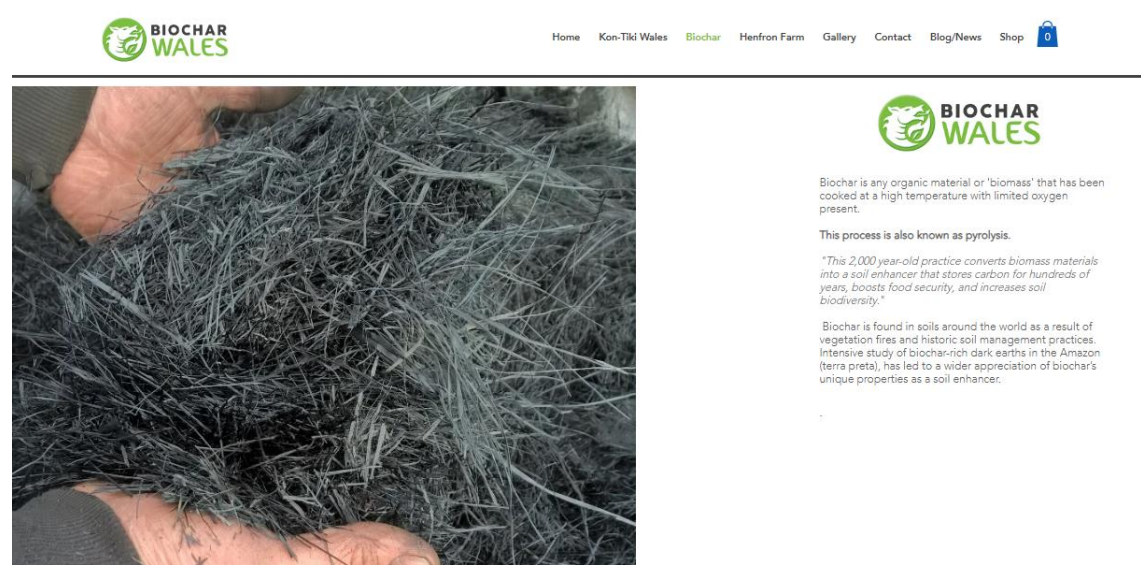


Figure 4.12 – A new business venture arising from the rhos hay project

Source: <https://www.biochar.wales/what-is-biochar>

While the project sought to revive a traditional farming practice in Elan, a secondary objective was to improve the condition of hillsides by opening up swards of dense Molinia. This was achieved for 23.5 ha through Molinia harvesting between 2019 and 2022. However, where new plant species began to colonise the managed land, sheep tended to quickly graze new growth, limiting biodiversity gains.

4.7.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
20 hectares of rhos hay habitat restored	Target exceeded – 23.5 ha
3 on-farm trials	2 on-farm trials
10 people trained in rhos hay skills	6 people trained
3 stakeholder days with 15 people attending	Target exceeded – 3 stakeholder days held with 20 people attending

³³ Information about Wales Biochar based at Henfron farm is available at <https://www.biochar.wales/>, accessed 7th February 2024.

All Elan Links farmers informed about project	
End-of-project report with recommendations for future management of Elan's rhos hay habitat and uses for rhos hay	
Interpretation to a wider audience	Work publicised through Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, BioChar Wales and BBC

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

4.8 Elan rams (project 3c)

4.8.1 Project aims

Elan has its own sheep breed, the Elan Valley-type Welsh Mountain. The character has evolved through generations of shepherding and hefting on the open hills. Changes in agricultural policy and market conditions put the unique qualities of the breed at risk (an Elan Mountain sheep might weigh 15–20 kg, whereas an 'improved' sheep might weigh 40 kg). This project aimed to develop a co-operative sheep breeding scheme amongst Elan farmers to ensure future maintenance of breeding stock with the qualities of hardiness and hefting instinct needed to thrive on Elan's open hills.

4.8.2 Delivery and difference made

There was engagement in this project from 18 tenant farmers from 17 farms over four years. This resulted in 662 rams being consigned to tack (against a target of 720). In this respect, the project was successful as it engaged farmers who did not participate in other Elan Links projects nor events.



Figure 4.13 – Back fat scanning and weighing at Elan Ram Open Day (Penglaneinon), March 2022

Source: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q1, 2022)

A short film of the first-year return weighing and scanning can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqO-s_mOoyc.

However, it became clear that not all farmers engaged with the spirit of the project. In the first year, some improved sheep were found on tack amongst the Elan Mountain sheep. In future years, farmers signed up to a rota to check on the sheep whilst on tack, but not all honoured that agreement. COVID-19 also played a part in reduced levels of engagement in 2020/21. Importantly, although detailed reports were available on each lamb scanned and weighed at consignment and return in order to identify the best rams for breeding Elan Mountain sheep, it was unclear to what extent farmers were using this data. Efforts to form an Elan Ram Committee of tenant farmers in 2022/23 to discuss issues and explore how best to achieve the project's key objective proved unsuccessful. Consequently, the decision was taken not to extend this project into 2023/24 when the wider Scheme gained an extension.

"What was meant to happen was that the tenants would take ownership of this project and that they would start to run it themselves and that they'd have a little group that met and talked and shared ideas about how to go forward. And that never happened. They never wanted to take it. Just nobody wanted to take responsibility."

Member of the Elan Links team

Interestingly, some of the most engaged farmers in Elan Links chose not to get involved in this project.

"Actually, I didn't get involved with that because I'd been involved with one run by the Welsh Government for several years, and [...] it didn't really do much good. So, I actually didn't waste my time getting involved with that one."

Farmer

4.8.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
Co-operative sheep breeding scheme for Elan farmers	662 sheep consigned from a target of 720, i.e. 92% of target
Annual records of 'location-of-origin' ram usage by participating farmers	
20 people trained - ram breeding skills	18 tenants / farmers trained
10 stakeholder days (annual consignment and selection days) with 20 people attending	Target exceeded – 10 stakeholder days with 70 incidences of attendance
All Elan Links farmers informed about project	
End-of-project report	
Interpretation to a wider audience	Articles in newsletter to tenant farmers plus social media posts about the project

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

4.9 Elan cattle (project 3d)

4.9.1 Project aims

This project sought to increase numbers of cattle in the Elan Valley by 45 to vary the grazing regime. The approach was adapted during the lifetime of the project to maintain the buy-in of tenant farmers already breeding cattle on the Estate. Unlike sheep, which reduce an area to a close-cropped lawn, cattle graze in a more haphazard fashion, creating a mosaic of habitats.

4.9.2 Delivery and difference made

Nine tenant farms had introduced cattle or increased herd sizes by the end of 2020. This increased to 12 farms in 2022, with 69 cattle under support. This was not without some controversy, given DCWW's concerns about the potential for cryptosporidium entering water. Conversely, as noted already, cattle fed into habitat restoration / enhancement in several other natural heritage projects:

- Healthy bogs ([4.1](#)) – tackling Molinia growth
- Dry heath management ([4.2](#)) – trampling bracken
- Improving our woodland ([4.3](#)) – thinning regenerating trees, reducing bramble and bracken ground cover, reducing overshadowing of veteran trees and lichen
- Rare birds ([4.4](#)) – tackling Molinia and allowing ffridd creation in support of target species
- Hay meadows ([4.6](#)) – enabling a mosaic of habitats through grazing and natural fertilisation which also encouraged invertebrates (in turn a source of food for rare birds and fauna).

With early achievement of targets and good engagement of tenant farmers, the project extended by promoting trials of Nofence technology to enable controlled grazing on open hillside, as outlined in [4.1](#). The technology was trialled on four farms, with three subsequently adopting the technology. EVT additionally bought 24 cattle collars to apply the technology on their own farms.

“And they paid for GPS collars [...]. So, we had the cows up on the hill and they were grazed in a rare bird area. And by having the GPS collars, we had complete maps to show where they'd spent most of their time. And then this could be overlaid with the surveys that came out as well. And so, we had some data on them, on what the cows were actually doing. Really good data. [...] It got us keeping cows back on the farm and it made them, I won't say profitable, but it did make it a viable thing for the farm. They wouldn't have been. And there's lots of data to go forward on the improvements of the land in most places, anyway, with the cows on there.”

Farmer on grazing evidence and how it informs future high nature value farming

The project attracted media interest, initially featuring in an article in the Radnorshire Wildlife Trust magazine in autumn 2018, building to BBC *Countryfile* filming at Neuadd Fach in November 2023.

BBC Countryfile – Elan Valley, 10th December 2023

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001tch0/countryfile-elan-valley>

The project worked with a variety of partners:

- Radnorshire Wildlife Trust – Rhos Pastures project
- RSPB – Celtic Rainforests project³⁴
- PONT.

Training events ranged from Nofence technology demonstrator days arranged by PONT to a dung beetle training and animal health training day run by a local vet.

“The way the farmers have been engaged in that, I think the work on cattle has been really good. The Trust itself has kind of benefited from that because we want to farm in a more nature friendly way. And so, it’s introduced the ability to test out that approach. It’s also shown us that there’s benefits to doing that, and there’s also benefits to having cattle on farms.”

Representative of EVT

4.9.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
At least five farm holdings supported to reintroduce and/or increase cattle numbers	Target exceeded – new or additional cattle introduced to 11 farms, and 6 farms supported where cattle were already present
Development of an Elan Links ‘cattle group’ for interested farmers to share best practice	
4 stakeholder days with 20 people attending	Target exceeded – 4 stakeholder days with 22 attending (43 incidences of attendance)
45 secured cows grazing the Elan Links area	Target exceeded – 69 cattle supported through Elan Links, plus more on other EVT farms
All Elan Links farmers informed about project	
End-of-project report with recommendations for future activity	
Interpretation to a wider audience	See main narrative

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

³⁴ The Celtic Rainforests Wales project was led by Snowdonia National Park Authority in partnership with Woodland Trust, RSPB, DCWW and NRW and supported by EU-LIFE and Welsh Government. Details were available at <https://snowdonia.gov.wales/protect/conservation-work/celtic-rainforests-wales/>, accessed 8th February 2024.

4.10 Elan wethers (project 3e)

4.10.1 Project aims

The project sought to develop and trial wether meat (castrated rams) in the market. This was aimed at securing a distinctive farming practice.

4.10.2 Delivery and difference made

Only one tenant farmer showed any interest in producing wether meat. Meetings intended to take this forward were delayed due to the pandemic and never recommenced. Ultimately, the potential economic return was not enough to engage the tenant farming community.

“Three of four of us sold meat direct to the public. We sold it from mutton to the public and sold it from hoggets and sold it from wethers and sold it from ewes. The next thing, they [the Scheme] said, ‘We’ve got this idea to sell wether mutton’. Nobody asked us, any of us, for what our opinions on it were before. And I felt like, right, okay, well, to be honest, when they came forward, we all said, well, that can’t work, because basically sheep devalue once they are a year old and it wasn’t an option. It just wasn’t an option.”

Tenant farmer

This farmer went on to suggest that the sale of mutton held significantly more potential. It was also suggested that a central website selling meat and other products direct to the public from Elan Valley farmers had potential. Ideally, such a website would have a link to the Elan Valley website.

Whereas the other natural heritage projects had clear links with each other (around high nature value farming), linkages with this project were less clear. Consequently, the Elan Links team tended not to prioritise this project. It was effectively dropped from the Scheme from 2022.

Budget from this project was vired, with NLHF approval, into production of short films about Elan Links. The Scheme Manager felt that sale of wether meat was largely about raising the profile of the Elan brand, so film production would contribute to this outcome.

4.10.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
Market development and testing for wether lamb meat including roll-out to catering outlets on a trial basis	
More effective woodland management at minimal cost with positive benefits	

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

5. Securing, safeguarding and enabling access to Elan's heritage

5.1 Safeguarding Elan's historic environment (project 4)

5.1.1 Project aims

People have interacted with Elan's landscape over four millennia. This project, led by the EVT, sought to safeguard key sites at risk of being lost by surveying and recording to preserve information for the future and to inform future interventions. Where appropriate and possible, greater access to sites was envisaged.

5.1.2 Delivery and difference made

Little progress had been made on this project by the time of the mid-term evaluation. A series of contracts had been let to a specialist heritage contractor, Trysor. Sites surveyed poorly previously were to be re-surveyed³⁵. Trysor's approach involved engaging local communities in their work and encouraging volunteer participation. A member of EVT was drafted in to add capacity in managing the project and move it forward. Unfortunately, neither this individual nor the wider team had expertise in archaeology. This led to Trysor effectively self-managing, with little connection with the Elan Links team.

"[They (Trysor) were] both very capable, very experienced and very skilled upland archaeologists and were quite capable of self-managing. They didn't need anybody to tell them what to do. [...] They just got on with it, without feeling part of the Scheme. [...] Fortunately, there was quite a tight design brief. They'd been involved in designing that element of the Scheme anyway.

Member of the Elan Links team

COVID-19 restrictions delayed the project further and prevented the community engagement work. When restrictions lifted, Trysor found their capacity constrained by demands from other clients as projects halted during the pandemic all needed to be moved forward simultaneously. Nevertheless, survey work did take place during 2022 and a public feedback session in Rhayader in October 2022 attracted 25 attendees. Moreover, a new appointee in June 2022 as an Elan Links Engagement, Education and Events Officer had an archaeology background and was able to focus on the archaeology projects within the Scheme.

³⁵ Some previous surveys had reportedly been carried out by an undergraduate as part of a student project. Other work had used early GPS technology which was only accurate to 100 metres, a long way if looking for a site in an upland area.



Figure 5.1 – Public outreach and engagement: (left) sharing the results of the walk over surveys and (right) volunteer training

Sources: Quarterly monitoring reports (Q3, 2022 and Q3, 2023)

Analysis of the walk over survey completed by Trysor in July 2022 carried on into 2023. The longer than intended timescale reflected significant volumes of new finds, each of which needed to be logged on the sites database. Further surveying was also undertaken in May 2023 to confirm / correct certain records. Consequently, the report of the walk over survey was not delivered until October 2023.

Trysor indicated that they had worked in the uplands of the Elan Valley for 15–20 years, and therefore felt they had a good grasp of what the walk over survey would entail. However, significantly more was found than had been anticipated. Instead of the anticipated 713 sites surveyed, 1,520 sites or complexes were recorded.

“What we thought we were going to be doing was going out and saying, ‘Right, well, here’s where it’s meant to be. So where is it? Oh, it’s over there.’ Matching up things on the ground with records. But when we went out, particularly in the southern part of the area but other areas as well, we realised that we ended up with double the amount of records that we started with.”

Representative of Trysor

This major piece of work identified Bronze Age funerary monuments for the first time, plus a significant increase in the number of medieval building platforms and sunken shelters, associated with pastoral activity during the period when the district formed part of a monastic grange held by Strata Florida Abbey. There was also a notable increase in the number of post-medieval industrial sites identified, particularly quarries and metal ore prospecting features. In total, 57 potential new monuments were identified for scheduling, with other schedules needing updating.

The Elan Links Officer produced a map of the sites to aid future management.

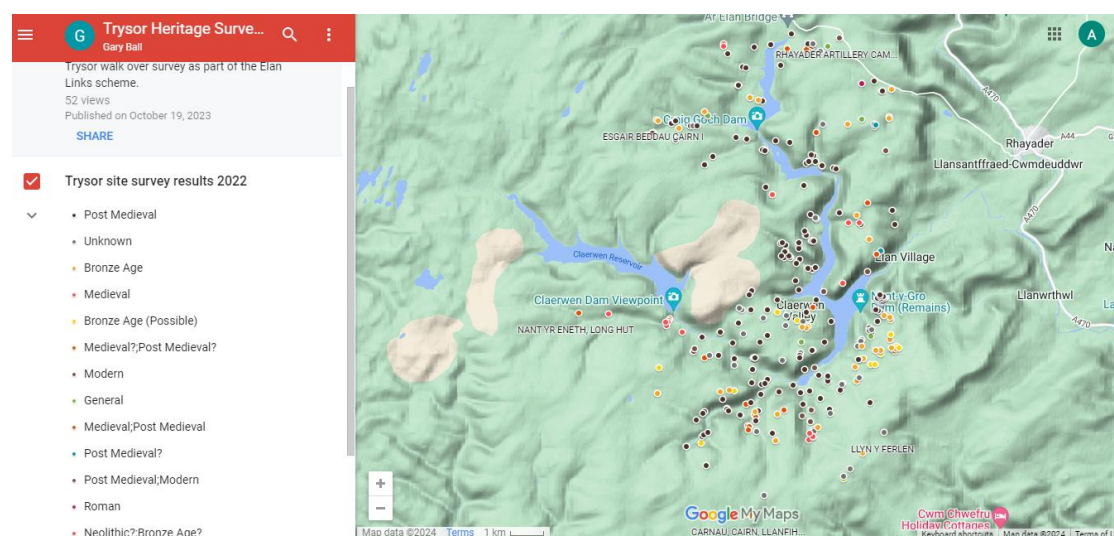


Figure 5.2 – Mapping of archaeological sites

Original to be found at

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1LQROGHTdaA7hVru2wnz44DeeZ084L3s&usp=sharing>

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q1, 2023)

The capacity constraints on Trysor led the Elan Links Officer to engage Clwyd–Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) to undertake the community engagement aspects of the project. Volunteer training took place over six-sessions³⁶ with 24 participants before any hands-on work began. In discussing the thinking behind the training, the Engagement, Education and Events Officer reflected:

“If they then came out to volunteer on site and they were asked to maybe go away for ten minutes while I record something, they understood why they were being asked to leave the dig [...]. That’s how we pitched the training, and I think it worked quite well. I think Clwyd–Powys Archaeological Trust themselves are going to use that as a model to deliver desk-based training to their own volunteers in the future, which was a good output.”

Member of the Elan Links team

³⁶ Two sessions were held each week for three weeks.

A CPAT representative commented on the training:

"[The training] was advertised in the local media. It was obviously advertised by the Elan Valley Trust and by the project, by us, to our volunteer and membership mailing lists. [...] So, there's like a really nice broad age of age range, men and women, professionals, hobbyists, retired people."

Representative of CPAT

The training was unusual in its length and breadth, leading the CPAT representative to reflect on how they could approach work in the future:

"We've now got a sort of ready-made training package that we can use for other events and for other volunteers. We've never delivered something over that duration before. We normally do, like I said, even if we've got a three-week excavation at a National Trust site, for example, our community open day is only ever one day. [...] So, yeah, for us, it allowed us to expand our provision going forward. So it actually helped with the sustainability of our organisation."

Representative of CPAT

Volunteers were fulsome in their praise for the training and how they were able to apply it in the field:

"So, it was adventurous and exciting. It was a lot of time, like I was volunteering, but I think the knowledge I was gaining paid me back tenfold."

Archaeology volunteer

"It was very informative, very well led, and very well organized. Just the right amount of participation and taking information and breaks and sort of relaxed feel about it, but also pushing over some quite useful and interesting information about the locality and about potential future digs."

Archaeology volunteer

Most digs did not take place until the last quarter of 2023, due to a combination of wanting all volunteers to undertake training and work taking place on SSSI sites requiring consents which avoided certain months.

Bracken clearance was undertaken at Nant Methan (by the NLHF investment team during a monitoring visit) and then surveyed and excavated by volunteers.

A two-day excavation of Cairn Ricet undertaken by Trysor in January 2023 indicated that this prehistoric burial site was intact and warranted scheduling. It was heritage at risk from off road vehicles using nearby land.

The survey of Maen Hir standing stone found no evidence of the stone's original location, so the decision was taken not to re-erect it. A survey report of Lluest Abercaethon was delivered and lodged with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS)³⁷.

Hillgate House was recorded and excavated by the newly trained volunteer team with CPAT. Apart from providing a good first experience for volunteers, this tied in with recent research undertaken into the Rebecca Riots by a volunteer at Kew. The Hillgate toll gate was attacked twice in 1843.

A final site for 2023 was a priority-1 earthwork from the Heritage at Risk Register, the platform at Esgair y Ty. Five days of excavation and recording exposed substantial stonework / wall lines beneath the visible earth banks. The building was approximately 10 metres by 4 metres and aligned perfectly east–west, leading to speculation that it may have been a chapel. A single iron horseshoe fragment, a piece of glass and a coin or trade token were recovered. The latter was sent to the National Museum of Wales for identification and potential dating.

Tools and equipment were purchased by the project for excavation work. This enabled volunteers to participate in the digs and represented a legacy investment that will enable participation in future volunteer archaeology. Consequently, the Engagement, Education and Events Officer felt he could not walk away from Elan and the volunteers at the end of 2023, when delivery had been scheduled to stop and he was made redundant by the Scheme. Instead, he set up a community interest company based out of CARAD's Timescape Museum and, following an open tender process, secured a contract to continue working on 10 of the Scheme's 15 priority-1 sites from March to May 2024³⁸.

"We proved that there's a huge amount of archaeology in Elan Valley. We proved that there's a huge amount of unique archaeology. It's quite a special place and needs a certain element of a different approach to it, but demands, really demands the attention of more work. I've built up momentum training volunteers. We purchased equipment for excavation for the volunteers, made relationships with tenants to landowners to get access built up."

Member of the Elan Links team

Archaeology volunteers were very positive about their involvement in this project, regardless of whether they were commenting on communication, the training or fieldwork. Nevertheless, they recognised a series of challenges that the project faced:

- COVID-19 delayed the start of the project

³⁷ The Archaeology Data Service describes itself as 'The digital repository for archaeology and heritage – Supporting access, innovation, and research', <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>, accessed 16th February 2024.

³⁸ Timescape Archaeology CIC was incorporated on 9th March 2024.

-
- A project officer knowledgeable about archaeology was only appointed in mid-2022, i.e. late in the Scheme's lifetime
 - One of the main CPAT archaeologists working with trainees was involved in an accident, so a colleague had to take over his input
 - Many of the sites were remote, a particular challenge in the winter weather in which many of the digs took place
 - Work required SSSI consents, limiting the time of year at which digs could take place.

The wet weather appeared to be a factor limiting involvement of some of the archaeology trainees:

"The only thing I would say is that it was just a little bit disappointing to see so many volunteers going through the actual training and not then partaking in the actual site digs. [...] I don't know, but there was a few of the many, should I say, that did the digs?"

Archaeology volunteer

By contrast, the Engagement, Education and Events Officer was not disappointed at the levels of turnout to digs. He was aware that some training participants were involved with CPAT or Abbey Cwmhir Heritage Trust, so they would apply their knowledge and skills elsewhere.

A helpful overview of this and the next project can be found within a recorded presentation by the Engagement, Education and Events Officer at the CPAT Day School for 2022:

The Elan Links Landscape Partnership: Safeguarding Heritage

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcuFUYQkXUo&list=PLEUoSY55hrHeQ4Vmc2z8HfKO-Fa_i9fc&index=6

27 minutes 41 seconds

A final insight about the value of this project was articulated by a member of the archaeological trust:

"But getting people to look at that landscape and they say, 'Gosh, it's so beautiful. It's so natural.' It's not natural. The entire landscape is man made. And getting people to understand that nothing that they're looking at is natural. It's all because of human intervention."

Representative of CPAT

5.1.3 Summary of outputs

The LCAP listed detailed output targets which are summarised below.

Outputs	Comments
Heritage at Risk survey – total of 80 sites identified at risk	Target exceeded – 1,520 sites or complexes surveyed
15 ‘priority 1’ sites actioned, e.g. vegetation better managed, excavations, photographic recording of sites, etc.	5 sites ‘actioned’ by the end of 2023 Delivery of the remaining 10 sites was completed by Timescape Archaeology CIC by May 2024 (see 7.2)
15 volunteers engaged with built and ancient heritage	Overall number of volunteers was not recorded. The monitoring system identified 13 days of volunteering, with up to 10 volunteers per day (by the end of 2023, plus further volunteering in 2024) but with no indication whether this was the same 10 people for each day, or whether more than 10 people were involved in total. Qualitative findings suggested volunteer numbers were less than the 24 trained. On balance, it is likely the target was achieved.
Public participation at 3 excavation sites	
Public engage with geophysical surveys alongside professionals	

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

5.2 Increasing access to Elan’s archaeological and built heritage (project 5a)

5.2.1 Project aims

Much of Elan’s diverse heritage was not visible nor accessible to visitors. This project, led by the EVT, sought to enable safe public access to the half-built Dol y Mynach Dam in the Claerwen Valley, the Dambusters site at Nant y Gro, World War II pillboxes, a Roman Marching Camp and the Cwm Elan Mines.

