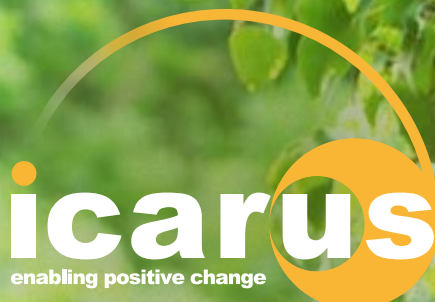


NATURAL
ENGLAND

BIG
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Executive Summary



Access to Nature: Creating the Legacy

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This paper provides a summary of the measures taken by projects funded by Access to Nature to ensure a legacy from their work. Access to Nature was funded by the Big Lottery Fund and run by Natural England as a Changing Spaces award partner. £28.75 million was distributed to 115 projects, all of which were aligned with two or more overarching programme level outcomes, including a compulsory requirement to work towards building ownership with local communities.

This focus on ensuring a sustainable future for projects' work was further reinforced when an additional £1.37 million was made available to the Access to Nature programme as part of the Big Lottery Fund's Supporting Change and Impact initiative. The goal was to give existing projects, in the last 18 months of their funding, vital time to review how they worked and how they could become more sustainable.

Projects worked towards creating a legacy in a number of ways. Operating within an increasingly uncertain and volatile funding environment, many organisations employed multiple strategies to build a future for their work after Access to Nature. Their efforts are described in this report and organised under five broad areas of legacy-related activity.

- Creating resources that help people access the natural environment.
- Disseminating project learning.
- Embedding the learning from their Access to Nature project within the host and / or partner organisations.
- Continuing activities funded initially by Access to Nature by securing ongoing funding or resourcing.
- Putting structures in place to further the work initiated by Access to Nature.

Creating the legacy

This paper showcases the many ways in which Access to Nature projects sought to create a legacy. It illustrates how projects have responded to the programme's aspirations to 'build a sense of ownership' of the natural environment (Outcome 5), and capitalised on the opportunities presented by Supporting Change and Impact to ensure the benefits of their work are 'sustained longer term'.

Creating resources that facilitate access to the natural environment

Many projects have created resources to guide people to local sites, highlighting the many social, physical, recreational and educational activities that can be enjoyed outdoors. Others focused on building the capacity of teachers, volunteers and group leaders to support others to utilise and benefit from the natural environment. In promoting these resources, organisations have made use of social media and other online platforms to reach a wide audience. Partners have played an important role, sometimes offering to house and disseminate resources for local communities to access.

The dissemination of project learning

Conferences, training courses, local networks and celebration events have all provided opportunities for projects to share their learning and showcase their achievements. Although it is too early to gauge the impact of this work, there are early indications that their dissemination activities have allowed some projects to secure new commissions and develop new collaborations, which will enable them to continue their work after Access to Nature.

Project learning embedded in the host organisation and / or with partners

There is evidence from the programme to indicate that many projects have succeeded in their ambition to change the way people are engaged in the natural environment. The principles of community engagement and empowerment that were prominent in Access to Nature are now applied more widely by project hosts and their partners; methods and approaches that were trialed through Access to Nature are recognised as good practice and are being replicated in other settings; a wide range of organisations, from schools and Children's Centres to housing providers and faith groups, now have the skills and confidence to engage others in the natural environment.

Project activities continuing due to ongoing funding / resourcing

Unsurprisingly, grant funding has played an important role in the continuation of project activities. The list of funders that are now investing in continuation / legacy activities is impressive and an illustration of the broad appeal of activities that engage people in the natural environment. This is not, however, the only mechanism through which continuation funding has been secured: some projects have succeeded in repackaging their offer for target audiences and have been able to charge a fee for participation in specific activities; and others have secured new commissions from strategic partners or found a way of retaining posts so that key staff can take the work forward.

Structures in place to further the work initiated by Access to Nature

Projects have contributed to the establishment and consolidation of local structures that support the ongoing engagement of non-traditional audiences in the natural environment. Local groups are a critical part of these community structures and many are now in a stronger position to organise and deliver activities outdoors. New partnerships and collaborations have been forged between non-environmental organisations and wildlife / conservation sites and groups and new communication channels have been created. Recently designated as Local Nature Reserves, some sites now have the potential to attract new resources and become a focus point for volunteer engagement.

It is also the case that there is a commitment in Natural England to learn and share the lessons from Access to Nature. Work has been done in bringing people together from a range of organisations to disseminate the learning and sow the seeds for further initiatives.

Conclusion

What this shows is the degree to which Access to Nature, via both Natural England itself and the funded projects, has created a significant legacy both for people and the natural environment. The funding has made a discernable difference in many communities and for numerous individuals. Lives have been changed by the programme; natural places have seen improvements that enable improved access and aid biodiversity; and people have come together to enjoy and care for the natural places around them. This is a great testament to the investments made by Access to Nature.