5.2.2. Delivery and difference made

Additional funding was obtained to take forward this project from the Welsh Government Rural Community Development Fund’s Tourism Amenity Investment Support Scheme (TAIS). While this provided additional funding to the Elan Links Scheme, TAIS required delivery by 31st March 2019.

DCWW oversaw and funded the copywriting and digital format of all interpretation panels. The fabrication and installation of the panels was funded through TAIS. Panels included:

-
- The half-built Dol y Mynach Dam
 - Dol y Mynach bird hide
 - Dambusters and Nant y Gro Dam
 - Elan Valley and the world wars
 - World War II pillboxes
 - Cwm Elan Mines
 - Cwm Elan House and gardens.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) granted consent to carry out vegetation removal in the vicinity of the Nant y Gro Dam, within the Elenydd SSSI, Elan Valley Woodlands SAC and Elenydd–Mallaen SPA. Some vegetation clearance work had been carried out by Tir Coed on the pillboxes during 2017.

The following were completed by 31st March 2019:

- Dol y Mynach – improved path and gradient, although this remained above the disabled access ratio of 1:10 as NRW could not consent to track widening. A new gate and drainage had been installed and there was a new path to the bird hide and new interpretation.
- Nant y Gro – the smaller trees had been taken off to enable better views of the dam from the Elan Valley Trail. New interpretation panels had been installed on the trail and the site.
- Pillboxes – a new interpretation had been installed on the triptych. Vegetation had been cleared, along with a new path and steps installed by Tir Coed, opening up access to all three pillboxes. In the long term, these new paths will be maintained by the DCWW rangers.
- Cwm Elan Mines – an interpretation had been bought and was later located where the path to the mines leaves the Garreg Ddu roundabout route. New waymark discs directed visitors from the Garreg Ddu path towards the mines. This waymarking was consistent with that at Claerwen and Penbont.
- A Cwm Elan House interpretation panel had been purchased.

The majority of the project's anticipated works had been completed by the mid-term evaluation, leaving the Roman Marching Camp for 2022/23.

The relative inaccessibility and lack of obvious landmarks at ground level made the Roman Marching Camp a candidate for a short film using CGI to create interpretation. This was developed and made available on the Elan Valley website to help bring the timeline to life³⁹.

³⁹ Elan Valley Trust (2023) Timeline, <https://elanvalley.org.uk/heritage/history/timeline/>, accessed 17th February 2024.

Esgair Perfedd – Roman Marching Camp

<https://youtu.be/2dV8FYTPawU>

7 minutes 18 seconds

Similarly, this approach was applied to Cwm Elan Mines. Information about mining in the area was developed for the Elan Valley website⁴⁰. This also hosted the short film about Cwm Elan mines.

Cwm Elan Mine

<https://youtu.be/YvG22Fx0iW0>

4 minutes 2 seconds



Figure 5.3 – Access to Dol y Mynach bird hide before and after works

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q4, 2018)

5.2.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
Increased public access to and appreciation of 6 heritage sites in Elan	Target exceeded – access improved also for Dol y Mynach and Cwm Elan House
Six scheduled historic monuments will be accessible and interpreted: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nant y Gro Dam (1)	Target exceeded – as above

⁴⁰ Elan Valley Trust (2023) Mining, <https://elanvalley.org.uk/heritage/history/mining/>, accessed 18th February 2024.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pill Boxes (3) • Roman Camp (1) • Cwm Elan Mines (1) 	
Visitors will have broadened their experience of and, potentially, their range of travel in Elan	Can infer from visits to online interpretation that visitors had broadened their experience. Improved physical access potentially improved visitor range of travel
Increased number of visitors visiting the sites	Poor indicator of progress as no means of measuring at these unmanned sites. Virtual interpretation was new and as such represented new visitors. From this, probability of increased numbers of visitors inferred

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

5.3 The Engineer's House (project 5b)

5.3.1 Project aims

This project, led by DCWW, aimed to renovate the Dam Engineer's house at Penygarrreg to become a fit-for-purpose space to accommodate artists during their Elan Links residencies and act as accommodation for educational groups and others.

5.3.2 Delivery and difference made

The condition of the Engineer's House had deteriorated further between the development and delivery phases of the project. Repeated break-ins and exposure to the elements had contributed to this.

Costs to complete the work were secured from DCWW's framework contractors. However, the price exceeded the budget by c.£200,000. A procurement exercise was undertaken with local contractors, but this did not yield a materially cheaper option.

The mid-term evaluation suggested the project had stalled and recommended swift decision-making by the Partnership Board to determine whether this restoration was possible within the options available to Elan Links.

Restoration of the Engineer's House was included as a project within the Mid Wales Growth Deal. This agreement was signed by Welsh Government, UK Government, and Ceredigion and Powys County Councils. The final Deal Agreement included projects for a strengthened tourism offer put forward by DCWW in the Elan Valley and further afield⁴¹.

⁴¹ Growing Mid Wales (2022) 'Mid Wales Growth Deal' – Final Deal Agreement, p21, <https://www.growingmid.wales/MidWalesGrowthDeal> , accessed 17th February 2024.

5.3.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
One historically important building restored	This restoration project was ultimately removed from the Scheme.
Accommodation for Artists in Residence project created	Accommodation provided through another site owned by DCWW
Accommodation for the Experience Elan Project created	Accommodation provided through Cwm Clyd Farmstead project
From year 3 onwards, 2 Engineer's House open days per year	This restoration project was ultimately removed from the Scheme.
A significant number of in-kind bed nights generated once the building is complete	Provision through alternative Scheme project (Cwm Clyd)

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

5.4 Cwm Clyd Farmstead (project 5c)

5.4.1 Project aims

This project, led by the EVT, sought to renovate a redundant 18th-century farmstead in the Claerwen Valley. Cwm Clyd was a collection of traditional stone buildings, including a longhouse, barn and cart shed. A sustainable future was envisaged through the farmstead offering accommodation suitable for larger parties wanting to stay and experience at first-hand the beauty and wildness of Elan.

5.4.2 Delivery and difference made

Initial progress was slow but a land contamination survey, heritage survey, photographic record and bat licence had been secured by mid-2019. Unfortunately, an initial attempt to secure a building contractor at that time resulted in tender responses significantly in excess of budget. Nonetheless, a reworking of the scope and re-tender exercise was successful to the extent that work on site had commenced by the time of the mid-term evaluation, although the work remained above the original budget.

The site groundworks were completed in 2020. COVID-19 restrictions delayed the start of the work by the main contractors until February 2021, but the site was completed in spring 2022.



Figure 5.4 – Cwm Clyd: (left) build work in progress and (right) the completed renovation

Sources: Quarterly monitoring report (Q2, 2021) and Elan Valley website – <https://elanvalley.org.uk/stay/cwm-clyd-bunkhouse>

The result was a suite of three buildings, collectively known as Cwm Clyd Bunkhouse, which together could accommodate up to 21 people.



Figure 5.5 – (left) Kitchen / dining room and (right) bunkhouse

Source: Elan Valley website – <https://elanvalley.org.uk/stay/cwm-clyd-bunkhouse>

While the refurbishment was undertaken in line with plans, subsequent attempts to use the facilities for their intended purpose of retreats (see 6.9) identified a variety of design flaws:

“[...] because there’s no particular classroom, there’s no relaxation room, there’s just a shared kitchen. The accessible room isn’t great, and there’s no bedroom with the accessible room for a carer. The shared toilet facilities with two toilets and two showers in one room don’t particularly work because we can’t have

school groups and religious groups and various people won't come because of the shared facilities."

Member of the Elan Links team

As a consequence of the learning above, EVT was investing in a feasibility study into how an associated bungalow on the site could be renovated and adjustments made to Cwm Clyd to make the whole complex more fit for purpose⁴².

Nevertheless, EVT viewed the work carried out through Elan Links as successful:

"Cwm Clyd. So that was a success. That was something the Trust was maintaining, but not utilising. Okay, so it's nice to see that. It's nice to see it being used."

Representative of EVT

5.4.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
One historically important farmstead safeguarded and restored	
Accommodation for the Experience Elan Retreat Project created	
A significant number of in-kind bed nights generated once the building is complete	Bed nights provided. The extent to which these could be viewed as significant was more debatable. However, COVID-19 affected this and was outside the control of the Elan Links team
Accommodation provision to the wider public to allow greater access to Elan's heritage	
From year 2 onwards, 2 Cwm Clyd open days per year	2 open days held in 2023

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

5.5 Elan Links: people to collections (project 6)

5.5.1 Project aims

The aim of this project, led by the EVT in collaboration with CARAD, was to create and populate an accessible online collections archive for public use. It sought to draw on the archives of CARAD, the EVT and DCWW. The existing collections at Rhayader Museum and Gallery were to be added, along with collected and archived additional

⁴² The tender request for a feasibility study was available on Sell2Wales on 18th April 2024 at https://www.sell2wales.gov.wales/search/show/search_view.aspx?ID=APR475025, accessed 3rd May 2024.

material, such as documents, memories, pictures and artefacts to ensure that they were not lost.

5.5.2 Delivery and difference made

A Cultural Heritage Officer was in post by July 2018. An initial attempt to secure a freelance archivist was unsuccessful but a salaried archivist was in place by February 2019.

By the first quarter of 2019, monthly meetings of a local history group (LHG) regularly drew 20 attendees. This was established following an Elan history day in November 2018. A sub-group was working on a town trail for Rhayader (featuring buildings particularly linked to the dam-building project), while another volunteer began working on a brief history of Rhayader, curating content from a local history website⁴³. Six oral history volunteers had been trained by the Oral History Society and initial oral histories were captured. Seven volunteers had been trained in use of the MODES collections management software and two had begun to digitise and catalogue the collection.

By the time of the mid-term evaluation a year later, the oral history target for year two had been achieved and 24% of the first-year target had been recovered in line with a plan to deliver a quarter of the undelivered first-year recording target in each of the subsequent four years. This was despite only small numbers of additional volunteers joining the oral history team. A collaboration with the RSPB led to stories of the woodland being collected. This fed into the Woodland Management Plan. A CARAD collaboration with the Young Farmers' Club led to the *A Year on the Farm* project, where images, recordings and stories were captured by around 40 young farmers.

Attendance at the local history group had fallen during 2019 to around five or six regular attendees. Nonetheless, this continued to provide a key source of oral history opportunities and a route to volunteer recruitment. Some people enjoyed informal gatherings to discuss local history, while others preferred formal speakers. Inevitably, some people were only able to attend on an occasional basis due to other commitments.

Unfortunately, the pandemic had a significant effect on this group:

"We were doing well with the local history group. Then COVID wiped this out. There needs to be someone to facilitate for them."

Member of the Elan Links team

⁴³ Historical Rhayader and Surrounding Area had 1,883 followers when it was accessed on 10th June 2020 at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/590505444386356/>. This had grown to 3,380 followers by 21st February 2024. There was significant engagement with the site, with posts during typically attracting 40–80 likes and some attracting as many as 120–200 likes.

Engagement with the local population continued to draw 25–35 people to events ranging from the annual local history day to a moon landing exhibition⁴⁴. An initial event held in Birmingham in the first year of the project had not led to further events there.

Archiving had progressed against an agreed strategy and plan. Unfortunately, the archivist was effectively only in post for seven months during 2019 before they left. The post had not been filled by the time of the mid-term evaluation in summer 2020. A retired archivist was providing some guidance for the Cultural Heritage Officer to support volunteers where possible.

Case study 5.1 – The local history volunteer

Eira returned to Rhayader around the start of the Elan Links scheme after many years living elsewhere.

“We formed this little group, just what I wanted to be a part of. It all started when they had some sort of display up – you know, pictures, maps etc. And I went along to the initial meeting. From there a group formed and people put their names on a sheet to sign up. And we started meeting basically to share things, bringing art and photograph albums etc. And then we got into splinter groups, one of which was the oral history.”

Eira described how the group received training and a talk from a member of staff at Cardiff University and subsequently additional training. A local nature society wanted someone to speak to one of the long-time farmers in the area, so she offered to do that. She also chatted with a local celebrity who had worked in the water works, again with prescribed questions. However, most of the oral histories she had collected were more informal. One lady interviewed was an evacuee; another was a local farmer turned post-office worker.

“I’m happy to go and talk to people but with anything technical, I might need a right-hand person. Transcribing is a bit of a labour of love really, I’m not a computer person. But fortunately, I’ve been doing it in the same office as [the Cultural Heritage Officer].”

Eira went on to suggest the Cultural Heritage Officer had been very supportive, particularly in providing technical help.

“I’ve always loved this area, being part of this project has just made it a little better.”

Despite the inevitable delays caused by COVID-19, the project progressed through 2021/22. A new archivist started in 2021. Some significant achievements included the digitisation of 13 large maps from the Elan Links archive by the National Library of Wales, the preparation of an archive legacy document and the transfer of the oral

⁴⁴ 25 to 30 attendees was good, given the context: The population of Rhayader ward (including Elan) was 2,088 according to 2011 census data at <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=W05000342>, accessed 21st February 2024.

history collection onto 31 archival CDs by autumn 2022, increasing to 35 CDs by the end of 2023. Throughout the period, the project continued to record and transcribe oral histories. Three core volunteers pushed ahead with this work. Typically, this proceeded at the rate of approximately 15 recordings per quarter (outside the period of the pandemic). Attendance at events, such as the Three Arches Memory Lane Club, was used to identify new avenues for oral history content.

A combination of the impact of the pandemic and the problems of recruiting and retaining archivists led to a renegotiation of the output targets for this project in 2021. It was agreed that 250 oral history recordings would be of little use unless they were of good quality, properly transcribed and catalogued, with a plan to make use of them. The oral history output target was halved to 125. Similarly, training in the use of MODES software had its target lowered from 18 to 10 people.

The Cultural Heritage Officer resigned in March 2022. Nevertheless, this person continued to contribute as a volunteer for one day per week and to manage the oral history aspect of the project. Consequently, the post was not replaced like-for-like. The archivist left in April 2023. Fortunately, one of the archive volunteers was qualified to fill the role and was recruited to the post in May 2023. They stayed until the end of the delivery phase in December 2023.

Work continued throughout 2023, by the end of which all EVT historical documents had been catalogued and properly archived. CARAD records had also been merged into the database. Manorial records were digitised and were being added to the Manorial Documents Register at the National Archives, Kew. In total, some 5,500 items had been catalogued in the database and 250 copyright-free items had been uploaded to the People's Collection Wales⁴⁵. Five regular volunteers worked with the archivist to achieve this. Some were very experienced – for example, one volunteer had studied medieval history and worked on transcribing manorial records extending back to 1703.

The scale of remaining work was larger than anticipated when the final archivist took over:

“When I was trying to figure out numbers for a digitization thing to send off, I unrolled some of these really big masonry progress sections. And it turns out, they’re not just one roll, they’re lots of items kind of rolled into one thing. So, we ended up with kind of 400 to 500 extra items that we didn’t think we initially had. And they were all kind of unique.”

Member of the Elan Links team

⁴⁵ Access to this database and further information about this initiative was available at <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/>, accessed 22nd February 2024.

There was evidence that the newly catalogued archive materials were being used. Three Artists in Residence referred to the historical records to inform their work. Some archive materials, including some historic rain gauges, were taken to Birmingham for use in one of the events at Midlands Arts Centre (see [6.10](#)).

An archive open day in June 2023 was reported by the archivist as “*well attended*”:

“I had stuff out in the meeting room downstairs and stuff in my office, and there was information next to each thing. And I was talking to people about what I kind of do and that kind of thing.”

Archivist

The Town Trail group used the records as part of their research. Archive material included a book of etchings from the lead engineer of the dam construction, Eustace Tickell, who was moved to capture the Valley before it was flooded. Moreover, archive material continued to provide social media content throughout the lifetime of the Scheme, often under the hashtag #ThrowbackThursday.

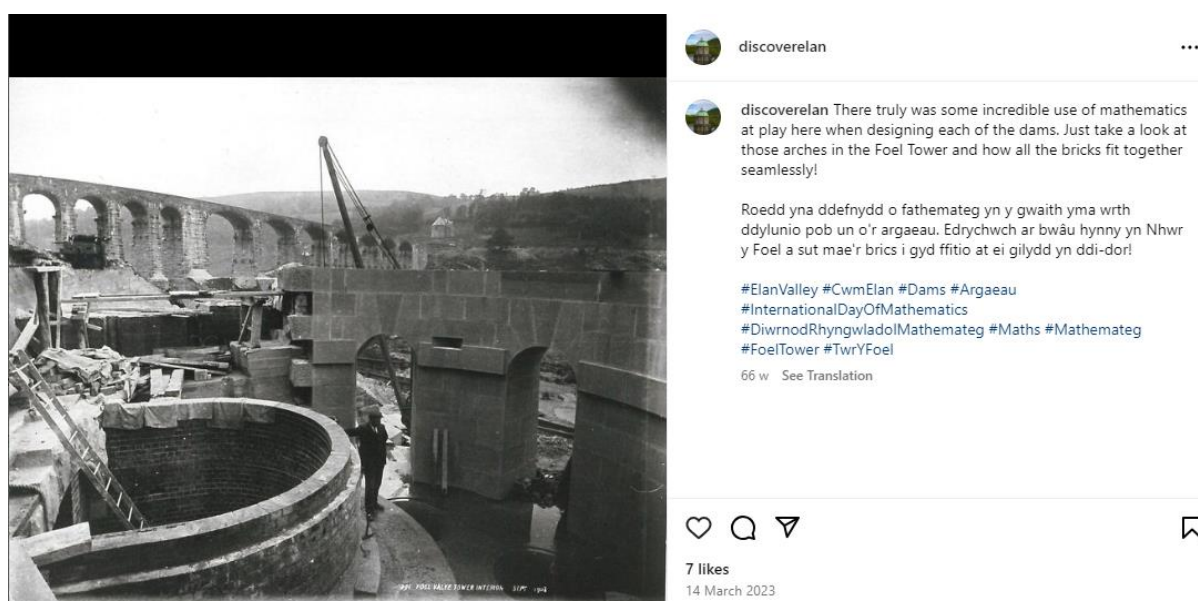


Figure 5.6 – The intricacies of dam building

Source: @Discoverelan Instagram, 14th March 2023

Progress was made through most of the project, excluding the pandemic period, on annual sharing history events. Most recently, this included an exhibition on Waun Capel Park as part of an event organised by Radnorshire Wildlife Trust.

Towards the end of 2023, the database was exported to a Google Sheet, making it more readily searchable by members of the public as a legacy resource.

“At the beginning of the project, it [the Elan archive] was basically a load of cardboard boxes in a room. [...] Things are now installed in proper archive safe materials.”

Member of the Elan Links team

The archivist reflected at the end of the project:

“I think what we’ve got is a really good basis for a really exceptional archive. I think that the material itself is like, worth its weight in gold in terms of historical research and the kind of things you could do with that. In terms of, not only local history, but in terms of more national history.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Similarly, a Scheme Partner reflected on the learning from the archiving project:

“We’ve delivered what we wanted to do [...] by employing somebody who’s an archivist, who knows what they’re talking about and knows these documents’ value [...] And then you think, well, there’s interest from our local community in looking at some of this stuff. So, could we actually display it? Does it fit better into a little local museum or something like that? So, there’s another piece of work to be done.”

Partner representative

5.5.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
All material will be assessed, documented and stored (or appropriate storage advised on) by the end of the project	Achieved
50 oral histories per year acquired over the course of the project	119 oral histories of the revised target of 125 recorded in December 2023, with volunteers continuing this work into 2024
10 people actively gathering stories of the area	Achieved
20 people trained in Oral History practice	6 people trained

1 sharing history day per year – Elan / Rhayader	Target achieved (except in 2020 due to pandemic restrictions)
2 sharing history days – Birmingham (Frankly and Cannon Hill Park)	Target achieved – venues were Midlands Arts Centre (Cannon Hill Park) and Highbury Hall
A minimum of 10% of all digitised material to be uploaded to People’s Collection Wales	All digitised materials (as opposed to catalogue records) were uploaded to People’s Collection Wales. Manorial records were sent to the National Archives at Kew
All Contemporary Collections data uploaded to MODES	A plan was in place to archive all Elan Links data on completion of the Scheme
Online archive created to enable access to Contemporary Collections via online archive	The catalogue created on MODES will be available as a downloadable, searchable CSV file (readable in Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel) from the Elan Links website
10 people formally trained in the use of MODES	7 volunteers and 3 archivists trained (target reduced from 18 to 10 in 2021)
10 people will work with the digital team to devise a series of four online exhibitions	No evidence suggesting any progress towards these outputs
10 people will use the Elan Links collections to raise the profile of the project and the participating partner organisations via production of educational documents, films and articles	Evidence insufficient to quantify progress exactly. Evaluator aware of 3 artists, 3 members of Elan Links staff and “the town trail group” using the collections

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6. Increasing benefits for people from Elan – Inspiring and engaging people

6.1 Interpreting Elan (project 7a)

6.1.1 Project aims

This project aimed to benefit residents and visitors to Elan through improved interpretation of the area. The project was led by the EVT in collaboration with CARAD and DCWW.

6.1.2 Delivery and difference made

A wide range of exhibitions were held at CARAD and the DCWW Visitor Centre in the early years of the Scheme. Subjects ranged from the Uplands Landscape to a Human Heritage theme linked to the work of Artists in Residence.

Enabling the local community to understand their environment better took place through attendance at events such as the Elan Valley Show and Rhayader Carnival, where quizzes and the *125 reasons why the Elan Valley is special* publication stimulated engagement. The latter publication was similarly used at an early engagement event in Birmingham.

An interactive, augmented-reality sandpit was purchased by the project and used to engage people, particularly children, in understanding landscape. CARAD estimated that 75% of the 292 visitors to their Dragon Festival in 2019 used the interactive exhibit. However, plans to take this exhibit into schools locally and in Birmingham had to be reconsidered as it proved less portable than originally assumed.

This project was significantly impacted by the pandemic, resulting in no exhibitions for the period from March 2020 and through the whole of 2021. A combination of other factors also hindered progress of exhibitions, not least continued turnover of Project Officer post holders, a reduction in space for exhibitions at the DCWW Visitor Centre and a major transformation of Rhayader Museum into Timescape Rhayader by CARAD.

The appointment of the two Engagement, Education and Events Officers (for the Arts and Archaeology & History respectively) in June 2022 injected fresh impetus to the project.

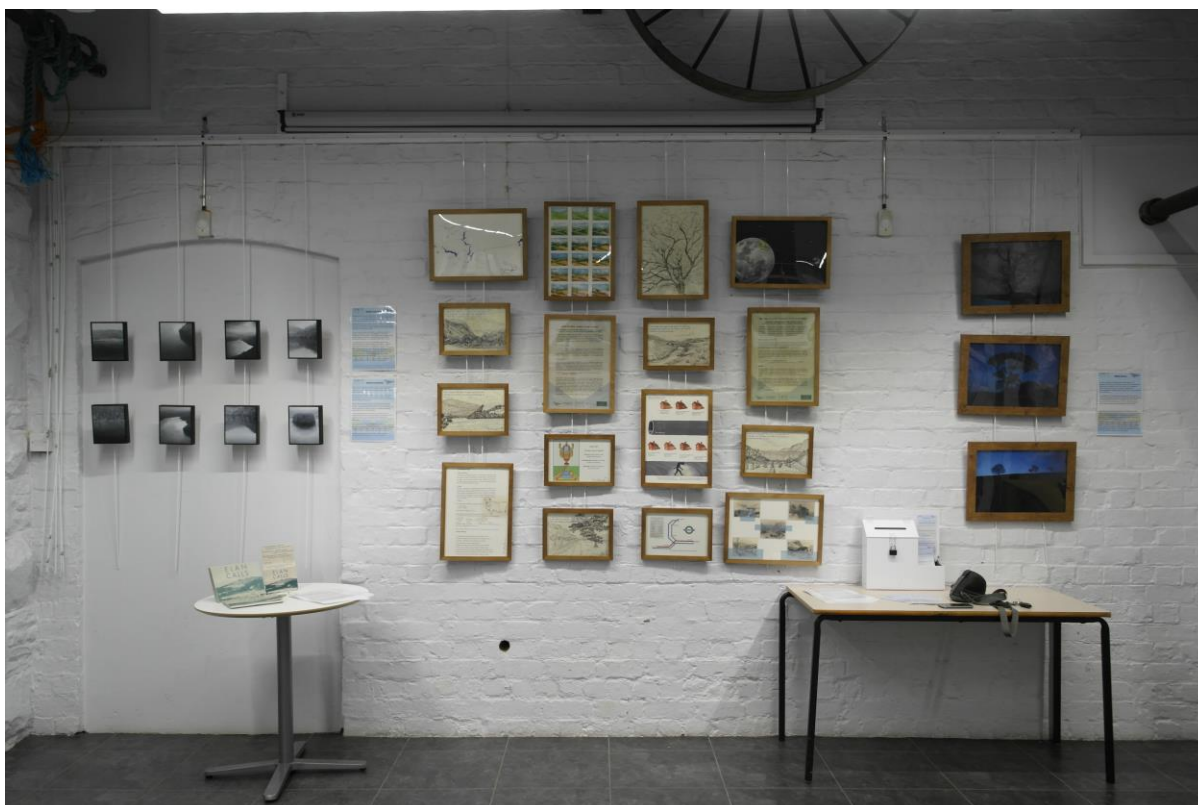


Figure 6.1 – First iteration of an exhibition at the Dŵr Cymru Visitor Centre of the works of three Artists in Residence: Daniel Crawshaw, Marcelo Sánchez-Camus and Zillah Bowes

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q1 2020)

Two major exhibitions of the work of the Artists in Residence (see 6.3 and 6.10) were held in 2023. The first, the Watershed exhibition, was a group exhibition exploring the history, landscape and culture of the Elan Valley. This was held at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) between 28th June and 5th November 2023 and over 314,000 people were believed to have visited it. The exhibition then moved online, available at <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=PZQMgPx9prZ>⁴⁶.

The Watershed experience also came to Rhayader and the Elan Valley on 22nd September 2023 when several of the Artists in Residence collaborated on a live performance hosted by CARAD around the Valley. A film capturing a summary of the of the performances was created.

Watershed event at Elan & Rhayader, 22nd September 2023 – Performances

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pu-0AFa0GdU>

42 minutes 20 seconds

“When we had the full event it was, I think, very successful. It brought a lot of people together. It kind of drew all the strands of the residencies together and it

⁴⁶ Accessed 23rd February 2024.

kind of gave us a platform to be able to talk about arts in general in the area because there have been ongoing massive cuts in the area. And I was able to say, you know, that the effect of the residencies in mid Wales has been on the art scene and on individual artists has been quite considerable.”

Scheme Partner

A third exhibition was held in 2023 between 30th November and 8th December at the Elan Valley Visitor Centre. Photography by young people with additional learning needs from Ysgol Calon Cymru was showcased.

Education formed a part of this project too. A major piece of work was to develop educational resources for years 6 and 7 which correlated with Welsh and English curricula. None of the project officers had experience of developing curriculum-based materials, so Think, Learn, Challenge! were contracted to deliver the resources by summer 2023. This yielded a cross-curricular resource themed around a series of activities:

- How can we make a walk interesting?
- What can we find out about water in our homes?
- Where does my water come from and where does it go?
- Why is access to clean water important?
- How do we create reservoirs?
- Why is it important not to waste water?
- How do we have an effect on our environment?
- How might climate change affect the Elan Valley?
- Why do we build dams?
- How can we celebrate our environment through art?

By the end of 2023, the Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Arts) had contacted 42 schools in Powys and 344 schools in Birmingham to promote the resources. At that stage, two schools had indicated they would make use of the materials. Social media was also used to reach out to a wider audience, including home school educators. The Resource Pack was available for download from <https://elanvalley.org.uk/visit/education-outreach/>⁴⁷. In addition to these resources, a water cube activity was developed for use in schools.

Some members of the Scheme team were disappointed that delivery took place so late in the Scheme lifetime.

“I think that it was a bit of a challenge, it coming so late on in the project. And I think we could have done a lot more. We could have done a lot more with it if that had been developed earlier on in the project, because as it is, we kind of

⁴⁷ Accessed 23rd February 2024.

only had it finalized in September [2023], so we've only been able to promote it in the last three, four months of the project."

Member of the Elan Links team

The consultants noted another barrier to take-up:

"The other issue is where they are on the website. You can find them, but at the bottom of the page, even though they're free. And I think if I was an organisation who had some free educational materials, I'd make sure that was highlighted on my front page, whereas, yeah, they're hidden."

Educational consultant

Nevertheless, there was a general feeling within the team that the resources were good and will prove beneficial.

"[The educational resources were] a good legacy that would just run and run, really, as long as there's somebody within Elan Trust to keep highlighting and showcasing the awareness that we do have these resources, that they are there and they are available and they are free."

Member of the Elan Links team

Finally, it had been a long-held aspiration of the Elan Links team to develop children's backpacks full of activities such as quizzes, trails and spotters' guides. It had been anticipated that these could be borrowed by families from the DCWW Visitor Centre. A set of backpacks was produced to trial with families, but unfortunately DCWW Rangers at the Visitor Centre were not able to find time to promote the offer to visitors.

Nevertheless, explorer packs were developed for young people with Special Educational Needs and made available to CARAD to support their Timescape Rhayader offer. Similarly, the children's sand table (discovery table) noted earlier was being placed at Timescape Rhayader, as was a touchscreen display to showcase digital content generated by Elan Links.

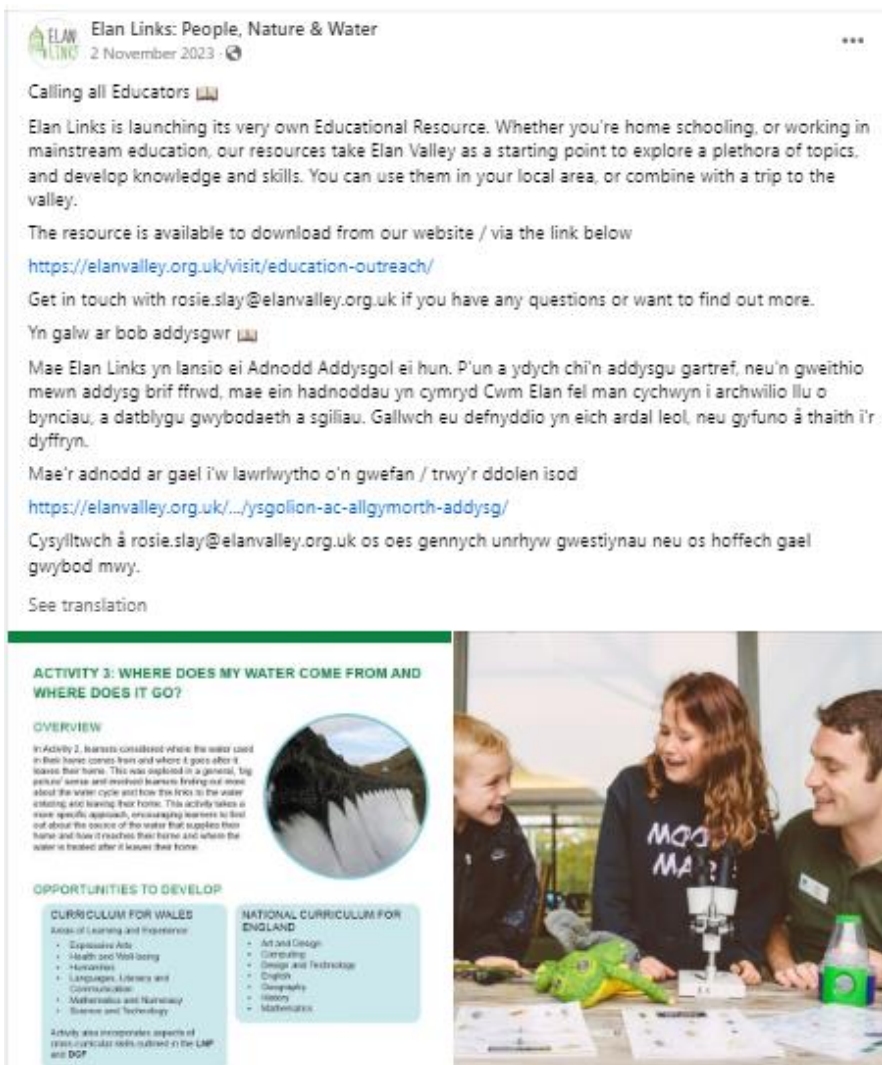


Figure 6.2 – Promotion of the Elan Links Educational Resource Pack

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/ElanLinks>, 2nd November 2023

6.1.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
New interpretation equipment	
10 Elan Links specific exhibitions (2 per year) at the Visitor Centre and at CARAD	Exhibitions were held outside the years of the pandemic
Children's discovery table	
Family explorer backpacks	Backpacks for children with Specific Educational Needs were produced and sited at Timescape Rhayader
All Elan Links projects interpreted and promoted through a number of platforms as detailed in the Interpretation Strategy	

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.2 Elan interactive (project 7b)

6.2.1 Project aims

This project, led by the EVT in collaboration with DCWW, focussed on the digital layer of the Scheme's interpretation work. This required development of enhanced heritage and Elan Links content on the Elan Valley website and use of social media. The project also sought to develop an app to enable visitors to learn more about Elan and enhance their enjoyment of the area.

6.2.2 Delivery and difference made

The mid-term evaluation reported that website and social media development had progressed throughout the first half of the project. By 2023, a new website was in place, populated with significant volumes of content created by the Scheme's projects.

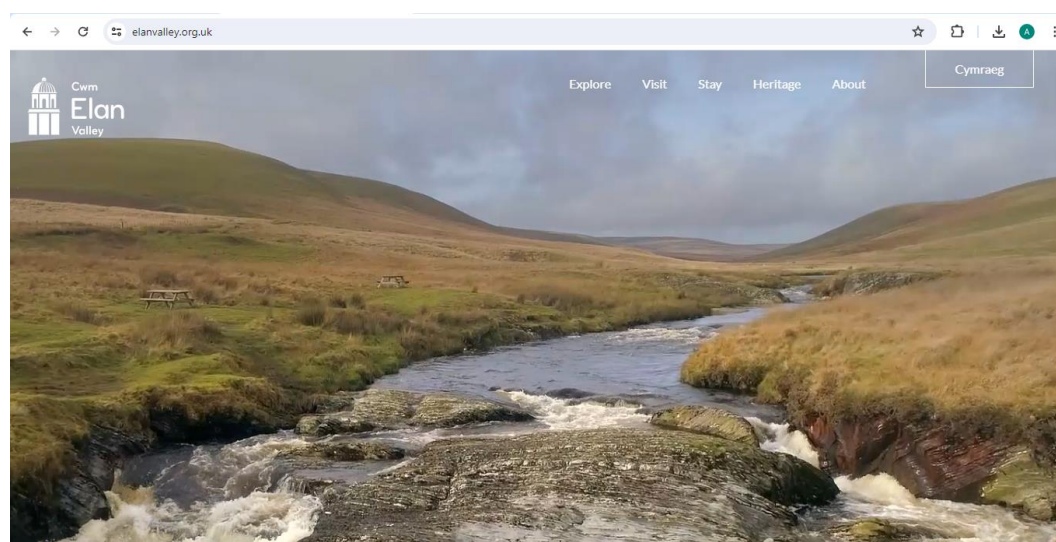


Figure 6.3 – Image from Elan Valley homepage

Source: Elan Valley website – <https://elanvalley.org.uk/>

Elan Links events and updates were included in the monthly edition of the Elan Valley newsletter. Initially, Elan Links had its own social media accounts and built a following month on month. It used features such as #ThrowbackThursday to post weekly images of memorabilia or anecdotes to attract attention. Fun activities, such as 'Where is Elan?' (a toy sheep) extended people's knowledge of the Elan Valley.

However, by October 2019, the Elan Links team had been given access to DCWW's main Elan Valley social media accounts and consequently significantly extended their reach. Levels of engagement with posts on the @Elan_Valley site were much higher than on the @ElanLinks site, as might be expected from the comparative numbers of followers, summarised in table 6.1. While the team continued to post to both accounts on Facebook and Instagram, the relative lack of follower growth and engagement from the ElanLinks X (Twitter) account led to the discontinuation of posts on this site from April 2022.

Table 6.1 – Snapshot of direct social media reach of Elan Links and DCWW sites on 10th June 2020 (mid-term) and 23rd February 2024 (final evaluation)

Platform	Followers of @ElanLinks		Followers of @Elan_Valley	
	10/06/20	23/02/24	10/06/20	23/02/24
X (Twitter)	231	274	3,637	4,071
Facebook	897	~2,000	13,019	~21,000
Instagram	501	945	2,454	5,907

Growth trends in @ElanLinks social media channels can be seen in table 6.2. These displayed notable growth during the pandemic period, with appreciable growth continuing on Facebook, with its multi-generational demographic, and on Instagram, with its younger demographic and use by those favouring images over text.

Table 6.2 – Snapshot of direct social media reach of Elan Links (@ElanLinks) sites over three years (percentage growth relative to prior period)

Platform	Followers			
	June 2020	June 2021	Sept 2022	Feb 2024
X (Twitter)	231	243 (+5%)	263 (+8%)	274 (+4%)
Facebook	897	1,336 (+49%)	1,752 (+31%)	2,000 (+14%)
Instagram	501	694 (+39%)	780 (+12%)	945 (+21%)



Figure 6.4 – Example post promoting social heritage

Source: @elanvalley Instagram, 28th December 2023

Over time, social media management became better planned and organised as DCWW, EVT and the Elan Links team all sought space for their posts. Members of the Elan Links team reflected that it proved helpful to have regular slots for posting content. For example, *plant of the month* was a good way of promoting elements of the natural heritage work of the Scheme.

The Elan Links social platforms continued to build followers in parallel with the DCWW social media. These were rebranded to Discover Elan from January 2024 and will continue with the support of EVT as a legacy of the Scheme.

Despite these efforts to coordinate social media, a sense persisted throughout the lifetime of the Scheme that a central marketing function was missing. Indeed, this had formed one of the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation⁴⁸.

“There definitely wasn’t an overall strategy for marketing that I could see. It was very located in each different small department. There didn’t seem to be an overview and communication and obviously, you know, we were advertising all our activities just from our point of view.”

Partner representative

Early attempts to commission an Elan app stalled when it became clear that the specification may have been too ambitious in its scope. The mid-term evaluation noted a lack of expertise in app commissioning within the delivery team. Greater focus was brought to the project in 2021. Additional funding of £54,900 was leveraged into the development through Arwain, the Powys LEADER Programme supported by the EU and Welsh Government. As a result, the app was developed as Elan’s virtual eco museum during 2022 and launched in October of that year. It could be accessed at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/explore/elan-valley-explorer-app/>⁴⁹.

Development of the app was supported by 25 volunteers who trialled different aspects, including:

- 10 trails, including an audio trail that could be followed by car or on foot, four trails suitable for wheelchair users and three trails suitable for cyclists
- stories about Elan in three themes: Epic Engineering, Wildlife Retreat and Elan Life. These themes encompassed Elan Links’ projects, for example Wildlife Retreat broke down into Claerwen Farm, Claerwen Nature Reserve, Cnwch Wood trail, Cwmduddwr Common, Upland Heathland Areas, Rhos Pasture and Rare Upland Birds. Additional content for this theme was Dark Skies and RSPB Carngafallt

⁴⁸ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) ‘Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme’. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p80.

⁴⁹ Accessed 24th February 2024.

- an 'I spy' game aimed at children.

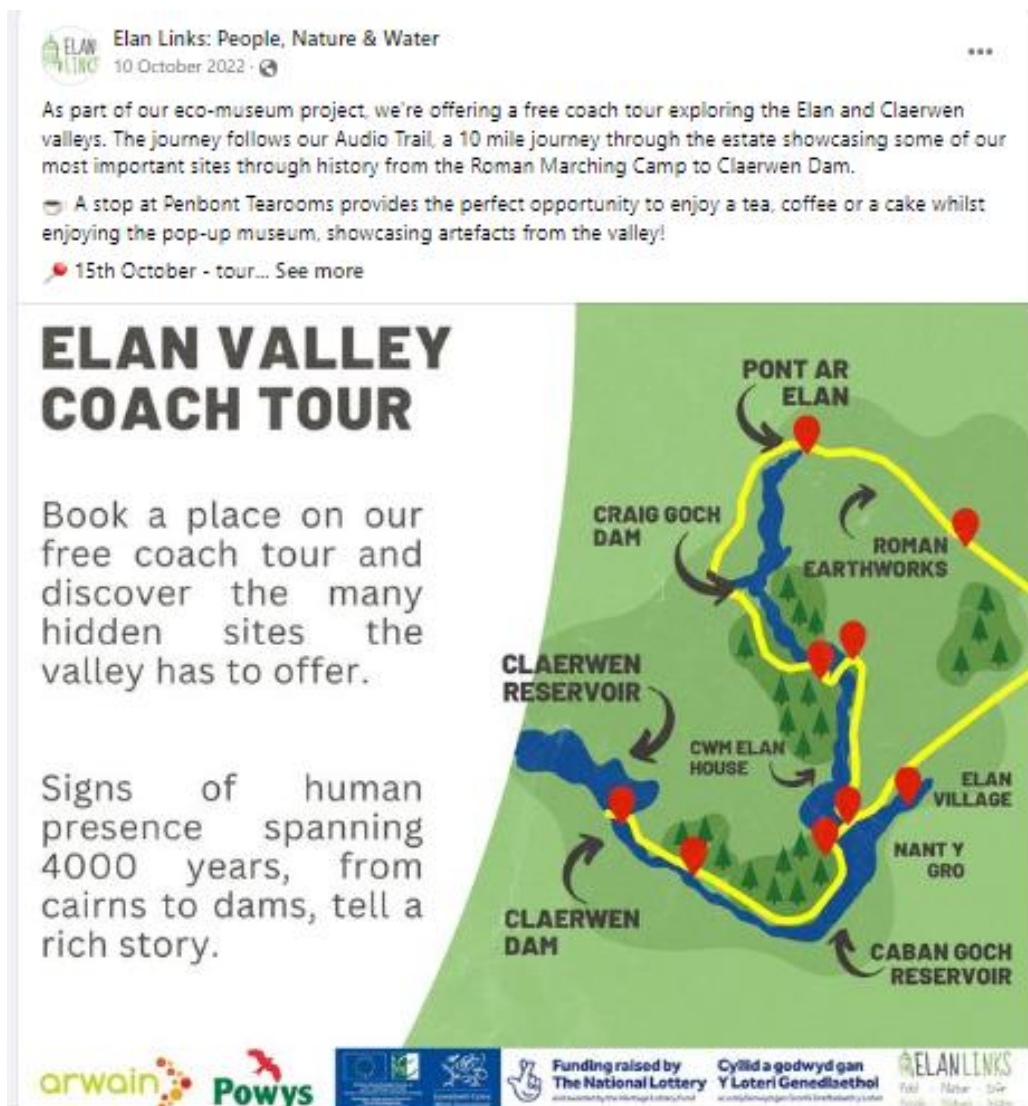


Figure 6.5 – Part of the social media campaign around the app launch

Source: Facebook.com/ElanLinks, 10th October 2022

A helpful case study about the app development was produced by the Elan Links Project Manager and can be found at <https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/%20%09/developing-elans-digital-platforms-elan-virtual-eco-museum>⁵⁰.

An interest of the Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Archaeology & History) enabled development of three bespoke Minecraft games for Elan Links in 2022. These were used at education and outreach events.

⁵⁰ Accessed 24th February 2024.



Figure 6.6 – Caban Coch Dam rendered in Minecraft for outreach events

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q3, 2022)



Figure 6.7 – (left) Minecraft workshop promotion and (right) 13 participants

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q1, 2023)

"I produced a Minecraft map of the Valley pre-reservoir to scale. And I did half term Elancraft workshops in the visitor centre, hosting about 15 or 16 kids at a time. And they'd build the dams in Minecraft, and the Visitor Centre, and then we'd flood the valleys. I did another one where we rebuilt Cwm Elan lead mine and also the Roman marching camp. We delivered that a couple of days in Birmingham at Midlands Arts Centre as outreach there. Worked really well. And just a couple of weeks ago we got into a school and spent an afternoon with 32 really excited kids."

Member of the Elan Links team

The Engagement, Education and Events Officer reflected that all children in Powys had educational Minecraft accounts in primary schools, so the Minecraft maps produced of Elan would be available as a legacy of the Scheme.

6.2.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
Enhanced web provision for Elan, its heritage and the Elan Links project on the visit Elan website	
1 multi functioning app	
At least 15,000 people using the mobile app by the end of the project, but more sophisticated output to be discussed during the development phase	286 downloads of the app noted in the monitoring system for 2023

In-app capability of measuring interaction and options for users to interact and post 'Their Elan' experience will also be measured	An 'I spy' game allowed interaction, but there was no functionality enabling users to post about their Elan experience
At least 60 Love Elan e-news bulletins	The Scheme anticipated monthly e-newsletters. Although these were produced in the initial years of the Scheme, the pandemic disrupted this pattern, leading to a notable gap from August 2020 to May 2023
At least 60 social media items posted on the Elan Links Facebook page	
At least 5 (1 per year) larger scale themes social media campaigns	
50 sessions of the volunteer film and media group	12 sessions noted in the monitoring reports, but the group lost impetus at the time of the pandemic

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.3 Artist residencies (project 7c)

6.3.1 Project aims

It was envisaged that ten artists would experience retreats in Elan over the lifetime of the Scheme. Four Creative Wales Fellows would live on site for longer periods. The experiences were expected to inspire the artists, who would in turn inspire local artists and visitors through arts-based activities, walks and exhibitions. DCWW led this project.

6.3.2 Delivery and difference made

"To rephrase the words of Tim Ingold: as we grew in Elan Valley, Elan Valley also grew in us."

Conclusion of the end of residency report by T.S. Anna and Adri Schokker

A series of eleven Artists in Residence engaged through the project, although the pandemic severely impacted the programme:

- Zillah Bowes (August–September 2018) was a poet and film maker who explored how darkness affects people. She used the Dark Sky Park status as a backdrop. An insight into how the residency influenced Zillah can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/zillah-bowes/>
- Marcello Sánchez-Camus (September–December 2018) was a social artist who built relationships with local people to inform his art and produce an alternative walking guide. An insight into how the residency influenced

Marcello can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/r-m-sanchez-camus/>

- Daniel Crawshaw (January–May 2019) was a landscape painter focussed on remote places. He worked with school children and other artists, the latter through CARAD. An insight into his experience and the how the residency influenced him can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/daniel-crawshaw/>.
- T.S. Anna & Adri Schokker (September–December 2019) used scanning technology to create art. An insight into their experience can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/t-s-anna-adri-schokker/>.
- Antony Lyons (January–July 2020) drew on his background in environmental science to use the media of film, photography and soundscapes. While at Elan he became fascinated by mosses and lichens of the Elan Valley. He also developed significant relationships with upland farmers of the Valley. This residency was interrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown and completed in the second half of 2021. Insights into how the residency influenced Antony can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/antony-lyons/>.
- Kate Green (August–December 2020) sought to stimulate creative discussions around the term ‘Watershed’. Again, this residency was completed in the second half of 2021. Insights into Kate’s approach and how the residency influenced her can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/kate-green/>.
- Alis Oldfield (January–June 2021) brought an interest in networks both digital and cultural, infrastructural and metaphorical. Insights into how the residency influenced Alis can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/alis-oldfield/>.
- Isa Suarez (January–June 2022), a composer and performer. Insights into Isa’s residency can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/isa-suarez/>.
- Alice Briggs (July 2022–February 2023), whose creative practice was inspired by communities, sites, place making, and the landscapes of Mid Wales where she lived. Her art tended to use materials found in these landscapes. An insight into the influence of this landscape during her residency can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/alice-briggs/>.

-
- Rowena Harris (March–June 2023) was a visual artist who set out to explore the water and energy management systems of Elan Valley in relation to life-altering chronic fatigue. The residency was split between Elan and MAC, Birmingham. This led to a moving image work displayed at the Watershed exhibition and a bilingual, fatigue-accessible audio trail. Insights into the residency can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/rowena-harris/>.

“We were all very happy, like here at MAC, with how the residency went. It really suited the organisation, the way how we work, because we usually don’t actually have residents. [...] At MAC, actually, we are proud from showing artists that are from disadvantaged backgrounds. That includes also disabled artists. So, the artist that we chose, Rowena, is an artist with a disability. And it was important for me that we chose an artist who fits in with those programming priorities.”

Representative of Midland Arts Centre



Figure 6.8 – A trial of an audio walk developed by Rowena Harris

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q2, 2023)

- Gweni Llwyd (September–November 2023) – typically creating installations, Gweni split her residency between Elan and Heatherwick Studios at Aberystwyth Arts Centre. An insight into her time was available at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/gweni-llwyd/>.

A further mini-residency took place in the second quarter of 2023 with sound art duo Ardal Bicnic (Rosey Brown and Heledd Evans). They developed a sound foraging piece over five days, in conversation with local people and other artists, performing it twice over the SENSE weekend (see [6.4](#)).

This project attracted strong interest from the arts community. The first round of applications in 2018, which appointed the first three Artists in Residence, drew 61 applications from as far afield as Norway, Poland and USA. The second round in February 2019 attracted 134 applications, 22% of which were from international applicants.

The characteristics of the different artists led to different audiences being engaged. For example, while Marcello, as a social artist, naturally engaged with a wide range of people living in, working in or visiting Elan, Daniel undertook more formal visits to two schools and engaged with over 60 children and young people. Zillah focussed her work on farmers. The exhibitions at CARAD and the DCWW Visitor Centre further extended that reach, respectively amongst residents of Rhayader (and surrounding areas) and visitors.

At the time of the mid-term evaluation, reach of the artists' work appeared to be organic, sometimes depending on the extent that individual artists engaged with the local population and sometimes through serendipity. For example, Zillah Bowes was selected to contribute towards an exhibition to celebrate 20 years of Welsh devolution, largely due to her work with the farmers of Elan.

Greater emphasis on intentional reach was built into 2022 planning to influence activities in 2023. As a result, joint residencies were forged with Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham and Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

The Arts Council of Wales awarded two Creative Wales Fellowships to Elan Links. The original intention had been to create four fellowships, but this was reduced due to funding cuts. The first was awarded to Meltem Arıkan, a Turkish-born, Cardiff-based author. She stayed in the Valley from 20th January to 20th March, hosting different visitors who provided personal perspectives in a diary. A record of Meltem's stay can be found within her blog, accessible at <https://meltemarikan.blogspot.com/>.

The residency turned out to be life-changing for Meltem. She not only developed new strands to her art practice but gained a new purpose and understanding of herself, moving to Builth Wells and getting involved with CREDU, an organisation supporting young and adult carers in Powys.

The 2021/22 Creative Wales Fellowship was awarded to Gareth Bonello, a songwriter and musician who wrote in Welsh and English. An account of his time can be found at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/elan-links-artist-in-residence-program/gareth-bonello/>.

At the mid-term evaluation, one interviewee suggested that the Creative Wales Fellowship was significant:

“[This] is prestigious. There are only three [Creative Wales Fellowships] and one is with the Hay Festival. We are up there.”

Member of the Elan Links Partnership Board

A workshop at the end of the programme was held with a range of stakeholders involved in managing the Artists in Residence programme, including partners, members of the Elan Links team and Arts Consultants. The workshop sought to explore lessons learned (the outline can be found in [annex D](#)), which led to a series of findings:

Lessons Learned

- The brief inviting artists to apply for a residency was well put together and the open process of inviting artists for the residency was fit for purpose.
- The sifting process applied by the arts consultants was helpful and the panels determining which artists to select enabled open and considered debate. Ensuring that artists had an interest in different communities was important to prevent artist fatigue from individual communities.
- While some residencies proved more fruitful than others, in terms of engagement with the community or development of an individual artist's practice, there was a general sense that the decision-making behind appointments was fit for purpose.
- The period of 28 days of residency was appropriate for some. An option of extending the time allocated to some artists who were producing good work but needed an extra couple of weeks would have been helpful in some cases.
- Some felt that communication could have been improved, for example between partners, the delivery team and consultants, such that each understood something of the rationale behind each person's involvement and their role in the residency.
- Artists tended to split their four-week blocks into two or more visits. While positive for the reflective process underpinning the development of practice, this did provide practical challenges in ensuring that suitable accommodation was available as the number of 'live' artists increased.
- Artists were attracted by the remote, rustic experience; nonetheless, some were unprepared for the reality of living off-grid many miles from a town. Expectations need to be managed effectively.
- In the main, artists were used to community participation and were able to reach communities of interest with a relatively modest number of introductions. Examples of their reach ranged from farmers to disabled people, from schools to residents of Rhayader.
- Time providing emotional and practical support proved to be far more significant than anticipated, in part *“because about a week into silence in the residency, some of the artists would start going very wobbly”*, and few were prepared for the reality of chopping wood and lighting fires.
- A pre-residency induction to Elan and a handbook of practical support would help future residencies.

- The programme had focussed largely on mid-career artists. It was felt that opening up to early-career artists was a possibility, but they would need to be mature individuals given the resilience required to live in a remote place and engage with a community.

Difference made

- *“It has been really lovely to be reminded of the effect of the arts on a community.” The residency programme “offered an outside input into arts as a career, into arts as a transformational thing from the point of view of health, from the point of view of people finding a constituency, young people finding a constituency, of finding somewhere where they can fit in.”*
- *“Down the road, there’s an artist living who had stopped doing her practice. She was quite a good level professional artist, and she’d stopped working. So, she’s now, as a result [...] of Daniel’s workshops, from there, she restarted her practice. She now sells and works and exhibits all over the country.”*
- *Another artist was inspired to pursue a MA in Art “and now produces work and exhibitions on fast fashion, on climate change. And she works with other groups on that to inspire them to create collective works of art, which are to do with better habits and better, more information about climate change and about fast fashion and the devastating effects of both those things on different communities.”*
- *The artist above also “set up an artist network in Llandrindod Wells, which has had the effect of pulling arts activity together, making it more visible.”*
- *“Anna and Adri from the Netherlands, who came over, then sent us a link to Nature Connectedness International conference. And from there we’ve developed other projects. It’s informed our other partnership work with the Radnorshire Wildlife Trust. It’s certainly informed our displays within the museum about climate change and about how we might engage other people and about current ideas to do.”*
- *“Zilla engaged the farming community. Young people went down to Cardiff to see her show. People absolutely loved seeing their photographs. They’re very proud of that. She came back and then did a film, not part of the residency, but it was because she’d done the residency. They were very proud of having their life shown on screen.”*
- *“Giving artists free rein meant that they’ve gone on a much longer journey. And you don’t always see where that feeds in until perhaps a year or two later [...] [Anthony Lyons] made lots of international connections with his work. And we’re part of a much bigger sort of mosaic, which only becomes apparent later in.”*
- *“EVT has, as a result of our residency programme, been invited to be a part and a partner of Arts Council Wales and the National Trust in the Creative Nature fellowships. And that wouldn’t have happened without our residency programme, which they’ve used as an example of good practice. And they’ve used our very open, brief model as the model that they’ve used going on.”*

- *“We had quite a lot of repeat applications from artists. We know it’s on their radar because it’s been a regular feature.”*
- There was a sense that people / organisations had gained confidence through the residency. Although the arts had never been viewed as core business of EVT or DCWW, they were open to considering future arts-based projects. *“If the residency hadn’t taken place, it wouldn’t even be on the table.”*

An idea was articulated in the evaluation workshop that Artists in Residence acted like stones thrown into a pond, causing ripples. A quotation from Daniel Crawshaw’s end of residency report echoed this:

“An old school friend is undertaking a creative writing masters at Aberystwyth – Partly inspired by my residency material she is taking Elan as the focal point for researching her novel.”
Daniel Crawshaw

And so the ripples continued.

6.3.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
10 resident artists living and working on site over five years	Target exceeded – 14 artists lived and worked on site (16 if the Creative Wales Fellows are included)
4 Creative Wales Fellowships	Although only 2 Creative Wales Fellowships worked on site, this was due to Arts Council funding cuts, i.e. beyond the control of the Elan Links team
80 creative young people working with established artists	
14 artists’ talks	7 achieved
14 artist-led walks	12 achieved
14 creative workshops	8 achieved
5 exhibitions	Target exceeded – 10 exhibitions
5 peer-to-peer portfolio sessions with resident artists	
25 young people involved in the above exhibitions and events	Target exceeded – involvement of 32 young people recorded. Additional school children were known to have worked with Daniel Crawshaw
5,000 members of public interacting with all of the above	Target exceeded – 317,652 recorded (314,766 at Watershed). Footfall at

	some exhibitions not recorded, so total attendees higher.
Further reach of the project achieved via web-based resources	
1 Water Summit – International Symposium (40 delegates engaged)	Delivered on 22 nd September 2023
Publication	There were multiple publications, including <i>Elan Calls</i> by R.M. Sánchez-Camus and a series of postcards and booklets by Anthony Lyons

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.4 Engaging and innovative events (project 7d)

6.4.1 Project aims

This project, led by CARAD, sought to increase and broaden the number of people engaging with Elan's heritage by producing a range of events and activities complementary to those already offered by DCWW and the EVT.

6.4.2 Delivery and difference made

This project made a positive start by engaging local organisations in developing a programme of activities for the second half of 2018. In addition to the Scheme partners, this included input from representatives of Rhayader Primary School, Rhayader Women's Institute, Rhayader 2000⁵¹ and Elan Valley Social Club. The programme had clear links with various other projects within the Scheme, for example photographing Elan's meadows and Farms under the Water.

By the end of 2018, the team had concluded that a more coherent programme could be offered by grouping events into festivals. The programme for 2019 was structured around a central theme of celebrating the natural world through:

- Creative Elan (13th–20th April) celebrated the natural world through creative arts, e.g. creative writing, storytelling walk and animation. Over 196 people attended across 11 events,
- Natural Elan (26th–28th July) looked at the natural world and wellbeing. Events included Uses of Local Herbs and the launch of the *Elan Calls* book. 68 people attended 6 events and an additional 20 people attended parts of drop-in events.
- Discover Elan (31st August–8th September) was a programme of evening events scheduled to complement the Elan Valley walking festival to encourage people to stay in the locality. Seven events drew 118 people. This included 47 at a food and drink tasting evening at CARAD supported by eight local / Welsh businesses. The majority of attendees were local to the area.

⁵¹ Rhayader 2000 was a voluntary sector community development organisation.

- Elan Eye (8th–11th November) was a film and photography festival with five events, including a beginner's camera workshop which was formally part of Elan Interactive's Film and Media Group programme. Other activities included a historical film evening and an animation workshop. The festival attracted a total of 53 participants.

Learning from 2019 emphasised the need to promote events far enough in advance to enable people to plan visits to coincide with their interests, while also having other events that visitors could happen upon when they were in the area. Attendance levels were also helpful in understanding what types of events were of most interest to particular groups of people. These insights led to three festivals being planned for 2020 based around Creative Elan, Discover Elan and Elan Eye.

The pandemic was pivotal for this project. Events stopped from March 2020. Two online events were held in the first quarter of 2021: a talk from Trysor about sites within Elan (17 attendees) and Unlocking our sound heritage (7 attendees), where representatives of this national oral history project talked about the importance and approach to oral history recordings. In tandem with the pandemic restrictions, the Project Officer left the Scheme.

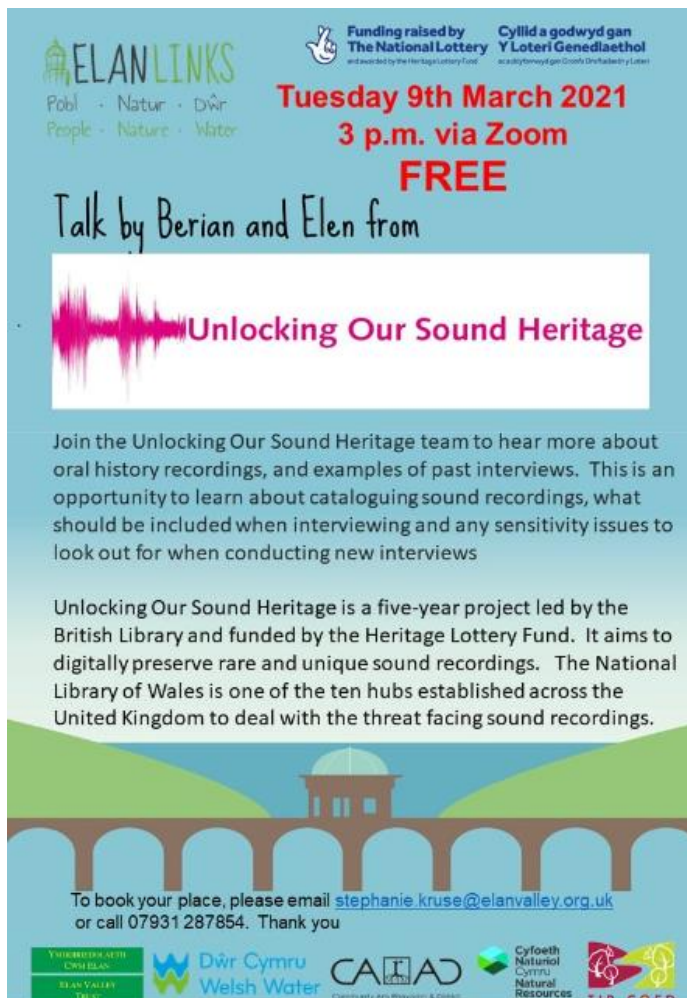


Figure 6.9 – Promotion of an online event

Source: Facebook, Elan Valley, 2nd March 2021

The appointment of the two Engagement, Education and Events Officers in 2022 gave a new dynamic to the project. They brought significant experience from the arts and heritage sectors respectively and determined that a smaller number of large-scale, higher-participation events were needed. This aligned with recommendation 13 from the mid-term evaluation⁵². Nevertheless, a selection of smaller events remained a staple of the events programme, partly to cater for the local community and partly to trial activities for larger events.

An illustration of the types of relatively small-scale events held was apparent from a sample delivered during January and February 2023:

- 3rd January – New Year Plant Hunt (2 attendees)
- 28th January – Big Garden Birdwatch (14 attendees)
- 22nd February – Sticker-making workshop (c.30 children plus carers)
- 23rd February – Elancraft Minecraft workshop (13 children).

Examples of large-scale events included:

- 11th September 2022 – Contribution to Chamberlain Highbury Trust Heritage Open day, Birmingham (550 attendees)
- 28th June–5th November 2023 – Watershed exhibition at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) (314,766 attendees)
- 29th & 30th July 2023 – Festival of Archaeology and Heritage at Elan (over 2,500 attendees).

A flavour of how five small-scale events over a weekend built into a larger whole could be discerned from a short film of the SENSE weekend, where events explored the five senses, from sound foraging to nocturnal wildlife spotting.

The SENSE weekend

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7muv7XTNU74>

57 seconds

Case study 6.1 provides a snapshot of the Festival of Archaeology and Heritage from an evaluator's observation day.

Case study 6.1 – Festival of Archaeology and Heritage

An evaluator attended this major event in the area surrounding the DCWW Visitor Centre. First impressions of a vibrant, well-attended event persisted throughout the day.

⁵² Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p84.

There were six distinct areas of activity surrounding and within the DCWW Visitor Centre, plus 'Ragged Victorians'⁵³ wandering around and engaging visitors outside the centre:

- Dinosaurs
- Early British history, with a series of exhibitors e.g. casting a cuttlefish and wood working
- A series of exhibitors based around the Roman era
- 1176 re-enactment camp and battles held beyond the Visitor Centre – Cwmwd-lâl⁵⁴
- En route to the battle area were a mix of exhibitors, from a Victorian doctor to a tent focussed on World War II
- The Visitor Centre housed a variety of exhibitors, including Stori Powys, Radnorshire Museum, Trysor, Cwm Hir Heritage and the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

It was clear from time spent at the event that there was a wide mix of visitors. There were a lot of families with children, perhaps unsurprising given that it was the second weekend of school holidays in Wales. Beyond families, there were plenty of couples of retirement age or older, but also groups of friends of varying ages. Discussions with a small sample (26) of visitors revealed a mix of home locations, from Mid and South-West Wales through to Birmingham and even Preston. Discussions with exhibitors also identified international visitors from France and the Netherlands.

Everyone within the sample of visitors indicated they had come to Elan specifically for the Festival. Ways of hearing about the event ranged across:

- Facebook – Elan Valley page
- publicity at the Royal Welsh Show
- ragged Victorians promotion
- word of mouth
- an archaeology network.

Although the majority of visitors were white, it was clear that there were more attendees of Asian descent than would have been expected from the demographics of Mid Wales. These visitors were typically in family groups.

⁵³ Ragged Victorians style themselves as 'a living history group re-enacting the lower classes of Victorian England, c1851'. An insight was available at <https://www.raggedvictorians.co.uk/>, accessed 8th April 2024.

⁵⁴ An insight into this re-enactment group was available at <https://www.facebook.com/cwmwdial>, accessed 8th April 2024.



6.10 –

Dinosaurs (top left), Roman weaponry (top right), a medieval beekeeper (bottom left) and one of the indoor exhibitors (bottom right).

Source: 20 Degrees

All six areas of activity attracted interest, with crowds gathering every time a new activity, such as a battle re-enactment, began.



Figure 6.11 – Gathering to watch a re-enactment (above) and to talk with a Victorian pharmacist (left)

Source: 20 Degrees

The Engagement, Education and Events Officer was keen to group a range of local exhibitors together within the DCWW Visitor Centre, to promote networking.

“It was an opportunity at the festival for other organisations to be aware of what they’re doing, because you do operate in your little bubble sometimes. So, the Abbey Cwmhir Trust, a lot of their volunteers have said, ‘Please send me [information]. We will come and volunteer with you, because we’re not always digging at the Abbey, but we want to come and do some more work.’ So, there is a crossover.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Feedback from these participant organisations was positive. One participant was able to benchmark the event against other events they attended annually as part of the national Festival of Archaeology:

“The festival of archaeology lasts for two weeks and it’s always in the last two weeks of July. We do lots of events in that time. It’s the busiest time in our diary, and the Elan Links was the best festival that we have ever attended. It was so well organized, so engaging, all of the feedback that were getting from people that were coming through and chatting to us. It was a really good family event.”
Exhibitor at Festival of Archaeology and History

At the time of the evaluation, a representative of DCWW that indicated a 2024 Festival of Archaeology was being planned by the former Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Archaeology & History) through Timescape Archaeology CIC.

Reflecting on the arts events, the Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Arts) was pleased that she had been able to develop a major exhibition in Birmingham, but shared a disappointment that lead-in times had not been sufficient to showcase Powys-based artists in a more local venue, such as Oriel Davies Gallery in Newtown⁵⁵.

A further insight related to the significant turnover of Project Officer staff. The findings indicated each Project Officer went through a learning curve of what types of events worked well and which types were less successful. This learning was not embedded in the Scheme, so there was limited learning from previous Project Officers. Consequently, few successful events were repeated.

“I did a nocturnal creatures walk with [a farmer]. That worked really well. It was really well subscribed. It was really easy to run. It was really fun. Everyone had a good time. [...] Something like that, you could have done at least twice a year, and so you don’t have to replan it each time and you can use similar communication. So that would have been easy enough, but it takes you a while to figure these things out.”
Member of the Elan Links team

⁵⁵ Exhibitions tended to be scheduled 3–4 years ahead at this venue, whereas the Officer was only in post from mid-2022.

6.4.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
100 events (20 per year) which engage with the different strands of Elan's diverse heritage and involve our different target audiences	Number of events held: 2018 – 12 2019 – 32 2020 – 0 2021 – 3 2022 – 1 2023 – 23 Rated amber overall – despite the headline output being less than 85% of the target, there were two years where the annual target of 20 was exceeded. The impact of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 was obvious.
25 events filmed for promotion and wider reach via social media platforms	The monitoring system recorded 9 films, but these focussed only on the arts and archaeology aspects of the Scheme. The evaluator was aware of at least a further 7 films produced, with another 10 scheduled for completion.
Yearly event programme developed and printed to include input and events from all partnership organisations and Elan Links projects	A printed event guide was produced but not distributed during the pandemic. 'Printing' evolved into the online Elan Valley events diary.

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.5 Friends of Elan (project 8)

6.5.1 Project aims

This was more of a cross-cutting theme than a project. It was an outworking of the volunteer strategy across other projects.

6.5.2 Delivery and difference made

Prior to the Volunteer Engagement Officer taking up post in March 2019, individual project officers tended to recruit relatively small numbers of volunteers through collaborations developed through their projects. This was aided by Tir Coed providing access to volunteers interested in natural heritage and CARAD providing access to volunteers interested in arts and culture. Initially, the Volunteer Engagement Officer built on these links and focussed on developing volunteer engagement across natural and cultural projects, although this expanded to cover all types of projects.

Collaborations with a range of organisations, such as Aberystwyth Botanical Society and the Welsh Ornithological Society, were developed by the Volunteer Engagement

Officer. These were useful links for recruiting volunteers to undertake surveys. More general calls for volunteers were made via a noticeboard at the DCWW Visitor Centre, in the Elan Valley e-newsletter, and through social media and links with PAVO⁵⁶, which included the Powys Volunteering Centre.

The mid-term evaluation noted a broad range of volunteers engaged with Elan Links in this early period of the Scheme. Ages ranged from 8 to 70-plus and were made up of a mix of locals and people traveling from half an hour to two hours to volunteer. Younger volunteers commonly wanted to develop their skills in support of career aspirations, while (semi-)retired volunteers tended to pursue an interest or made use of skills developed during their careers.

Activities took place to thank volunteers for their efforts and retain engagement of natural heritage volunteers during the winter period when surveying did not occur. A Christmas 'get together' was held in December 2019 and monthly coffee afternoons were intended from January 2020.



Figure 6.12 – Christmas event for volunteers

Source: Elan Valley News, 1st January 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on this project. There was no volunteering for nearly a year. Throughout the pandemic, the focus was on retaining volunteers, rather than recruiting more. Despite these retention efforts, some key volunteers did not return when volunteering restarted in 2021.

⁵⁶ PAVO is Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations.

“So, I’ve completely changed settings, going from a very urban place to a very rural one. And it was noticeable to me that there seemed to be a lot more nervousness here about COVID than there had been in the city. I think even when you could do things, I think the people in the local community were very nervous about opening up and having more people about.”

Partner representative commenting on the effect of the pandemic on volunteering and events

New volunteers were recruited and trained in 2021, 14 in plant identification and 7 in curlew surveying. Quarterly volunteer meetings were reinstated. However, the Volunteer Engagement Officer left the Scheme at Christmas 2021. The decision was taken not to replace this position, although a former volunteer was appointed to a natural heritage surveying role from January 2022. As a result, volunteer recruitment, training, management and retention effectively reverted to individual project officers. The discontinuities in staffing, combined with different emphases towards volunteering by different officers, meant that there was no single, coherent volunteering project from 2022 onwards. Rather, different officers had individual approaches to volunteering.

Reflecting on natural heritage volunteering from 2022 onwards, a member of the delivery team noted:

“Historically the natural heritage volunteers have been small in number, but very committed [...] [Since the pandemic] the people we got were mainly interested in training and not necessarily volunteering. [...] I think the COVID break was a big misfortune, that we lost a lot of people, and we lost momentum and somehow weren’t able to bring that back. [...] I got volunteers where I could, and I’ve run more training days, but I haven’t been able to dedicate the time needed to build up a team of volunteers, which I’d really hoped to do.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Consequently, there was a significant change in the character of natural heritage volunteering from 2022. Two volunteers in particular became very engaged, one an expert in lichens and another a local farmer. The latter identified a plant register of the Elan Valley that had not been updated since 2006. The decision was taken to survey four remote target areas of the Valley for rare plants. This became a focus for volunteering, with the core team able to gather four more volunteers to support this activity, alongside a DCWW ranger and the Natural Heritage Officer. This type of targeted volunteering became a feature of natural heritage volunteering.

Volunteering in archaeology and built heritage projects took a different route from natural heritage. Prior to the pandemic, there had been little progress with these projects, so volunteering aspects did not take place. It was not until the Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Archaeology & History) engaged CPAT that there was

an opportunity to take forward this aspect of the Scheme through public digs, as outlined in [5.1](#) and [5.2](#).

A celebration event was held on 25th November 2023 for those who had contributed to Elan Links. It was a family-friendly event, running from 2.30–11.30pm with activities ranging from live music and aerial theatre to a prize draw and a twmpath. The day attracted 103 attendees.

Reflecting on organisational approaches to volunteering, the difference between work carried out on DCWW and EVT land was notable:

“There was no synergy between the Dŵr Cymru system and the Elan links system. [...] Welsh Water needed to have much more governance and control over the volunteers [...] because it’s a big organisation, it’s risk adverse. Whereas, if somebody wants to come up and do a volunteer activity [with Elan Links], it’s almost open arms. ‘Yes, come on down. We can do this next Tuesday.’ [...] It’s almost like a sort of institution versus a movement. And the two don’t join in the middle at all. So, it didn’t really help at times.

Partner representative

Reflecting on volunteering management within the Scheme, a member of the Scheme team noted that the Natural Heritage Officer, as an example, had nine projects to deliver, while working part-time. Given this context, there was no time to manage volunteers.

“[...] without a dedicated volunteer officer who does that work, volunteering is just too complicated because the staff are too busy doing their own jobs to be able to engage with volunteers the way they need it.”

Member of the Elan Links team

6.5.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
A volunteering Strategy which all partnership members and organisations subscribe to	An approved volunteering policy was developed
A coordinated approach to volunteering opportunities across the Elan Links Partnership	
A number of volunteer hours delivered by Friends of Elan volunteers	Volunteer records were adequate from 2018 to 2021, providing a total of 2,265 hours of project delivery from natural and cultural heritage projects.

	Records focussed on steering group volunteering from 2022 onwards, suggesting a focus on match funding rather than people-based outcomes.
Partnership database of volunteers and volunteering opportunities	There was no central database of volunteers across the Scheme; rather, individual officers kept records of volunteers with whom they worked.
Regular volunteering opportunity updates	
Volunteering training and expenses paid	

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.6 Making the most of Elan (project 9)

6.6.1 Project aims

This project, led by the EVT, sought to improve access and recreational activities. In addition to improvements to an existing range of routes, it also endeavoured to create new routes for walking, running, cycling and horse riding. Central was the idea of creating three new activity hubs to encourage exploration beyond the DCWW Visitor Centre.

6.6.2 Delivery and difference made

As already outlined in [5.2](#), TAIS funding was secured and speeded up delivery of this project due to a requirement to complete TAIS-funded works by 31st March 2019. Some 80% of the total project had been delivered by the time of the mid-term evaluation. Three family-friendly hubs had been delivered, centred at lower Claerwen, Nantgwyllt and Penbont. Improved parking facilities with interpretation boards featuring information about the locality and history were completed. The Claerwen and Penbont hubs displayed three walking routes, while the Nantgwyllt hub had information on a mountain bike route.



Figure 6.13 – (left) Waymarking at Claerwen and (right) mountain bike trail route

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

The Elan Woodland Cycle Route was completed by the end of 2019 and opened its two downhill routes through Llanerchi Woods in summer 2020.

The project was completed by developing a series of walks of varying levels of difficulty and in agreeing two orienteering courses around Cnwch Woods and Elan Village.

In addition to involving the EVT and DCWW, this project developed the active involvement of Mid Wales Orienteering, Powys Ramblers and Elan Valley Lodge.

The access and recreation plan was reviewed during the pandemic. The decision was taken in early 2021 to develop a Strategic Plan to focus both DCWW and EVT on how to shape future access and recreation development post-Elan Links.

“[We are] ensuring that we are having a consistent approach when we’re developing footpaths, bridleways, signage schemes, etc. So, it doesn’t end up like a county council boundary where one authority has a particular standard and another one doesn’t have any funding, so it falls into disrepair. [...] So, we’ve got an understanding that we’re keeping to the same standards, that when we’re doing projects that we’ve got in mind that actually it doesn’t stop at a particular point, that it does go beyond this mythical boundary which is not perceived by the visitor.

Partner representative

6.6.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
Visitors will have clear routes of progression in building their confidence for recreational use of the Estate	
A network of improved routes for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, and orienteers. Their experiences will have improved through ease of navigation both before and during their activity	
A suite of new routes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elan's first purpose-built woodland cycle route• New section to the Garreg Ddu roundabout• Two orienteering routes• 2 new waymarked walking routes a year (10 total) with the opportunity to link gateway communities	
Three new Hubs with the benefits of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• more opportunities for families to explore away from the Visitor Centre• a range of walks in length and variety for visitors• more information and interpretation available on the heritage surrounding them• more accessible routes for disabled and limited mobility users	
20 volunteers engaged with access and recreation	Apart from references to Mid Wales Orienteering, Powys Ramblers and Elan Valley Lodge, there were no records of volunteers being engaged.

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.7 Investing in Elan (project 10a)

6.7.1 Project aims

This project, run by Tir Coed, aimed to deliver improvements to the lives of people from areas surrounding the Elan Valley by supporting the re-engagement and reintegration of those furthest from the training and job market back into employment, education and training. It sought to promote self-confidence and self-worth, and to

enable reconnection with families and communities while developing transferrable skills. Activities tended to be structured into 24-day courses⁵⁷ and 5-day courses.

6.7.2 Delivery and difference made

The mid-term evaluation noted a clear linkage between these courses and other projects within the Scheme. For example, during the five cohorts of the 24-day courses (made up of Sustainable Woodland Management and Country & Carpentry Skills courses) held by the first quarter of 2020, the participants had:

- brought 0.25 acres of woodland into management through activities such as thinning and brashing
- cleared access to the World War II Pillboxes at Coed y Foel
- created family nature areas
- built seating areas, gates, fencing and constructed a roundhouse
- planted trees to support hedges.

Similarly, the four 5-day progression courses in Ecology, Carpentry Techniques and Heritage Craft had:

- taught natural heritage surveying and species monitoring skills
- taught heritage skills related to wood working.

A wide range of partnerships supported recruitment of participants. Referral organisations included:

- Kaleidoscope – supporting people and families affected by drug and alcohol misuse – <https://www.kaleidoscopeproject.org.uk/>
- Cyfle Cymru – peer mentoring support for people misusing substances or with poor mental health – <http://dacw.co.uk/en/about-cyfle-cymru/>
- Prime Cymru – supporting over 50s into work, training or volunteering – <https://www.primecymru.co.uk/>
- The Wallich – tackling rough sleeping across Wales – <https://thewallich.com/>
- Powys Integrated Autism Service – <https://pthb.nhs.wales/services/learning-disabilities-services/integrated-autism-service/>
- Siawns Teg – helping people to integrate into their communities and gain self-worth – <http://www.siawnsteg.co.uk/>
- MIND – promotion of better mental health – <https://mnpmind.org.uk/>
- Jobcentre Plus.

⁵⁷ The 24-day courses ran for two days per week for 12 weeks.

The mid-term evaluation focussed on the Sustainable Woodland Management course run in early 2020 to understand the types of participants and their outcomes from engagement⁵⁸. In summary, the findings were:

- Participants were diverse, from 18 to post-retirement in age, from having no qualifications and never having worked to holding degrees and professional careers.
- While most attended to develop woodland management skills to apply on their own land, use as a hobby or for a career, tackling loneliness and stress were motivators for some.
- The group was positive about the overall course experience. Similarly, group dynamics were positive.
- A minority gained a greater appreciation of the history of Elan, particularly related to the dams.

Perceptions of one of the course participants were recorded in case study 6.2.

Case study 6.2 – Ira

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hliWg7zPOR4>

2 minutes 20 seconds

N.B. The quality of the film is below our usual standard as it was undertaken remotely using Zoom during the period of COVID-19 restrictions.

Case study 6.2 indicated the contribution this training made to Elan Links' natural heritage education outcomes related to biodiversity.

These insights into a specific Elan Invests course aligned with the monitoring information collected by the Tir Coed team throughout the lifetime of the project.

Where possible, the project team maintained contact with participants after they exited the Investing in Elan project. This enabled progression information to be collected for the cohorts completing the 24-day courses. As an example, of the 34 people completing the four courses held during 2018 and 2019, progression information was collected for 24:

- one progressed to undergraduate study
- one progressed to postgraduate study
- one entered employment and further training in the forestry sector
- one secured additional working hours in a role already held
- one self-employed participant felt a qualification gained through Elan Invests would support tendering for work

⁵⁸ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, pp53–56.

-
- one indicated the qualification gained through Elan Invests provided the confidence to apply for jobs
 - seven secured new employment
 - one committed to a volunteering role
 - 10 progressed to further training.

It was unclear whether specific incidences of progression arose from the qualifications, skills, experience or confidence gained through the course attendance. In all probability, different combinations of these outcomes related to different participants.

There was evidence that intended progression from the 24-day courses to the five-day continuation courses was taking place. It was also clear from discussions with attendees at the sample course that some people were entering the project via an interest in the five-day courses and progression for them was to the 24-day course. The project was flexible enough to enable that alternative entry and progression pattern.



Figure 6.14 – (left) Creating a family-friendly nature area on day 3 and (right) chiselling slots in a gatepost on day 18

Source: 20 Degrees

All courses stopped for the period of the pandemic. Courses restarted from May 2021, when 24 applications were received for six places on the first course, numbers having been constrained by social distancing limitations until July 2021.

Post-pandemic course recruitment was characterised by a smaller proportion of enquirers translating into course participants, with significant churn. This translated into a need for more active promotion.

"We have struggled for the last few courses to get people to come on them. We haven't run a single course since then [2021] at capacity."

Member of the Elan Links team

A member of the course delivery team suggested that COVID-19 and changes to the benefits system had a significant effect on the types of participants signing up for the courses. More widely, it was suggested that COVID-19 had a significant effect on the mental health of participants, brought about through social isolation.

"Our demographic has totally changed since COVID. It's changed from referrals from drug and alcohol agencies and people who not working, to more people with part time jobs who are underemployed. There were a lot more people who seem to have moved to this area to get away from more urbanized areas, who are seeking employment, looking at a change. The social isolation has been a massive impact. Every single person on our course at some point has suffered some form of social isolation or is struggling to resocialize. So, our demographic has changed."

Member of the Elan Links team

Changes in the types of people participating could equally have been a reflection of changes in recruitment. Pre-COVID-19, some 50% of participants were referred by agencies, for example drug or alcohol agencies or Job Centre Plus. Post-pandemic, most participants were self-referred. The delivery team noted lack of opportunities to interact with referral agency staff post-pandemic as many organisations continued to enable staff to work wholly or partly from home.

The ninth 24-day course started in October 2022. This incorporated an innovation of paid traineeships through the support of the Powys Social Value Forum, which brought a different dynamic to courses. Higher expectations were placed on trainees.

"With the traineeships, it's half an hour for lunch. With the [volunteer] training courses, it's really sort of as long as they need to decompress for lunch."

Member of the Elan Links team



Figure 6.15 – Installing new fencing around Cwm Elan mineshaft

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q3, 2023)

The Tir Coed team made a film about the penultimate 24-day course and its cohort which completed in December 2023. This can be viewed as case study 6.3.

Case study 6.3 – Pathways to Prosperity

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQe_yw1kj00

4 minutes 7 seconds

“I think just seeing the fact that they’ve engaged people that perhaps wouldn’t normally come to a place like this, that they’ve engaged with people who were having other challenges in life and made a real difference for them, both in terms of learning new skills and some of them going on to work elsewhere, but also just building people’s confidence, building their self-esteem, seeing the change in them. And it’s quite nice to see that.”

Partner representative talking about the work undertaken by Tir Coed

Reflecting on the work undertaken during this project, it was clear that the team had remained focussed on the core aims of the project articulated at the outset:

“We’ve got people here who have really struggled with routine and doing things and maybe working with other people [...]. So, that ability to try and get people to break cycles has been really good. We’ve had a lot of people who have not ever seen anything through from start to finish and that’s where we’ve really had to nurture and hold their hands and support them to see them through to the end. But that’s a really big thing for some people, and it’s not about necessarily always

getting them into a job, it's about getting them to do that. Start something and finish it."

Member of the Elan Links team

Another member of the team reflected on the philosophy underpinning the approach with participants:

"We look at it as if you do meaningful work, then you'll get self-confidence. You'll feel better for doing meaningful work. If we do a really interesting project and we make something quite spectacular at the end of it, the pride that those people who've built that have, I mean, they'll be coming back for years and bringing the families."

Member of the Elan Links team

6.7.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
10 x 24-day training course over five-year period	Target exceeded – 12 courses delivered
10 x 5-day progression training courses over five-year period	9 courses delivered; the 10 th course was cancelled in order to deliver a ramp for disabled people but required more time, so became the 12 th 24-day course between January and March 2024. Various delays outside the team's control had prevented delivery of the ramp on two occasions, so this became a passion project for the team.
80 people attending a 24-day training course which impacts positively on their lives	Target exceeded – 91 participants and one peer mentor had attended. Qualitative evidence suggested positive impact on the majority of lives
80 people attending a 5-day training course to support their progression and development	67 people attended
160 people gaining experience and training	Target exceeded – 178 people participated
80 people gaining Level 1–2 Agored Cymru Accreditation	Target exceeded – 87 accredited / passed internal verification stage by the end of March 2024
80 people gaining certificate of achievement	67 gained a certificate of achievement

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.8 Elan empowers (project 10b)

6.8.1 Project aims

This project, delivered by Tir Coed, offered bespoke activity days (BAS) to enable organisations working with harder-to-reach individuals, community groups and local schools to engage with Elan's heritage. Activity days were arranged specifically around the needs of each group.

6.8.2 Delivery and difference made

The mid-term evaluation noted that a minority of participants engaged through open sessions held during school holidays, with participants more typically joining bespoke sessions through community organisations⁵⁹. At that stage, the following organisations had engaged:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| • Rhayader Primary School | • PAVO Teen Scheme |
| • New Leaf Home Education Group | • Powys Children with Additional Needs |
| • Cefnlllys School | • Action for Children |
| • Fostering & Adoption Service | • Newtown College |
| • Credu Young Carers | • Kaleidoscope |
| • Siawns Teg | • Prime Cymru |
| • Small Steps | • Healthy Lives |
| • Mid Powys Mind | • Dementia Matters |
| • Llanelwedd Primary School | • Brecon Integrated Sports Association |
| • Cyfle Cymru | • Memory Circle |
| • Integrated Autism Service | |

The nature of these organisations indicated engagement by people from mainstream, local schools to retired people and a wide range of people with specific needs. A degree of overlap was apparent between the referral organisations contributing to this project and those involved in Elan Invests. The nature of such referral organisations suggested that Tir Coed kept to the spirit of the project, focussing on harder-to-reach individuals rather than working only with mainstream schools to secure large numbers of participants.

Examples of activities pre-pandemic:

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| • Bushcraft | • Cooking |
| • Forest adventure | • Clay modelling |
| • Greenwood craft | • Natural dyeing |
| • Practical conservation | • Cordage |
| • Blacksmithing | • Raft building |
| • Orienteering | • Basket weaving |

⁵⁹ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p56.

- Treasure hunts
- Firelighting
- Pendant making
- Spoon carving
- Lantern making



Figure 6.16 – (left) Young Carers setting off on their raft and (right) Healthy Lives Project Group

Source: Quarterly monitoring report (Q4, 2019)

COVID-19 restrictions caused significant challenges for this project. Groups were unable to take part in activities during 2020 and part of 2021 and then proved unwilling to engage in planned activities through to the end of 2021.

“Before COVID we had a lot of people approaching us, wanting us to do activity sessions. After COVID, I’ve really struggled to get groups and organisations to organize activity sessions.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Sensing a mood for families to engage in outdoor activities, the project pivoted towards the end of 2021. A Dark Skies session was attended by 12 children and five accompanying adults⁶⁰. This session involved making willow lanterns, a walk in the woods and the Dark Skies team recreating constellations in the dark. A wet-felting session was also held for the Llandrindod Outdoor Families Group, attracting 27 participants.

A combination of open and bespoke activities was possible by summer 2022. For example, an outdoor cooking session was held for families entitled to free school meals. Open-access sessions were themed around Myths and Legends of the Elan Valley, attracting 96 participants over seven sessions. These mainly attracted families from within 10 miles of Elan, typically Rhayader and Llandrindod Wells.

The Tir Coed team were also able to try new types of activities as part of their BAS offering for 2022/23 as they attracted COVID Recovery funding to supplement funding

⁶⁰ The Elan Valley is the only privately owned but publicly accessible Dark Skies Park in the world. Further information available at <https://elanvalley.org.uk/explore/dark-skies/>, accessed 12th April 2024.

provided by the Scheme. ‘Sheep Shenanigans’ was one theme of 2022 and then Harry Potter.

“The BAS days, when we started doing the really silly themes for the summer, really worked well. [...] We were getting people who wouldn’t traditionally come and do whittling if we called it wand making. [...] Our public BAS days pre-COVID had been really badly attended. That switch and changing wording worked really well.”

Member of the Elan Links team

The aim was to push boundaries of people’s modern-day experiences. Felt work fitted the sheep theme, whereas making lanterns out of sheepskin did not attract so many people. Similarly, bone carving within the Harry Potter theme did not attract so many. Indeed, activities making use of dead animals tended not to attract so many participants. Nevertheless, where people did engage with such sessions, the effects could be striking.

Case study 6.4 – Do you know where your food comes from?

One of the Elan Links team recalled a particular BAS session with a group of young men.

“One of the ones we’ve done with the NEETS⁶¹ was we did cooking. But we wanted to yet again do something that they wouldn’t have done. Everyone could just go home, so obviously it was outside cooking, but we also got pheasants.

We decided to opt for skinning them because plucking is quite, if someone wanted to have a go at plucking, we would have shown them how to pluck a pheasant. But skinning. But, yeah, we had whole pheasants. And when you’ve got eight or ten, real tough, all referred by probation, young, probably, well, our age group was 16 to 25 males, and you give them a pheasant with its head on, one of them threw up.

But they saw the complete process. Well, we didn’t make them go out and shoot or anything. Yeah. And it was so good. And they all loved we made the pheasant stew because we had [team member] with us then, who was a chef. His original trade was chef. It was gorgeous. I mean, it was something you would have paid for in a restaurant quite easily, because that’s the grade of chef he was, and it was great and everyone loved it. But, oh, goodness, to see all these tough 16-year-olds, I saw some of their referrals and I know some of their backgrounds, throw up and be very good and listen and engage.”

⁶¹ Not in Employment, Education or Training

2023 saw a variety of activities taking place, from a well-attended wassail at a newly planted orchard in January⁶² through to a summer of 14 sessions of heritage crafts and outdoor skills. The best-attended session saw 70 children from Cefnlllys Primary School participate in a nature adventure walk and make bug hotels. Despite such levels of engagement, the Coordinator nevertheless noted a pandemic effect as late as September 2023:

“Our summer activities were also busy though didn’t sell out as quickly as we are used to. [...] Hesitancy over face-to-face activities has still had an impact on activity sessions this quarter.”

Member of the Elan Links team

While positive reaction to BAS days was clear from participants, the Tir Coed Coordinator was prompted to reflect on whether the sessions led to effects beyond the immediate:

“I know people who have gone out and they’ve emailed me and they said, ‘Oh, we came on your BAS day, where we did felting. Where do you get your felt supplies from? [...] Some of them we taught how to do leaf bashing [...]. And they all went home and one of them posted me a picture of the bunting. [...] They went and made bunting to decorate their house by leaf bashing.”

Member of the Elan Links team

It was apparent that the Tir Coed team were making links with other aspects of Scheme in the latter stages of this project.

“I did a bracken bashing day, which tied in with [Natural Heritage Officer’s] themes [...] We did work [...] at Cwm Elan mine, which was in the LCAP. We did other work at the mine site, which tied into [the Engagement, Education & Events Officer’s] theme. So, we put signage up for the mine and things like that. So, the cross-theme work that we should have been doing from the beginning, I think we should have been tying into each other’s projects a lot better, but it came together at the end.”

Member of the Elan Links team

⁶² A good introduction to the history of wassailing can be found at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/art-collections/wassailing-ritual-and-revelry> , accessed 20th May 2024.

6.8.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
20 Special Activity Days per year (100 Special Activity Days over the course of the 5-year Scheme)	96 sessions held
1,200 harder-to-reach individuals from our local communities have engaged with the heritage of Elan	Target exceeded – 1,378 individuals participated
Feedback from these client groups used to inform future information and access developments	
A number of client groups make return visits due to increased confidence from supported visit	Not monitored

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

6.9 Experience Elan (project 10c)

6.9.1 Project aims

Retreat packages, delivered by Tir Coed, sought to enable harder-to-reach groups from the Birmingham area to connect with Elan and the natural environment. The intention was for them to learn about the source of their water and benefit from a package of bespoke activities arranged for them.

6.9.2 Delivery and difference made

The mid-term evaluation noted similarities between this project and Elan Empowers, although Experience Elan had a greater emphasis on the reservoirs, dams and aqueducts of the area⁶³. At that stage, sessions were provided to groups of people associated with the following organisations:

- YMCA Sutton Coldfield (youth group), Stepping Up (young adults with severe learning and physical disabilities), G.I.R.L.S. Move (project to get girls more active), Virtually Minded (mental health awareness group)
- The Factory Young People's Centre (young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs))
- Masefield Wellbeing Hub (youth groups)
- Birmingham Youth Service – The Lighthouse (youth council group) and Concord Youth Centre (sexual health bias)
- King Solomon IBS (young people with behavioural issues)
- Minworth JI School (children with SEN, Pupil Premium Funding, behavioural issues and physical disability)

⁶³ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p57.

-
- Elms Farm School (children in care, with a SEN diagnosis and Pupil Premium Funding)
 - Young Carers
 - British Red Cross (asylum seekers and refugees)
 - Selly Oak Trust School (children with special educational needs)
 - ATHAC (social enterprise enabling access to arts, culture and heritage)
 - Clifton Road Youth Centre
 - Maryvale Community Project (adults with disabilities)
 - Ashiana Community Project (women's wellbeing hub).



Figure 6.17 – Members of the Ashiana Community Project on the high ropes

Source: Quarterly monitoring system (Q4, 2019)

The nature of these organisations suggested Tir Coed kept their focus on harder-to-reach or disadvantaged individuals in the Birmingham / Midlands area.

Activities delivered pre-pandemic included:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Greenwood working | • High ropes |
| • Estate and dam tour | • Archery |
| • Bushcraft | • Orienteering |
| • Forest adventure | • Screenwriting workshop |
| • Nature identification | • Pond dipping |
| • Farm visit | • Elan Village tour |

-
- Walking
 - Kayaking / Canoeing
 - Bug hunt

The mid-term evaluation found high participant satisfaction rates⁶⁴. These appeared to stem from participants getting on well with others, feeling connected to nature and gaining a confidence boost from being involved. Despite this positive feedback, the team reported a major challenge in recruiting from Birmingham, given that it was beyond Tir Coed's usual geographic footprint. Provision of group accommodation was also reported as challenging at the mid-point, although beneficial for a local holiday letting agency.

The pandemic halted this project during 2020 and the first half of 2021. However, the effect of the pandemic proved significantly longer lasting. COVID-19 hesitancy reportedly meant that young people, or their families, did not want to spend time away from home in groups. However, there were other barriers to engagement.

"We've even offered to pay for buses last year. [...] They've said things like staff don't want to spend overnights. They don't have the funding to pay staff to do overnights. [...] I think to make it a success, [the retreats] would have needed to have been fully supported."

Member of the Elan Links team

It was October 2022 before a group of 13 young people and four support workers from Sutton Coldfield YMCA undertook a one-night retreat. Not only were they the first group to stay since the pandemic, but they were also the first group to use the Cwm Clyd bunkhouse. This group plus one other group in 2023 were the only ones to undertake overnight retreats since the pandemic.

Again, the team needed to pivot their activities in light of the COVID-effect. Instead of promoting retreats – or adventure stays, as they referred to them in promotional material – day visits were offered. Essentially, the BAS days offered through Elan Empowers were offered to groups from Birmingham, albeit tailored to meet their needs and timings.

6.9.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
1,000 people from harder-to-reach groups in the Birmingham / Midlands area have enjoyed and benefited from an 'Experience Elan' weekend retreat	335 harder-to-reach participants

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp58–59.

during the course of the 5-year Delivery Phase	
30 day and night retreats	Target exceeded – 40 nights and 52 days were spent at Elan by 23 different groups
30 bespoke activity sessions	Target exceeded – 71 bespoke sessions

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

N.B. Quarterly internal monitoring reports had targets of 150 day and night retreats and 150 bespoke activity sessions. While more realistic for a target of 1,000 participants, LCAP output targets have been used consistently throughout this evaluation.

6.10 Tap into it (project 11)

6.10.1 Project aims

This was an outreach education programme delivering activities and events in Birmingham to raise the awareness of that population's water heritage. It aimed to raise the profile of the unique connection between Elan and Birmingham, encouraging more people from the city to visit Elan.

6.10.2 Delivery and difference made

A launch event was held at Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham in 2018 with support from the Friends of Cannon Hill Park and Severn Trent Water. The water company provided a Key Stage 2 book to help children understand the source of their water. Visitor feedback suggested that older generations had high levels of awareness of links between Elan and Birmingham, some sharing stories of school trips that used to run from Birmingham to Elan. However, younger generations were not typically aware of these links.

The project failed to gather momentum in 2019, despite discussions with at least four organisations about potential collaboration. The pandemic stopped progress through 2020 and 2021.

The Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Arts) was able to make some progress in 2022, largely through other Scheme projects. A key link was with Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) and the joint residency between Birmingham and Elan Valley.

MAC was based in Cannon Hill Park, where a model of the Elan Reservoirs sits. Through this partnership, the Scheme was able to contribute to celebration of 150 years of Cannon Hill Park through the Big Green Weekender:

“And we talked about water and [...] we put together a walk through the history of water from prehistory right through to 1939 Birmingham where we had a Second World War fire tender from the Blitz. We try and find a fun, engaging, hands on way to talk about the history of moving water. And that worked, and that was good.”

Member of the Elan Links team on the contribution to the Big Green Weekender

The team reflected that the reach at that weekend was to a more diverse audience than would have been the case at an event in the Elan Valley:

“We had people queuing up, and they really related to the, you know, ceramics and things like. ‘Oh, yeah, you know, my family, I’ve got a potter in my family back in India or Pakistan’, and they get the phone out and they’d start showing you photographs. ‘I remember as a kid, a bowl like this.’ And they really got it. [...] That really just was our one chance to talk to a diverse audience, which you don’t get in mid Wales, in rural mid Wales.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Lee Mackenzie, a Birmingham-based artist, was given a residency including delivery of two workshops in Birmingham and a further two in Elan, to create a ‘poetry map’ between Elan and Birmingham.

A series of events were held in and around MAC in summer/autumn 2023. These ranged from Minecraft workshops to a talk to an over 60s club at MAC. The largest event was the Watershed exhibition, with accompanying talks and performances by the curator and artists.

The Elan Links team worked with Severn Trent Water throughout the lifetime of the Scheme. Some engagement activities, such as a portable, interactive water cycle display, proved unworkable in school settings. Nevertheless, Severn Trent did provide books for a significant number of schools in and around Birmingham to raise awareness of where people’s water came from.

Reflecting on this and the Experience Elan (see [6.9](#)) projects, the team concluded that they would have designed the project differently:

“And had I set the project up with hindsight, which is always a wonderful thing, I would have had a member of staff on the ground in Birmingham. [...] Because to try, for us in the Elan Valley to get into Birmingham and to make inroads and build those relationships was always going to be a difficult thing for us to do.”

Member of the Elan Links team

In practice, the link with Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) proved to be the key link to Birmingham:

“That was a really good partnership, really important for the Tap into it project [...] MAC basically gave us a centre, as like a Welsh organisation, trying to do outreach work in Birmingham.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Nine events or collaborations were held at or with MAC. Birmingham residents tended to engage far more than the Elan Links team anticipated:

“One of the favourite events that I did there was something called the Culture Club, which is for over 60s, based at the Midlands Art Centre. And they kind of meet once a month and they engage in some way with art [...] And I went to talk to 45 of them. [...] I gave them a presentation about, kind of the project in general, and then specifically about the exhibition. And then we did some tours through, and the feedback at the end was just like, really incredible. People just being like, ‘We had no idea. We had no idea that people had sacrificed so much in order for us to have water.’ That felt like a very good piece of engagement.”

Member of the Elan Links team

Far from being an isolated experience, the above aligned with comments made to the team at MAC during the Watershed exhibition:

“From what my conversations were with our audiences, that people were like, ‘Oh, I knew that our water comes from Wales, but I didn’t know the full story’, for example. Those kind of comments were quite often.”

Representative of Midland Arts Centre



Cannon Hill Park
@cannonhillpark

...

The 1960's @BhamCityCouncil Tulip Festival introduced @CoftonNursery to @The_RHS Chelsea Show with @BirminghamBloom displays & to Cannon Hill Park @TheElanValley Reservoirs Model opening by @BrumLordMayor on 4 May 1962 @MACEarchive
macearchive.org/films/midlands... @Elan_Valley @stwater 💧



Figure 6.18 – Cannon Hill Park’s Elan Valley Reservoirs Model

Source: X, @cannonhillpark, 23rd December 2022

6.10.3 Summary of outputs

Outputs	Comments
8 smaller outreach community projects / events in Birmingham / Midlands area supported	A minimum of 8 events / activities were delivered in the Birmingham area albeit some formed part of project 7d.
1 launch event at Cannon Hill Park	
10,000 people from communities of Birmingham and Midlands more aware of where their water comes from through a campaign to raise awareness about water quality, sustainability and sensible use of precious resources	Target exceeded – there were over 314,000 attendees of the Watershed exhibition at MAC, for example

Of these, 2,500 people visit Elan for the first time	This was a poor indicator as the delivery team had no way of measuring this output. Although DCWW undertook periodic visitor surveys, they did not specifically explore whether visitors came from Birmingham or surrounding areas as a result of particular outreach activities. Undertaking a separate visitor survey to find a link between Elan Links and a first time visit from Birmingham or surrounding area would have been prohibitively expensive.
25 schools engaged with through the use of the portable water learning resource, resulting in 1,500 school children being more aware of where their water comes from	Target exceeded – although the portable water learning resource proved inappropriate for schools, the spirit of the output was achieved and the target exceeded by distribution of educational resources to 238 schools in and around Birmingham by Severn Trent Water.
1 Cloud to Tap Festival in Year 5	Watershed exhibition

Source: Elan Links monitoring system

7. Progress towards outcomes and legacy

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is structured around the two themes of the Scheme, with each subheading representing a Scheme outcome, according to the Scheme's logic model ([annex A](#)). A third section of the chapter captures lessons learned which did not sit within the outcome sections. The fourth section of the chapter maps the Scheme outcomes onto the intended outcomes of the NLHF for Landscape Partnership Schemes.

The view on progress towards each outcome builds on findings presented earlier and introduces additional insights from interviews carried out across a wide range of stakeholders.

7.2 Securing and safeguarding Elan's heritage

7.2.1 Important habitats restored and enhanced (identified in the LCAP)

Projects contributing towards this outcome:

- Healthy bogs
- Dry heath management
- Improving our woodland
- Elan cattle.

This was a key outcome, not only in its own right, but as an enabler for the next two outcomes also.

The healthy bogs project was successful. The headline target area of peat bog for restoration was significantly exceeded. More importantly for the longer term, there was significant learning by the EVT team and successful demonstration for their tenant farmers of what worked.

"Farmers were not going to engage at this point because there is [... the] new Welsh sustainable farming scheme. [...] There's always the thought that if you just waited, then you will get some money. [...] But, what we've managed to achieve is work on the ground that farmers can see. We've learned how to do it. They can learn from us how to do it. They know now what's involved."

Representative of EVT

So, while the bog restoration work did not take place on tenant-farmer-managed land, many tenant farmers did allow surveys on their land, and more were scheduled to have surveys undertaken in 2024/25. This positioned the tenant farmers of the Elan Valley to engage in peat bog restoration (and other habitat works) as and when the Welsh Government sustainable agriculture scheme allows.

The EVT representative reflected that bog restoration work undertaken through Elan Links gave them a head start in developing capacity and expertise in this area. As a result, Elan was able to attract additional support from the Welsh Government SMS programme and was well positioned for future sustainable agriculture and land management schemes.

"We would never have done as much peatland work as we've done [without Elan Links], and we would never have been as far forward in getting our heads around peatland stuff as we now are. And I would have thought if you look across Wales there won't be many areas that have done as much as we have or are now as equipped as we are to keep taking it forward."

Representative of EVT

Bringing the tenant farming community on board with this work was acknowledged as an achievement that should yield long-term benefits for both nature and farmers.

"I feel like it's done a really good job on the ground of communicating and earning the respect of those people in the Valley. I feel like there will be long term benefits from their work on the peatland work and hopefully the meadows too."

Natural Environment Consents Officer reflecting on the approach of the Peatlands Officer and Natural Heritage Officer

Good contributions were also made to this outcome from the headline areas of land under better management in the dry heath and woodland projects. The findings clearly demonstrated the use of a considered approach, rather than the unthinking following of initial project plans. For example, different mixes of trees were planted in the woodland project to those originally envisaged, in order to maximise the benefits to the species in that habitat. Similarly, 50% degenerate heather was retained at Cwmduddwr. Both of these decisions were taken in consultation with NRW.

"So, the question was, could I give consent for that [bracken control] in the woodland? [...] So, we met on site and we talked through it, and, yeah, I think that one was dropped. And instead, the trust is going to be putting cattle actually in that woodland, which will then do the job of cutting the bracken. Basically, the animals will trample the bracken and it will be a much longer, more sustainable, long-term solution."

Natural Environment Consents Officer

Good project design was apparent between the three projects already noted and the cattle project. Cattle were used to selectively enhance habitats by trampling bracken, tackling *Molinia* growth, thinning regenerating trees and creating a mosaic of habitats.

Overall, this outcome was achieved.

“We’ve shifted the agenda for the people that matter, which for these projects is for the tenants and for the Elan Valley Trust as well, although we’re obviously leading it, like our staff have shifted their mindsets too. And all for the positive, I think, in terms of wanting to deliver more for nature.”

Representative of EVT

7.2.2 Key species conserved (identified in the LCAP)

Projects contributing towards this outcome:

- Rare birds of Elan
- Rare species of Elan.

The findings suggested that interventions in support of curlew showed initial signs of success. They did not suggest similar levels of success for red grouse, golden plover, ring ouzel or merlin. However, improvements in habitat for these species, and dunlin, were undertaken. It will take many years for berry-rich trees to grow to provide a source of food and cover from predators, for example. If the logic holds that improved habitat will increase the likelihood of rare species moving into and surviving in the Valley, successful outcomes may yet be realised in the future.

Although an outcomes-based approach was trialled for the rare bird species project, it proved unwieldy. It was discontinued in favour of a more frequently used activity-based approach, i.e. farmer payments for activities, rather than for results. An overarching focus on outcomes from which actions were defined gained positive outcomes for curlew and secured buy-in from tenant farmers. Indeed, a positive contribution to this outcome for the longer term was growth in interest from tenant farmers.

“So, I had a payment for being involved [in the Rare Birds project]. I was going to the meetings, and I really broadened my mind as a farmer, [...] I learned a lot about birds and nesting habits. In the last couple of years, I’m regularly taking photos of birds and taking a GPS notice and forwarding it on back to them or even other people they introduced me to. To say, ‘Well, this was there. That was here.’ [...] I’m quite surprised. It changed my thought process and some of the other farmers as well, actually.”

Tenant farmer

The rare species of Elan project was fundamentally about surveying for particular species. These baseline findings will be fundamental to designing future conservation actions, in all likelihood supported by the agenda for ‘public money for public goods’ manifest in the Welsh Government sustainable agriculture or NRW nature

conservation schemes. Consequently, this work should make a positive contribution to the outcome.

An intention of the projects was to raise conservation volunteer capacity, particularly in the area of surveying. The mid-term evaluation noted the high quality of training offered to volunteers in support of that objective⁶⁵. While the high quality of training continued throughout the rest of the Scheme's lifetime, the pandemic had a severely negative effect on volunteering. An initial group of committed volunteers did not return post-pandemic. Changes in the Elan Links team left insufficient capacity to develop the volunteering aspect of these projects to the extent originally envisaged. Nevertheless, a small group of committed individuals and groups of event-based volunteers were in place by the end of the Scheme.

Overall, this outcome was partially achieved. Positive contributions were made towards the outcome, although much of the work was preparatory, rather than activity realising conservation successes for species during the lifetime of the Scheme.

7.2.3 Sustainability of Elan's traditional high nature value farming improved

Projects contributing towards this outcome:

- Elan hay meadows
- Elan rhos hay
- Elan rams
- Elan cattle
- Elan wethers.

A series of traditional farming practices were trialled to explore sustainable options for farmers. In line with the experimental nature of the projects, some succeeded and some failed.

The Elan hay meadows project made a positive contribution to the outcome. Ways of improving the condition of hay meadows were approved by NRW and trialled. The value of hay meadows was demonstrated to farmers and additional buy-in to the approach was evidenced within the findings.

"Five or six farmers now really value their hay meadows."

Partner representative

The contribution of the Elan rhos hay project towards the outcome was limited. Although the findings did identify a new biochar business having been established, the traditional practice of using *Molinia* as animal feed or bedding was not a nutritional nor

⁶⁵ Hughes, A. and Powell, A. (2020) 'Mid-Term Evaluation of the Elan Links: People, Nature, Water Landscape Partnership Scheme'. 20 Degrees & Arcadis, p71.

financially sustainable option for wider adoption. Biodiversity gains from clearing *Molinia* would require exclusion of sheep from the cleared areas.

The Elan rams project made positive contributions to the outcome, albeit not in the way anticipated. The project delivered a key benefit of engaging initially disaffected tenant farmers who were unhappy with the Scheme. Consequently, this project became a significant enabler of other projects which delivered contributions to high nature value farming, most notably the Elan cattle project.

The Elan cattle project was successful and made a positive contribution to the outcome. As noted in 7.1.1, cattle were used to improve the condition of habitats for nature and people (bog restoration work with associated climate change implications).

The Elan wethers project was unsuccessful and so did not make a contribution to the outcome. An alternative project may have been more appropriate, but would have required greater engagement with farmers at the design stage.

Overall, this outcome was achieved, with sustainable options for high nature value farming demonstrated. These projects led to a series of lessons learned by the Scheme team.

A turning point in engaging farmers was the different style of the second Natural Heritage Officer. Farmers felt this officer listened to their views and modified project approaches, rather than imposed a view of how project outcomes should be achieved. Moreover, this officer enjoyed being out on the land and was regularly seen by farmers. This helped to build positive relationships. In fairness to the original Natural Heritage Officer, timing may also have been a factor, given that the second officer had the benefit of positive outcomes to which she could point.

“[Other high nature value farming schemes] could basically just have more human interaction because it’s land and it’s so variable. It is really variable. Every farm is different. [...] The HLF [Elan Links Scheme] worked when we had a good field officer who was visiting farmers and coming out and phoned up, whatever, and it worked. And it was human involvement.

Tenant farmer on learning that informs future high nature value farming schemes

“I think that’s always what I say about any project, is they’ve got to be from the ground up. Whereas I don’t think at the beginning it was.”

Tenant farmer

Farmers indicated they would not have kept cattle prior to Elan Links because it was not financially viable to do so. Moreover, the barriers from DCWW to keeping cattle were high, due to concerns over water quality. However, use of GPS cattle collars meant that farmers learned how to keep cattle in areas in order to protect water quality. If future sustainable agriculture programmes address the financial barriers to keeping cattle for the benefit of nature, lessons have been learned that will enable engagement.

Overall, farmers were open to high nature value farming if the approach was financially sustainable:

"I suppose it's the justification to why people in a landscape can deliver all this biodiversity. So, it's already there. And then the tweaking of other things like cutting bracken and the molinia. I mean, it's just changing people's mindsets of looking at their holdings, rather than sort of focussing completely on sheep and numbers. And I do hear people sitting around like the shearing table and stuff, giving me records of wildlife, telling me what they've got."

Tenant farmer

7.2.4 Key built and ancient heritage sites protected to safeguard and maintain their condition into the future

Delivery of this outcome was primarily the work of the Safeguarding Elan's historic environment project.

A precursor to safeguarding heritage is knowing that it is there. Extensive surveying doubled the number of monuments / sites recorded. Planned work to safeguard and maintain the condition of the highest priority sites was delivered.

"[The survey report] provided 800 new records. So, 800 new sites, that, again, is unheard of. We rarely ever survey sites with 800 individual features, so that's hugely impactful. And the legacy is the HER [Historic Environment Record]."

Representative of an archaeological trust

Key contributions to safeguarding and maintaining the heritage longer term were:

- high quality training to upskill archaeology volunteers
- enthusing archaeology volunteers through involvement in test digs
- establishment of a community interest company to progress future archaeology and site maintenance.

"Just even more love for the area up there, finding things and that sort of thing. I was not aware that there was this mine up there [...] I've now seen it. I've visited it. I've worked on it. What more could I want?"

Archaeology volunteer

"I think I've sort of always been quite interested in the history of the area before the dams were built about that sort of what was there before then. And I think as well, that was what I found quite interesting."

Archaeology volunteer

Contributions to the outcome were made not only through archaeology professionals and volunteers, but also through changed attitudes by those working the land in the Valley. In all likelihood, it will be through such changed attitudes that local champions will "keep an eye" on historical monuments "on their patch".

"Connecting people that come and visit to what goes on the land is the most important thing [...], getting people to really appreciate the depth of the landscape beyond the last hundred years. And again, that brings me back to another project, which again, I did think was worthy, was the collecting of information about all the places, the historic places on the Estate, because I think that gives a depth of understanding of that landscape."

Tenant farmer

"I'm realizing that actually, I got lots and lots of things on my farm. So, here's where I've seen a bit of a ditch and I've seen a bit of a bank. But I've realized now they are all remnants of something in the past. Over the last three years, I've actually been taking photos of things and taking a GPS location and forwarded them on and discovered a few sites for them as well, which is really very interesting."

Tenant farmer

Moreover, the Engagement, Education and Events Officer who went on to establish Timescape Archaeology CIC is a knowledgeable champion of the ancient heritage.

"They have got a pretty unique landscape there that hasn't been degraded because it's watershed, because it's catchment. It's not had that deep ploughing, industrialisation, new roads. It's been kept almost like a time capsule landscape."

Member of the Elan Links team

Overall, this outcome was achieved.

7.2.5 Access and sustainable use for Elan's built heritage

Projects intended to contribute towards this outcome were:

- Increasing access to Elan's archaeological and built heritage
- The Engineer's House
- Cwm Clyd Farmstead.

Positive contributions to the outcome were achieved early in the Scheme by the first of these projects with physical access and vegetation clearance from a range of historic sites. These will help visitors find and appreciate these sites. Use of CGI films to enable access to Cwm Elan Mines and a Roman Marching Camp was innovative and enabled access to sites that were physically inaccessible to most people.

“The computer-generated animations or whatever they are, of the mines and the Roman camp. Just, wow! Just incredible.”

Partner representative

The Engineer’s House restoration was not delivered. This represented the major limitation on achievement of this outcome. Cost escalation of capital projects resulting from the pandemic was a significant factor in the lack of progress. Nevertheless, the restoration has been included in a major scheme funded by UK Government, so the outcome may yet be achieved, although it cannot be attributed to Elan Links.

There was a positive contribution to the outcome from the capital works undertaken on Cwm Clyd Farmstead.

“We’ve now got a building which is operational as what it was intended to be and it’s sort of working. It’s washing its face, just about, as a low-cost solution for groups of people to come and visit the Valley and do what they’re going to do.”

Partner representative

If the planned feasibility study results in an actioned project to further develop the site, Cwm Clyd will be closer to a sustainable future.

Overall, this outcome was partially achieved.

7.2.6 Elan’s diverse cultural heritage recorded, ensuring accessibility and benefit into the future

Work undertaken through the Elan Links: people to collections project was the sole contributor to this outcome.

Despite several discontinuities in delivery arising from the pandemic and various periods without an archivist, the project made positive progress towards this outcome. Physical archives were secured and catalogued, and new oral histories were captured and archived. Some materials were shared on social media to make more accessible. Other materials were displayed at events, and yet more material will be accessible to the public via Timescape Rhayader.

One element missing was the collections archive being available to the public online, apart from the proportion uploaded to the People's Collection Wales.

"The long-term solution would be you would have the archive properly accredited by the National Archives and you would get what's known as an ARCHON number. [...] And then you can add your catalogue to their online programme, which is called Discovery, which is pretty much every accredited archive in the country is on at the minute, or trying to get on to, and that allows your catalogue to be made searchable online."

Member of the Elan Links team

Overall, this outcome was largely achieved.

7.3 Increased benefits for people associated with Elan

7.3.1 Engaging and innovative ways of narrating Elan's heritage to a wider audience developed, to increase the impact of Elan's heritage

Projects intended to contribute towards this outcome were:

- Interpreting Elan
- Elan interactive
- Artist residencies
- Engaging and innovative events.

The Interpreting Elan project made positive contributions towards the outcome. Apart from the period of the pandemic, exhibitions were used to good effect at the DCWW Visitor Centre and at CARAD in Rhayader. As confidence grew and new staff were appointed with significantly more events experience, the scale and ambition of exhibitions grew considerably. The Watershed exhibition was the key example, and a major contributor to the outcome.

Elan Interactive made positive contributions to the outcome, but there was a pervading sense from the findings that more could have been achieved if there had been a member of staff with a central focus on marketing. For example, the EVT website was overhauled and improved, but this did not take place until early 2022. The Elan app was delivered, but needed to be downloaded from home or at the Visitor Centre, given the remoteness of some areas of the Valley. Numbers of downloads of the app were relatively limited, suggesting a lack of priority to its promotion. Nevertheless, there were some innovative elements of this project contributing towards the outcome, primarily the use of Minecraft to engage young people with Elan's story and the use of GIS story maps.

"So, no, I genuinely don't think that the Scheme was successful in reaching huge numbers of people, and I think that is down to the marketing, you know, not

having the marketing to tell people what was happening. [...] So, although there's been a positive effect, I don't think necessarily that has been ascribed to the Scheme."

Partner representative

Development of educational resources represented a potential contribution to the outcome. However, the relatively limited levels of school engagement by the end of the Scheme delivery suggested that potential remained largely latent rather than realised.

The findings suggested the Artists in Residence programme was a significant contributor to the outcome. This project was commonly identified by a wide range of stakeholders when asked to talk about highlights of the Scheme. The findings suggested this area of work engaged a wide range of communities from farmers to visitors and was a source of inspiration for local artists. As noted in the mid-term evaluation, few – if any – other places in Wales had such a significant programme of residencies. The Arts Council of Wales further enhanced the programme through support for Creative Wales Fellowships at Elan.

"... and then Zilla. She got really involved with the community and I think that sort of changed things again [...] People like Zilla and all did manage to sort of promote the sort of hill life and how it's an important part of Wales's voice and things. So that was what I felt good out of that."

Tenant farmer – initially dubious about the arts elements of the Scheme but changed perspective

"[The scheme has been] working more in the artistic realm than I'd anticipated. A move in my thinking came about when I realised how many use Elan for art."

Partner representative

A notable feature of resident artists was that they continued to reference Elan in their works when they left.

"It's much more of a ripple effect with art stuff, because especially with the residencies, you might only get them doing, say, like one workshop, one walk, one talk or something while they're here. But then when they go away and they carry on working on the things they've been working with, they will keep referencing Elan and they'll keep [...] throwing that spotlight back on this place."

Member of the Elan Links team

The significance of the Artists in Residence programme was reflected in the Elan Links team requesting an evaluation workshop specifically on this project. In the final section of that workshop, thinking about the future, some ideas were proposed:

-
- A rural region of culture based around Elan – a magnet for national and international attention
 - EVT was open to discussing a future programme, potentially embedding a thematic programme opening up a debate about the way the landscape of Mid Wales continues to be used for the greater good but not necessarily for the people of local communities, for example as a place for wind turbines, carbon sequestration or water provision.

The Engaging and innovative events project mirrored the Interpreting Elan project. The pandemic was a major problem, given that events largely shut down in 2020 and 2021. Staff changes added a further hiatus in 2022. However, the Engagement, Education and Events Officers appointed in 2022 brought significant prior experience. Grouping events into festivals had been identified as a positive way forward as far back as 2019, realising initial successes that year. However, the Archaeology and History Festival of 2023 was an order of magnitude larger in scale and illustrated relatively new levels of confidence and ambition.

“The archaeological festival was a great way of engaging with people in a practical and sort of very constructive way. It’s one which has been talked about afterwards as one of the highlights as well.”

Partner representative

The Scheme team recognised that more could have been done to tell Elan’s story in a joined-up way. All of the Scheme’s projects related to facets of the story, but the fact that delivery was split into siloes run by different project officers meant that the interconnectedness was not always apparent. A book was commissioned towards the end of the Scheme to make clear the different strands of Elan Links and celebrate its achievements. This will be a legacy document, serving to progress this outcome further.

Overall, this outcome was achieved.

7.3.2 The range and number of people experiencing Elan as visitors, volunteers and learners increased

Although the Friends of Elan project was the way the Scheme envisaged this outcome being met, in practice there were contributions from seven projects, at least:

- Friends of Elan
- Engaging and innovative events
- Artist residencies
- Making the most of Elan
- Investing in Elan
- Elan empowers
- Experience Elan.

The findings suggested that the Engaging and innovative events project and, to a lesser extent, the Artists in Residence programme did draw a wider range of people to Elan for events, exhibitions and activity days. Similarly, Investing in Elan, Elan empowers and Experience Elan drew people to Elan from a broad range of backgrounds, both locals and people from the Midlands. Learning was certainly embedded in these three projects also. Making the most of Elan was focussed on developing access and recreational activities, from mountain biking to orienteering. Again, this broadened the range of visitors to Elan.

Friends of Elan did not really exist as a project. Volunteering was more of a cross-cutting theme, embedded in many different projects. The pandemic and lack of capacity to recruit, manage and support volunteers across the Scheme had a negative effect on levels of volunteering. While some project officers were able to recruit and train committed volunteers for focussed periods of activity, others found the demands of delivery too time-consuming to dedicate sufficient time for effective volunteer management.

Overlaid on the specific case of this Scheme was a national context for volunteering resulting from the pandemic, with WCVA data indicating that many people stopped volunteering during the pandemic and did not return⁶⁶. There was also a national shift towards informal and shorter periods of volunteering⁶⁷.

Nevertheless, there were commendable aspects of volunteering within the Scheme. The high standard of training offered was a theme running throughout the evaluation, contributing positively to the outcome. Where groups of committed volunteers were identified for archaeology, local history and, to a lesser extent, natural heritage work, the findings suggested they would carry on volunteering post-Scheme.

There was also learning from the Scheme, by EVT and DCWW in particular. The organisations had limited experience of working with volunteers prior to the Scheme. However, they came together in a new project as the Scheme ceased delivery to share a volunteer coordinator.

"I think we've also learned a little bit about the benefits and liabilities of volunteering [...]. We've got a more realistic sense of what can be achieved with volunteers than we did have, but enough to want to carry it on in potentially a slightly more focussed [way]."

⁶⁶ WCVA (2023) 'Wales facing national volunteer crisis', <https://wcva.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Press-release-Wales-Facing-Volunteer-Crisis.pdf>, accessed 18th March 2024.

⁶⁷ Kanemura, R., Chan, O. and Farrow, A. (2022) 'Time well spent: Impact of COVID-19 on the volunteer experience'. NCVO, <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-research-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-volunteer-experience/how-did-covid-19-change-volunteering/>, accessed 18th March 2024.

Overall, the outcome was largely achieved, with contributions from a wide range of projects. Significant lessons were learned about the value of volunteering and the resources necessary to create effective volunteering environments.

7.3.3 The range of recreational opportunities and ways to enjoy Elan improved

Making the most of Elan was the only project envisaged as contributing towards this outcome. In practice, many projects contributed. For example, the volunteer work undertaken within natural heritage through to cultural heritage and archaeology tended to be recreational activities which the findings suggested added to people's enjoyment of Elan.

Regardless of this added value, the Making the most of Elan project made an early and positive contribution to this outcome. The mid-term evaluation made the point that *'the success of the outcome lies in visitors actively using and enjoying these facilities'*. There was evidence to suggest such engagement was stimulated by the enhanced provision:

"I would say that's where its biggest successes are. From where I'm looking out the window now, the cycle, the two mass cycle routes which I think are part of Elan Links. [...] They are so popular. In fact, I can see a band only now. It's unbelievable how many people are using them. Which is obviously a knock-on effect to businesses and residents in Rhayader."

Tenant farmer

Further contributions towards this outcome are anticipated into the future, given the strategic plan for access and recreation agreed by EVT and DCWW.

Overall, the outcome was achieved.

7.3.4 More difficult to reach individuals engaged such that skills learned, confidence built, sense of achievement gained and a sense of the natural environment experienced

Three projects were intended to contribute towards this outcome:

- Investing in Elan
- Elan empowers
- Experience Elan.

Investing in Elan made a strongly positive contribution to the outcome. Despite the pandemic, 11% more people benefited overall than originally anticipated, with additional benefit from a higher percentage engaged in the longer interventions than

the five-day courses. Tir Coed maintained a clear focus on recruiting participants fully in line with the intended outcome.

Typically, only participants commented upon the benefits of Elan empowers, with this work tending to be invisible to most residents of the area. However, where the work was known, comments were positive:

“My son was on the Tir Coed training. Again, I sort of felt like that was another example of people coming in. But he’d been through it, and I’d met some of the people that had done the training. I think that was an exceptionally valuable part of the project.”

Member of community reflecting on initial view that Elan Links was ‘being done to’ the community, rather than influenced by the community

Elan empowers made a positive contribution to the outcome. Where possible, Tir Coed focussed on the intended target audiences, from families attracting free school meals to NEETS. Nevertheless, the pandemic effect was notable, shifting elements of delivery to open access, rather than targeted provision. While the findings indicated this delivered for local families, the approach may have diluted work with harder-to-reach participants.

Experience Elan made a limited contribution to the outcome. A stronger contribution was building prior to the pandemic. A combination of COVID reticence, inappropriate bunkhouse provision, cost to youth groups and lack of embeddedness in Midlands networks weakened the contribution overall.

Overall, the outcome was achieved.

7.3.5 Increased understanding of the importance of sustainable lifestyles for nature and society

Tap into it was the only project envisaged as contributing towards this outcome. In practice, many projects contributed. Training of natural heritage volunteers reinforced messages of sustainability that conservation volunteers already understood. A shift in thinking towards high nature value farming was evident amongst tenant farmers and the EVT. Some Artists in Residence challenged society to think about their use of and impact on natural resources.

“People keep saying, ‘Oh, we want to double the numbers or whatever, to the Estate.’ And it’s like, ‘Well, do we?’ We don’t want to double them. We want to make people that leave here get a connect and a better story of mid Wales. If there’s double the cars going through here, that’s like a climate problem. People that traditionally came to the Elan Valley would come, have a picnic, go for a walk, do the bird watching. Now it’s just like a drive route where you just stop and

click. And sometimes the people in Rhayader, it's just the visitor centre playground and the odd walk. And there are dog walkers and runners, they do use it. And the walking community that are from Rhayader that come up the Valley are really useful. I'd like to see that connection brought back."

Tenant farmer

The Tap into it project took a long time to make progress, but ultimately resulted in a positive relationship with Midlands Arts Centre, building on previous focus on Cannon Hill Park. The lack of embeddedness in the networks of the Midlands, plus the pandemic, were largely responsible for lack of early progress. Nevertheless, the range of events at MAC did raise understanding in Birmingham of where their water came from and the impact on Elan's story.

One partner advocated for the approach adopted through this project for winning hearts and minds for the sustainability agenda.

"Thirty, forty years of David Attenborough's programme telling you facts about climate change, and it doesn't make a difference. You need to have the emotional component, and that's delivered through the arts so they're not an add on."

Partner representative

Overall, this outcome was achieved.

7.3.6 Project legacies secured

The LCAP used the phrase '*embedding legacy at every turn*'. Certainly, the evaluators noted a focus on legacy by both Scheme Managers. The findings contained numerous examples of Scheme legacy.

The **design of the Scheme** led to legacy arising as a matter of course. Natural heritage projects surveyed repeatedly through their lifetime provided records to the local environmental records centre. This helped to establish trend data to inform future approaches. Habitat improvements sought to give various species the best chance of thriving. Historic monuments were better recorded, in turn informing their future treatment. The social history collection was catalogued, augmented and archived to preserve it for future generations while making it more accessible to a wider public.

Built environment legacy was delivered to an extent. Visitors into the future have better access routes, enhanced interpretation and improved leisure facilities.

Significant legacy was apparent in the way people were upskilled and inspired. Findings from artists to cultural and natural heritage volunteers revealed a '*golden thread*' of capacity-building that ran throughout Elan Links.

“One of the legacies I hope that we’ve left is bringing some of the participants, who are more like the person who’s never worked, who’s got a lot of social issues, to the Valley and changing them and the people around them in the Valley itself a little bit. Yeah. You can go and walk on our lovely boardwalk. That is a very obvious legacy, but hopefully it’s what we’ve implanted in people’s minds and attitudes.”

Representative of Tir Coed

While explicit in the projects led by Tir Coed, the wider work – from Artist in Residence masterclasses to training people in the use of collections software to undertaking survey work – was equally valid.

“It really felt like it was part of a movement, that in the future you look back, and that was a movement that was happening in the Elan Valley and how inspired. So fantastic.”

Partner representative in a wide-ranging discussion about Tir Coed working with young people, CARAD’s new museum and the impact of resident artists and work on archaeology

Major changes brought about through the Scheme were in **mindset**. Partners piloted new ways of working and new ways of looking at the land and its features. The changes in mindset were considered in line with the direction of policy and public opinion.

“I think things will change with the farming subsidies, [landowners and tenants] will have to have an understanding of the importance of habitat, but it’s also on archaeology as well. [...] And also with the carbon and the upland management of the upland peat areas, that’s another area which will have to be not just a project, which it will be, but it is part of the core business that we’re in. So, there’s a lot of elements within Elan Links which will be business as usual, but not necessarily in the same guise that it is now.”

Representative of EVT

Work on natural heritage projects and high nature value farming piloted by the Scheme were expected to continue if supported by emerging agricultural support schemes. Not only did the Natural Heritage sub-committee meet throughout the lifetime of the Scheme, but the members also determined to continue meeting in future to continue a focus on this work.

“[A tenant farmer] has said that she wants to fence a piece of land and regenerate it and see what happens, but manage regeneration. She wants to do a little bit of work for glow worms. They [tenant farmers] want to do a little bit of experimental peat restoration, but they want to do it sort of now as on individual

farms and individual farmers. So, they're taking on some of the stuff that we've been working on, which is great."

Partner representative

The Scheme changed the Partners, particularly the smaller organisations. Case study 7.1 relates how the Scheme left a lasting contribution to the area.

Case study 7.1 – Contribution to a revitalised museum

Two trustees of CARAD outlined the Scheme's contribution to Timescape Rhayader.

"So, in lockdown, we decided to redevelop the museum because we decided we needed a bigger visitor offer to attract more people through the doors and to kind of change the focus of the museum a bit. Partly probably to do with the Elan Links sort of subject matter that we've been looking at, but not entirely. But it did contribute. And in the past year, certainly, we have had financial support to be able to employ someone to help us finish the museum. That's been amazing, hasn't it? And resources to be able to do it."

"Yes. Some resources to be able to feature some aspects of the Elan Valley more in our museum here, and to be able to provide somewhere where some of the histories that have been collected during the project can be heard. And some of the films that were developed, the mining and the Roman marching camp films. So, we've acquired a touchscreen table that we can show the films and listen to all histories on."

"So, it'll be a legacy, really, of the project to share it with the general public."

Tir Coed largely delivered courses and activities aligned to their core experience and business, albeit at times to audiences from a different geography. Nevertheless, one experimental piece will lead to a legacy change.

"One of the exciting things, I think, for us, that we'll take away is [...] more in depth progression training, which was something we hadn't really had time or resources to do before [the Officer] raised the money so that we could employ six trainees for a number of weeks and they would build something substantial and it would be a little bit more like a short traineeship, not as big as an apprenticeship, but that was a new strand of work that I think we want to build on in the future."

Representative of Tir Coed

EVT representatives noted substantial change arising from the Scheme.

"The organisation has moved on a lot over the six-year period. We're not the same organisation by any means. [...] to make the decision to keep [the Natural

Heritage Officer] on board two days a week and to pay for that out of our own funds, we wouldn't have been in that place six years ago. Having the confidence to keep [Peatland Officer] on and working on Peatland stuff and the confidence to carry on applying for grants, to deliver for natural heritage stuff and the skill set to carry on applying for grants. We didn't have those when we applied for Elan Links."

Representative of EVT

The above quote touched on another feature of legacy, that of increased **confidence**. This was apparent across a wide range of findings. There was increased confidence to try new ways of working, deliver large-scale events, apply for significant grants and put in place long-term strategies to manage the land and its use. At the level of the individual, people had confidence to develop their careers in the arts, set up new businesses or simply complete a project for the first time in their lives.

In support of this improved confidence, **capacity** was added to enable future developments.

- The Scheme manager was retained for four days per week by EVT until July 2025 as a Partnerships Manager. The focus will be on developing the legacy of Elan Links. The Scheme partners committed to continuing with quarterly meetings to continue developing one or more new programmes.
- The Natural Heritage Officer was given a permanent contract for two days per week by EVT to continue conservation work.
- The Peat Bog Officer was retained by EVT for four days per week, again on a permanent contract.
- The Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Arts) will be retained until the end of June 2025 at CARAD for three days per week. Her work focussed on getting the Timescape Rhayader museum up and running with legacy content from the Scheme. There was an appetite from CARAD to retain her if they can source suitable funding.
- Independent of the Scheme, the Engagement, Education and Events Officer (Archaeology & History) and a member of the Tir Coed team set up Timescape Archaeology CIC when their employment by the Scheme ended. This new entity was based at CARAD. When his Scheme contract ended, the Officer approached 28 archaeology volunteers who had been trained by the Scheme. All indicated they were open to volunteering on projects with the CIC. Work to complete priority sites on project 4a was delivered by this new CIC and the volunteer team by May 2024.

-
- Cultural heritage work was continuing, led by a volunteer champion (the former Cultural Heritage Officer for the Scheme).

“So, I think off the back of it, there’s been experience and momentum to get further projects funded and happening. So that’s, I think, a great success.”

Partner representative

Historically, neither EVT nor DCWW had worked with volunteers. That was obvious from the way in which volunteers were viewed during one phase of the Scheme as match funding, rather than as a valuable practical resource. By the end of the Scheme, the view had been transformed to the extent that these partners were working together on a volunteering project with spin-offs into other projects needing volunteers, primarily in the area of nature conservation.

This example of EVT and DCWW working together was part of a wider picture of an increased openness to collaboration between partners. This was an indication of a set of **relationships that had matured** during the lifetime of the Scheme.

Interestingly, even some of the projects that did not succeed during the Scheme were reimagined and will be taken forward. The **lessons learned** from the Scheme were influencing the future. The key example was the Engineer’s House restoration, which will be a project within the Mid Wales Growth Deal. This Deal offers the potential of £21.7 million of work on Dŵr Cymru land for the benefit of Mid Wales.

“So, it does have its genesis in a lot of the work which has been done over many years to get to this point. Although it’s transformational, it isn’t sort of trying to reinvent things, it’s actually trying to build on what is being positive and what people are looking for, you know, identified the need.”

DCWW representative

Finally, the Scheme will leave behind a raised **profile** of the Elan Valley. This was apparent from interest in TV programmes such as *Countryfile* and sharing learning from the Scheme at COP26, through to global interest in artist residencies at Elan and continuing influence on artistic practice from the residencies. Ten films commissioned about all aspects of the Scheme, plus the publication of a book drawing together all the strands of the Scheme into a coherent narrative, will add to this legacy.

7.4 Additional lessons learned

7.4.1 Introduction

Most lessons learned have been embedded in discussion of outcomes and legacy. Some lessons learned did not sit naturally within that framework and are added here to inform future programmes.

7.4.2 Make intended outcomes explicit

The findings revealed partners and wider stakeholders typically wanted the Scheme to strengthen links between the Elan Valley and Rhayader. There was a desire for Rhayader to benefit from the Scheme, in part as the closest town to Elan Village. There were examples of such benefit within the findings, for example the work to support Timescape Rhayader and the support for local families through Elan Empowers. However, these examples were added value, rather than intended outcomes as they were not explicitly within the logic of the Scheme.

“What we didn’t do, and I think is a significant failing of the project, is we didn’t create links with Rhayader. Rhayader wasn’t included in the project area, and we didn’t engage with Rhayader the way we should.”

Member of the Elan Links team

This leads to a simple lesson for future projects: all intended outcomes of a project need to be articulated and made explicit so that they can form part of the project’s theory of change and embedded within project design.

7.4.3 Seeing firsthand is best

One of the Scheme’s partners identified a useful practice to incorporate into future project steering groups:

“What would you do differently? I think actually going. A lot of our meetings were inside around meeting tables, and I think actually going out and seeing bits of each other’s projects to really understand how else can we work together, and are we all really working [together]?”

Partner representative

7.4.4 Consult and then consult some more

The Scheme struggled to engage farmers at first. At the root of this was a feeling by tenant farmers that they had not been involved in designing the Scheme, and yet were expected to engage in delivery of several projects. People within EVT appeared to have learned from this experience.

“But they’re still saying to me, you know, we didn’t know what was going on. Nobody told us. We really want to be involved with our Valley, too. And so, you know, I think. I think our approach, the EVT’s approach would be different in the future.”

Representative of EVT

While open invitations to consult on projects under development may attract sufficient engagement to justify a project, it is nonetheless wise in developing projects to identify

gaps in engagement from key stakeholders. Further consultation needs to be actively targeted at these gaps.

7.5 Progress towards NLHF outcomes

The NLHF amended its objectives during the lifetime of Elan Links, most notably to incorporate a focus on wellbeing during and following the pandemic, then around four investment principles in 2023. However, this evaluation focussed on the original objectives, given that the Scheme was developed to align with these objectives. The findings of chapters four to six enabled projects to be mapped onto the NLHF objectives to which they contributed. Table 7.1 indicates that there were contributions to each NLHF objective from multiple projects within the Scheme.

Table 7.1 – Mapping of projects against NLHF objectives to which they contribute

Project	Heritage will be			People will have			Communities will		
	better managed	in better condition	identified / recorded	developed skills	learned about heritage	volunteered time	have negative environmental impacts reduced	have more and a wider range of people engaging with heritage	Have a local area / community which is a better place to live, work or visit
Healthy bogs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dry heath management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Improving our woodland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rare birds of Elan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rare species of Elan			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Elan hay meadows	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Elan rhos hay				✓					
Elan rams			✓						
Elan cattle	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Elan wethers									
Safeguarding Elan's historic environment			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Increasing access to Elan's archaeological	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓

and built heritage									
The Engineer's House									
Cwm Clyd Farmstead	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓
Elan links: people to collections	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Interpreting Elan					✓			✓	✓
Elan interactive					✓			✓	✓
Artist residencies				✓	✓			✓	✓
Engaging and innovative events				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Friends of Elan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Making the most of Elan					✓			✓	✓
Investing in Elan	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Elan empowers				✓	✓			✓	✓
Experience Elan				✓	✓			✓	✓
Tap into it					✓			✓	

8. Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Headline conclusions

"I think the whole Scheme has made us aware of how valuable nationally the landscape is, particularly with the archaeology and the number of sites and the rare species there. So, it has kind of emphasised why, quantified, why it's a special place, a nationally valuable place."
Partner representative

Table 8.1 summarises achievements towards the approved purposes of the Scheme. It makes clear that the Scheme achieved a large measure of success.

Table 8.1 Summary of progress towards approved purposes

Approved purposes	Status	Comment
18,000-plus hectares of semi-natural habitat more resilient	Largely achieved	See (a) below
1,037 hectares of habitat managed to deliver favourable conservation status	Largely achieved	See (a) below
40 of Elan's most at risk built and archaeological sites safeguarded	Exceeded	See (b) below
Increased public access to 6 different heritage sites at Elan	Exceeded	
Renovation and new uses for 2 historic buildings	Partially achieved	
Creation of an online archive	Largely achieved	See (c) below
An enhanced collection of materials and oral histories	Achieved	
Innovative and engaging interpretation facilities	Achieved	
Improved range and quality of recreational facilities	Achieved	
New audiences and wider range of people engaged	Achieved	
1,200 harder-to-reach individuals from local communities have engaged with the heritage of Elan	Exceeded	
160 young, educationally disadvantaged people, NEETS, young offenders, the unemployed and those receiving ESA will have received training in the natural environment	Exceeded	

1,000 people from harder-to-reach groups from the Birmingham area will have benefited from a retreat at Elan	Partially achieved	335 participants
8 smaller / community projects / events in the Birmingham area	Achieved	
10,000 people from the communities of Birmingham and the Midlands area are more aware of where their water comes from through a campaign to raise awareness about their water quality, sustainability and sensible use of a precious resource. Of these people, 2,500 visit Elan for the first time	Exceeded	See (d) below
High-visibility acknowledgement of the National Lottery Heritage Fund on site, online and in all activities	Achieved	
Develop and deliver a plan for how you will use your project to thank National Lottery players for their support	Achieved	

- (a) The targets of 18,000 ha of semi-natural habitat being more resilient and 1,037 ha of habitat managed to deliver favourable conservation status included elements of double counting, i.e. they were based on adding areas of habitat within each project. Consequently, some areas of improved bogs or dry heathland, for example, were also counted as areas improved for specific species. The inability to apply a 450 ha tick control zone for red grouse represented the only significant aspect where the approved purposes were not achieved.
- (b) In addition to action on 15 'priority 1' sites, 57 new monuments were identified for scheduling.
- (c) The archive was created. Some was made available online via the People's Collection Wales and Manorial Records at the National Archives, but more needed to be done to make the full archive available online.
- (d) The number of people with increased awareness of where their water comes from was vastly exceeded. The number making a trip to Elan as a result was unknown.

8.2 Detailed conclusions and recommendations

The **Partnership** was established for the Scheme. Despite differences of size, scope and culture, the relationships between partners matured. This arose through working together on practical challenges in delivering projects and significant contextual issues, chiefly dealing with the pandemic.

The **pandemic** had a significant effect on the Scheme. It came as projects were gathering momentum, effectively requiring a restart for many projects in 2022.

Activities requiring public participation were particularly affected, but the Elan Links team were largely able to recover momentum, aided by a Scheme extension for 2023/24.

Recruitment challenges and turnover of **staff** were significant issues throughout much of the Scheme's lifetime. Recruitment challenges appeared to be a feature of working life in Mid Wales, primarily due to the low population density. More generally, staff turnover can be relatively common in project-based work where employment contracts are temporary. Nevertheless, additional factors appeared to be at work. The part-time nature of most Elan Links contracts, coupled with large workloads, appeared to be key factors influencing recruitment and retention. It was notable that officers in post at the end of the Scheme were all very experienced *self-starters*.

Recommendation 1: Where possible, partners should seek to offer permanent or full-time employment opportunities if they wish to attract and retain employees within the area.

Recommendation 2: Sufficient managerial capacity needs to be in place to support employees in order to aid retention and development.

Recommendation 3: Sufficient staff capacity needs to be built into the design of future projects to enable achievement of outcomes, while enabling job satisfaction.

Moreover, the Scheme delivery was largely within project siloes *owned* by individual officers. While ownership of project targets provided focus and may have been a significant motivator for target achievement, more collaboration may have been helpful also, enabling officers to draw on the strengths of the team rather than expecting individuals to excel at all aspects of project delivery. For example, some projects required nature conservation, event organisation and volunteer recruitment and management. These are different skills and potentially greater effectiveness and job satisfaction would have arisen from different team members having delivered each type of activity.

Recommendation 4: In seeking to deliver future projects, partners should look at the skillset of the entire team to determine how best to deliver intended outcomes.

Beyond staff resources, **volunteering** was a feature of the Scheme, although not to the extent originally envisaged. The pandemic was a key negative influence on volunteering. However, the way volunteer recruitment and management was structured for much of the Scheme was suboptimal. Lessons had been learned by the end of the Scheme about the value of volunteers and the capacity required to manage volunteers effectively.

Recommendation 5: Sufficient capacity needs to be built into future projects to recruit, manage, support and retain volunteers.

The Scheme leveraged in **additional resources**. There were instances where delivery of these additional project funds shifted focus away from delivery of the NLHF-supported work. Nevertheless, all additional funding and support did contribute to achievement of the Scheme's intended outcomes, so the overall effect of the additional resources was complementary and overwhelmingly positive.

Monitoring of Scheme outputs and outcomes was inconsistent and displayed weaknesses. Experience from evaluating other complex and multi-faceted schemes suggested a simple progress tracker regularly updated by officers could have made the job of the Scheme Manager easier, while acknowledging that the use of short reports was better for presenting the key issues to the Partnership.

Recommendation 6: Managers of future projects are encouraged to consistently monitor output / outcome progress towards targets in a simple progress tracker.

Weaknesses in **stakeholder engagement** were a recurring theme of the evaluation. Tenant farmers felt they had not been consulted during the development phase. Stakeholders suggested there was no coherent marketing strategy, with project officers largely managing the promotion of their own projects. There was an acceptance that few residents of the Elan Valley or Rhayader would recognise the coherent story underpinning the variety of projects making up the Scheme. Quite simply, the Scheme delivered far more benefits in and around the Elan Valley than residents of the Valley or Rhayader would know. Partners did learn lessons along the way – for example, significant effort was put in to working with tenant farmers and the book was an attempt to tell the story of Elan Links, almost as an apologetic. Nevertheless, the Scheme would have benefited from a marketing officer to provide capacity for this activity.

Recommendation 7: Partners should ensure sufficient marketing capacity is embedded in future projects to engage effectively with the full range of stakeholders, promoting the opportunities offered by the project and raising the profile of achievements.

People development was a strength of the Scheme, which left a notable legacy. It was evident in all aspects of the Scheme, from training volunteers in species surveying to archaeology. Tenant farmers were introduced to new ways of working and Artists in Residence worked with school children to local artists. The findings suggested the work undertaken by artists and archaeologists, in particular, left a legacy of volunteer archaeology capacity strengthened and local artists inspired / re-engaged. Work with harder-to-reach individuals was a commendable feature of the Scheme, raising the

confidence of many, enabling some to enter employment or change career direction, and encouraging others to undertake further studies.

The **outcomes** of the Scheme were largely achieved, as rehearsed in the previous chapter, with useful **lessons learned** and **legacy** secured.

Significant progress was achieved in **restoring or enhancing habitats** for the benefit of nature. Learning was substantial through demonstrator projects and was successful in engaging land managers. The land managers of the Elan Valley became well-positioned to take advantage of agricultural grants through the emerging *public money for public goods* agenda and the wider funded response to the climate emergency.

Short-term gains for the benefit of **rare species** were limited, with outcomes for curlew only just emerging as the Scheme finished its work. Nevertheless, there was much to celebrate. The mindsets of those managing and working the land were changing in favour of high nature value work. Moreover, the logic of the Scheme suggested work on habitat restoration should improve the potential for rare species to benefit as time goes on. Clearly, it can take many years for trees to grow and flora to regenerate after interventions. In due course, more benefits for rare species may emerge from the work undertaken through the Scheme.

Recommendation 8: Survey work undertaken through Elan Links should continue into the future to understand the extent of biodiversity improvements and species recovery over time, informing future activity.

The **sustainability of Elan's traditional high nature value farming** demonstrator projects were important. They identified some approaches that were beneficial to nature, which farmers would deliver if supported by sustainable agriculture payments. Work on hay meadows and use of cattle in the Valley were highlights of the approach. The demonstrator projects were also of value in ruling out other approaches, such as wethers as traditional meat, and rhos hay as bedding or winter feed. Nevertheless, while rhos hay was not valued by most, the findings included one example of an entrepreneurial farmer creating a new business from the initiative. While the ram scheme failed to operate as intended, as a means of breeding from the best Elan Valley sheep, the project proved to be one of the best ways of engaging tenant farmers who had largely opted out of the Scheme initially.

The **archaeological** work of the Scheme proved to be a highlight for many. The number of new monuments and sites recorded was both substantial and significant. This engaged people living in the Valley and attracted widespread interest from volunteers. The training given to volunteers was exemplary, leaving a highly engaged and capable group of archaeology volunteers who continued to support archaeological work into 2024.

Recommendation 9: In light of the large number of monuments and historic sites recorded by the Scheme, the Partnership should work with CADW to explore ways to enable a wider public to engage with the sites, potentially physically or virtually.

Access to and the condition of **historical sites** was improved. Innovative techniques such as the creation of CGI films and story maps and using Minecraft to engage audiences that could not reach or might not immediately appreciate historic sites were of particular note. The number of people attending the archaeology and history festival in 2023 was significant. It was noted that DCWW was planning a similar event in 2024. Such large yet relatively short events may prove a good way of balancing competing demands of driving up visits to the Elan Valley while not spoiling, for the majority of the year, the tranquillity for its human and wildlife residents.

Recommendation 10: Partners keen to drive up visitor numbers to the Elan Valley might wish to consider the approach of large events as a means of concentrating busyness into relatively short periods of time.

The above needs to be considered together with recommendation 16.

Aligned with this idea of increased visitor opportunities was an **improved offer for visitors** in terms of recreational activities and interpretation. The selection of bike trails, orienteering courses and walks fitted with the outdoor experience in the Elan Valley landscape advocated by some local land managers. The findings certainly suggested that the bike trails were popular with visitors. The strategic plan for access and recreation agreed by DCWW and EVT offered potential benefits for visitors into the future.

Projects intended to improve the **sustainability of Elan's built heritage** suffered from underestimates of restoration costs. In part, this was due to cost escalation arising from supply-chain challenges during the pandemic. However, the Cwm Clyd Farmstead redevelopment was an example of insufficient feasibility work leading to a redevelopment that only partially met the needs of intended users.

Recommendation 11: Future capital redevelopment works should undertake robust feasibility work to ensure that the resulting building meets the needs of intended users in full.

The **archive** was secured, catalogued and enlarged. Some elements were accessible to the public. A final piece of work would enable full access. Ideally, this would tie to the National Archives, making the catalogue available to a global audience. While this would maximise the potential access, the findings also made clear that the greatest

interest may be local, due to personal connections and the vibrancy of the Historical Rhayader and Surrounding Area group online.

Recommendation 12: The Partnership should consider completing the work of getting the archive online, ideally linked to the National Archives to give the archive maximum exposure to a wider audience.

Recommendation 13: The Partnership should seek to maximise opportunities for items from the archive to be displayed locally, perhaps through rotating mini-exhibitions or space within the new Timescape Rhayader and/or the DCWW Visitor Centre.

The effect of the **Artists in Residence** programme was wide ranging and brought significantly more impact than anticipated by some stakeholders at the beginning of the Scheme. The findings made clear that the residency programme had a global reach in the arts community and the diversity of artists involved enabled a wide range of local stakeholders to be engaged. Wherever this engagement took place, whether with farmers, school children or local artists, the findings suggested that positive sentiment was generated. Moreover, the findings suggested that artists engaged during a residency continued to raise the profile of Elan by means of their practice being affected through the residency.

Arts-based projects formed one of two themes that particularly raised the profile of the Valley:

- Nature recovery work / high nature value farming featured on an episode of BBC *Countryfile* and in a film showcased at COP26
- The Watershed exhibition and smaller collaborations at MAC / Cannon Hill Park.

It seemed likely that nature recovery work / high nature value farming will continue in the Elan Valley through EVT but more generally within the farming community if supported by Welsh Government and NRW. Promotion of EVT's ongoing work will keep the agricultural community in the minds of policy makers, opening opportunities to influence emerging policies.

Recommendation 14: The Partnership should continue to publicise its nature recovery / high nature value farming work in order to influence the agricultural policy agenda in Wales.

The arts-based work, while championed by CARAD, would benefit from the support of other Partners to enhance capacity. The mid-term evaluation suggested Elan could be for the arts what Hay-on-Wye has become for literature. The findings of the final evaluation led to a slightly more nuanced view, that Elan could be the Cheltenham of

Mid Wales, i.e. a place where there are multiple festivals in an annual calendar but where the residents and wildlife are left undisturbed to live a quieter life outside those festival periods. An annual archaeology festival has already been noted. An annual arts festival, with linkages to an arts residency programme, would be another opportunity. Such a multi-festival approach would offer tangible opportunities to work with businesses of Rhayader, Llandrindod Wells and Builth Wells to create value for the local economy and cultural enrichment opportunities for people of Mid Wales, and beyond.

Recommendation 15: The Partnership should consider perpetuating the Artists in Residence programme as a means of raising the profile of the Elan Valley to a wider audience and positioning Elan as a Mid Wales epicentre for the arts.

Recommendation 16: The Partnership should consider whether an annual programme of festivals linked to the Elan Valley (initially arts and archaeology) would, on balance, be of benefit for local people.

Efforts to engage people in **Birmingham** and the wider Midlands proved particularly challenging because the Partnership had limited links into the area's networks. It was not until the collaboration with MAC was developed that progress gathered momentum. In hindsight, a member of staff based in the area would have been beneficial. Similarly, Birmingham was not represented within the Partnership, a significant gap in representation for a key group of stakeholders. The right representative on the Partnership Board could have facilitated links for the Scheme.

Recommendation 17: In designing future projects, representation of all key stakeholder groups needs to be embedded in partnerships, perhaps through an appropriately networked member of staff or through representation on a steering group.

Recommendation 18: If the Partnership wishes to continue building links to Birmingham, effort should be put into maintaining and developing collaborations with MAC, using it as a springboard to develop wider links.

Scheme legacy was substantial, as rehearsed within 7.3.6. It included:

- tangible legacy in the form of improved habitats
- land more suited to carbon sequestration
- survey trend data to inform future interventions
- early signs of successful support for curlew and potential for habitat work to translate into support for other rare species
- new historical monuments identified and a huge number of monuments and sites correctly located and identified
- historic buildings and sites in a better condition

-
- a managed archive of the Elan Valley
 - better interpretation
 - more recreational facilities
 - capacity built in natural heritage, archaeology, the arts and woodland practices
 - educational resources
 - Timescape Rhayader (a partial contribution to this legacy)
 - key staff being retained by EVT to deliver habitat conservation, enhanced carbon sequestration and development of the partnerships created through the Scheme
 - the creation of two new businesses, one of which kept a key member of staff in the area.

Each of these and other tangible legacies was positive. Some of the less tangible legacies may prove of equal or greater value in the long term. There was a greater **openness** from key stakeholders to think differently, in particular amongst land managers. The findings suggested the Partners had improved **confidence** to tackle major developments and put forward significant projects for the benefit of Mid Wales. At a more individual level, trainees from harder-to-reach groups had their confidence boosted.

Finally, some general lessons learned can help to improve future projects.

The findings suggested that aspirations to benefit Rhayader had not been made explicit in the Scheme, so benefits realised for Rhayader tended to be serendipitous or driven by individuals, rather than designed into the Scheme.

Recommendation 19: In developing future projects, partners need to make explicit all intended outcomes, so that they can be embedded in project design.

A key stakeholder group, tenant farmers, did not feel they had been consulted in the development phase of the Scheme. Potentially, projects would have been better defined and had earlier engagement if representatives of this group had been more involved during the development phase.

Recommendation 20: All key stakeholder groups need to be consulted effectively in the development of future projects, with additional effort required to target engagement with harder-to-reach groups.

The Partnership matured well and meetings were reportedly effective. An improvement could have been more site visits by the Partnership Board to understand progress and complementarity with their own interests.

Recommendation 21: Steering groups of future projects should consider more site visits as part of meetings, if appropriate to the project.

Annex A – Elan Links logic table

Inputs	Activities/processes	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NLHF funding Partner funding – cash and in-kind Volunteer time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of blanket bog on Elan's upland plateau Restoration of 73 hectares of dry heath Clearance of invasive plant species Thinning of overwhelming plant species Tree planting Improve habit to improve breeding chances for rare upland birds Monitor rare species Hay meadows improved Restoration of rhos hay habitat Establishment of co-operative sheep breeding scheme to safeguard the Elan Valley-type Welsh Mountain sheep Reintroduction / increase of cattle grazing Testing wether meat at local catering outlets Access improved to built and ancient heritage Excavation of archaeological sites Surveying archaeological and built heritage sites Interpretation of built heritage sites undertaken Restoration of Engineer's House and Cwm Clyd Farmstead 	Natural Heritage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 590 hectares improved for specific species needs 109 hectares of woodland in better condition for their identified priority wildlife 81 hectares of woodland under sustainable grazing practices 73 hectares of dry heath restored 73 hectares of thinning completed to enhance ecological under-storey 42 hectares of land cleared of rhododendron 20 hectares of eroded and degraded bog better managed / restored 20 hectares of rhos hay habitat restored 12 hectares of hay meadow under favourable management 9 hectares of bracken management 8 hectares of native oak planting 30 supporting your natural heritage days 3 on-farm trials Co-operative sheep breeding scheme for Elan farmers 5 farmers supported to reintroduce and/or increase cattle numbers 45 secured cows grazing the Elan Links area More effective woodland management A management plan for the woodland landscape laying out management for the next 25 years Management and burning plans and in-by field management plan Elan Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) updated New records for the Local Record Centre (LRC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Important habitats restored and enhanced Key species conserved Sustainability of Elan's traditional high nature value farming improved Key built and heritage sites protected to safeguard and maintain their condition for the future Access and sustainable use for Elan's built heritage Elan's diverse cultural heritage recorded, ensuring accessibility and benefit into the future Engaging and innovative ways of narrating Elan's heritage to a wider audience developed, to increase the impact of Elan's heritage The number and range of people experiencing Elan as visitors, volunteers and learners increased Range of recreational ways to enjoy Elan improved More difficult to reach individuals engaged such that skills learned, 	<p>The unique and varied heritage of Elan safeguarded, while significantly enhancing outcomes for people, communities and heritage for the long term</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of memories (oral history), documents and artefacts • Uploading oral histories and artefacts to online databases • Meetings of historical interest group • Artist residencies held, with accompanying workshops, peer mentoring and exhibitions • Cultural events held • Two exhibitions held per year • Development and delivery of visitor app • Delivery of promotional campaigns • Meetings of film and media group • Production of films • Volunteers recruited, trained and supported • Development of cycling, walking and orienteering routes, including more accessible routes • Delivery of development programmes for the more difficult to reach people of the area • Delivery of special activity days to enable those from the area with least opportunity to engage with the natural heritage of Elan to do so • Delivery of 'Experience Elan' weekend retreats for harder-to- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual records of 'location-of-origin' ram usage by participating farmers. <p>Built & Ancient Heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elan's Heritage at Risk Audit updated on a yearly basis • 34 of Elan's most at risk built and archaeological sites safeguarded • Inadequately surveyed areas resurveyed • At-risk historically important buildings restored and brought into sustainable use • Increased public access to 6 different heritage sites <p>Cultural Heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online archive • 250 oral histories collected • 10 people actively gathering stories of the area • 7 sharing history days • 5 sharing history days in Elan / Rhayader • 2 sharing history days in Birmingham <p>People learning and engaging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25,000 visitors will engage with a particular strand of Elan's diverse heritage • 10,000 people from the communities of Birmingham and the Midlands are more aware of where their water comes from through a campaign to raise awareness about water quality, sustainability and sensible use of precious resource, and 2,500 visit Elan for the first time. 	<p>confidence built, sense of achievement gained and sense of natural environment experienced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of sustainable lifestyles for nature and society increased • Project legacies secured 	
--	--	--	---	--

	<p>reach people from Birmingham / the Midlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach activities held in Birmingham / the Midlands • Raising awareness within Birmingham / the Midlands of water-based link with Elan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,500 people have engaged with partner events in Birmingham • 25 schools engaged through the use of the portable water learning resource, resulting in 1,500 school children being more aware of where their water comes from • 1,000 people from harder-to-reach groups from the Birmingham area benefited from a retreat at Elan • 1,200 harder-to-reach individuals from local communities have engaged with the heritage of Elan • 10 Elan Links specific exhibitions • At least 60 Love Elan e-news bulletins & 60 social media items posts • At least 5 larger scale themed social media campaigns • 100 events which engage with the different strands of Elan's diverse heritage and involve our different target audiences • 14 open days at each of the newly renovated at-risk buildings • Yearly event programme developed and printed to include input and events from all partnership organisations and Elan Links projects • 1 multi-functioning app which at least 15,000 people have downloaded • Increased public access to 6 different heritage sites at Elan • Improved access and recreation activities across Elan • 8 smaller outreach community projects / events in Birmingham / Midlands area • 1 launch event at Cannon Hill Park 		
--	--	--	--	--

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Cloud to Tap Festival • 5,000 members of the public interacting with artists through talks, led walks, workshops and exhibitions • Children's activity table and family explorer backpacks • 388 people trained • 290 training days in sustainable land management and green wood craft • 240 (10 x 24) days' training courses • 50 (10 x 5) days' intensive training courses • 80 creative young people working with established artists • 30 supporting your natural heritage days with 300 people attending over the 5 years • 1 woodland craft day to celebrate works and products of the woodlands • 4 Creative Wales Fellowships • 1 social science research project <p>Volunteering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14,400 volunteer days in sustainable land management and green wood craft • 2,400 volunteer days in further more specialised tasks in sustainable land management and green wood craft • 27 stakeholder days for natural heritage projects • 7 demonstrating and volunteering days for natural heritage projects • 25 volunteers engaged with woodland tasks with the Rangers • 15 volunteers engaged with built and ancient heritage 		
--	--	---	--	--

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 volunteers engaged with access & recreation • At least 25 groups of people supported with a bespoke activity & events which link to one or more of Elan's diverse heritage strands 		
--	--	--	--	--

Assumptions underpinning the programme's logic

Landscape Partnership Schemes work on a vision expected to extend to multiple decades. Delivery of the NLHF-supported LPS is expected to establish what works and put in place a legacy plan for the future.

The landscape character of Elan Links was dramatically changed only within the last 120 years, whereas the uplands and ancient heritage evolved over thousands or many hundreds of years.

The logic model provides the majority of but not all activities and outputs.

Annex B – Research framework

Area of questioning	Source of research insight						
	Management information	Project team / Scheme partners	Volunteers	Residents of locality	Businesses of locality (includes farms)	Visitors	Birmingham / Midlands residents
		Interviews Case studies	Interviews Surveys Case studies Monitoring information	Interviews Surveys Case studies Monitoring information	Interviews Surveys Case studies Monitoring information	Interviews Surveys Case studies Monitoring information	Interviews Surveys Case studies Monitoring information
Rationale: To what extent does the rationale for the scheme / specific project still hold?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Inputs: Does the scheme / project have:							
• appropriate and sufficient expertise?		X	X				
• appropriate and sufficient financial resources?	X	X					
• the most effective design to achieve intended outcomes?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Activities / processes Does the project have:							
• appropriate and effective governance?	X	X					
• appropriate working partnership arrangements?		X	X				
• effective promotion?		X	X	X	X	X	X
• affective stakeholder engagement mechanisms?		X	X	X	X	X	X

continue work beyond Scheme lifetime	X	X	X	X	X		
• Unintended outcomes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Attribution / Counterfactual / Deadweight/ Displacement							
• What would have happened in the absence of the Elan Links Scheme? (Was there any trend data prior to the scheme?)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
• Are there any comparable projects in the vicinity creating overspill or deadweight in the scheme area?		X	X	X	X	X	X
• How many of the project outcomes would have arisen without NLHF support, i.e. deadweight?		X	X	X	X	X	X
• Is there evidence of negatives having been displaced out of the Elan Links region into neighbouring areas by the scheme?		X	X	X	X	X	X

Annex C – Sample topic guide for semi-structured interviews

Topic Guide 4 – Delivery team – Final Year

- Introduce purpose of evaluation
- Informed consent
- Don't have to answer any of my questions

Narrative Inquiry

1. Could you talk me through each of your projects, what you did, the challenges you faced, and successes won?
2. Do you feel the resources available to you on each project were sufficient?
[Prompt: If 'no', why was that?]
3. On reflection, do you feel the way your projects were envisaged were the best way of achieving their intended outcomes?
[Prompt: Considering effectiveness of project design]

Activities / processes

4. Again, thinking about your projects, who were the key partners and how did these relationships work out in practice?
5. Who were the wider stakeholders for your projects and to what extent did you manage to engage them?
[Prompt: volunteers, local people, Birmingham residents etc.]
6. To what extent were your projects promoted and by what means?
7. Could you tell me about linkages between your projects and other projects within the scheme? Can you give me examples of complementarity such that the scheme was greater than the sum of the parts?
8. What have been some of the highlights of the scheme, from your perspective?

Outputs

9. To what extent do you feel your projects met targets? Why do you say this?
 10. [If targets not met] Why do you think these targets were not being achieved?
-

Outcomes

Wording of questions depend on who is being interviewed

11. What differences have you observed / become aware of in the physical environment (natural or built) during the life of the scheme?
12. What differences have you observed / become aware of in local resident groups / local businesses / residents of Birmingham / visitors?
[Prompts, as necessary: more engaged in Elan, working together, more proactive, changed perceptions, greater connection with place ...]
13. To what extent are your projects changing perceptions about / within the Elan Valley and environs?
14. To what extent are your projects having an impact on the local economy?
15. Thinking about scheme legacy, to what extent will activities from your projects become part of 'business as usual' for partners by the end of the project?
16. To what extent have partners or stakeholders built capability and confidence?
17. To what extent have partners or stakeholders developed the will to continue work beyond the scheme lifetime?

Lessons learned

18. Is there anything that has been learned during delivery that can inform design of future projects?

Attribution / deadweight / displacement

19. To what extent have you been able to tie project activities with other projects / community activities? Has this duplicated or enhanced reach / delivery?

Close

20. Is there anything else you would like to say about the scheme or your projects?

Annex D – Artist in Residence evaluation workshop

Artist in Residence (AiR) evaluation workshop

10.00–12.30, 6th December 2023

Zoom

10.00–10.10 Introductions / Setting the scene

10.10–10.40 The Process – Part 1 – Selecting AiR

The calls for AiR tended to have an open brief and drew large numbers of applicants at varying stages in their artistic careers. A panel had the task of identifying preferred artists from over 100 applicants on each call. This translated into highly varied AiR in style and media used. Some AiR focussed on developing relationships with individuals at Elan, others with local organisations, and others with partners further afield, such as Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham.

- What worked well from your / your organisation's perspective?
- What proved challenging from your / your organisation's perspective?

10.40–11.10 The Process – Part 2 – Supporting AiR

The off-grid experience appeared to appeal to the AiR. Support of accommodation plus £3,000 for preparation, four weeks on site, a report and follow-up activity was offered. This attracted not just UK artists but those from further afield. Some AiR appreciated introductions to a great many individuals / organisations, while others preferred to establish their own connections.

- What worked well from your / your organisation's perspective?
- What proved challenging from your / your organisation's perspective?

11.10–11.20 Break

11.20–11.50 Difference made – Share stories

It would be helpful to hear stories about the difference the AiR programme (or individual residencies) made. Alongside the successes, perhaps there were opportunities missed also? Some suggested areas for consideration:

- People inspired or challenged within the Valley, e.g. local artists, residents (including children)
- Raising the profile of Elan in Wales, in Birmingham, globally ...
- The artistic community
- Enduring legacy, e.g. arts groups formed, people inspired to start an arts-based career

11.50–12.20 The future – Let your imagination roam

Given the learning rehearsed today, what appetite might there be (particularly at an organisation level amongst partners) for follow-up activity and what might it look like?

- More of the same?
- Art linking Elan to a wider world, e.g. partnerships with Aberystwyth and Midlands Arts Centres deepened or replicated elsewhere?
- An Elan arts festival (Brecon has a jazz festival, Hay has a literature festival ...)?
- Something completely different?

12.20–12.30 Recap, next steps and close