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# Northern Heartlands Great Place Scheme Final Evaluation & Completion Report



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October 2020



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## Abbreviations used in text

AB	(NH) Advisory Board	HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
ACE	Arts Council England	HoT	Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	IE	Independent Evaluator/ Evaluation
BOP	Burns Owens Partnership	IMD	Index/ indices of multiple deprivation
CC	Culture Counts on-line evaluation platform	LAG	Learning Advisory Group
CDCF	County Durham Community Foundation	MTR	Mid-term Evaluation Review/ Report
CF	NH Community Facilitator/s	M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
CIC	Community Interest Company	NE	Natural England
CIO	Charitable Incorporated Organisation	NH	Northern Heartlands Great Place/ Scheme
DCC	Durham County Council	NLHF	National Lottery Heritage Fund
DWT	Durham Wildlife Trust	NPO	Not-for profit organisation/s OR ACE National Portfolio Organisation/s
ELC	European Landscape Convention	PDG	(NH) Programme Delivery Group
EOPR	End-of-project partner payment request and evaluation report	PS	Project Summary
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations	TAP	Teesdale Action Partnership
HE	Historic England	UTASS	Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support
		VCD	Visit County Durham

**Codes used to identify respondents** throughout this report are as follows:

**PA** = participant in one or more *NH* events or activities; **PL** = project lead, partner representative or delivery team; **V** = volunteer; **CF** = met with an *NH* Community Facilitator **NP** = aware of *NH* but non participant; **NA** = unaware of *NH* until approached as part of this evaluation.

**The *NH* core team are referred to where necessary by their initials:**

**JC** = Jill Cole, Director; **ED** = Emily Diamand, Head of Learning and Influence; **AC** = Anna Collins and **TI** = Tariq Imam, Community Facilitators; **JB** = Jayne Bradley, Administrator; **GY** = Graham Young, Chair of the Advisory Board; **EA** = Ewan Allinson, *NH* Ambassador.


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Cover: Scenes from Northern Heartlands

# Foreword

By Graham Young, Chair of the Northern Heartlands Advisory Board



The Northern Heartlands Great Place Scheme has come to a triumphal conclusion! Three, action packed years of creative engagement with people and their communities. This has culminated in the showing of a filmed Community Opera and an innovative and beautifully directed video songbook, both produced and presented in compliance with Covid-19 guidelines. But this was only a small part. We have put on 80 performances, 600 workshops and 90 school trips. We have supported 22 other organisations and funded 47 community projects. We have funded 700 days of work for independent artists and put on 7600 opportunities for people to engage.

But let's back up a little. I guess the question to be asked is, 'Why?'.

Some of those involved in Northern Heartlands were also involved in an earlier Landscape Partnership (Heart of Teesdale LP). As we evaluated what we had learnt from that experience, one of the points we recognised was that artists had had an interesting role to play as interlocutors, enabling communities to explore and gain confidence in who they are and what they value. We decided we wanted to explore the potential for that as a main theme for a new programme. At that time the Great Place Scheme was being promoted and we created a successful bid to become one of the 16 programmes nationally.

We covered Teesdale and Weardale and the ring of towns which surround the eastern end of those dales, Tow Law, Crook, Bishop Auckland, Shildon and all the many villages around. This covers a wide diversity, ranging from small isolated farming communities at the top of the dales, to post-industrial communities in the lower lands. There is some wealth there, but there are also many communities of multiple deprivation. In many, and especially the latter, there are people with a great commitment to where they live and to each other as communities. We have seen how the use of creative engagement can stimulate activity, engender more sense of pride and belonging and the desire to improve and move forward. We have seen people and communities gain a voice. Some of them by singing, but that's not the voice I mean. This voice comes from even deeper than their singing, it comes from the very centre of their soul.

So that's 'Why'.

Art, creativity, culture is not the reserve of one sector of society. We have seen communities claim it back and use it to shout out who they are and what they value.

We have worked with many partners, individuals, communities and artists. Thanks to them for all of their support and for walking this journey with us.

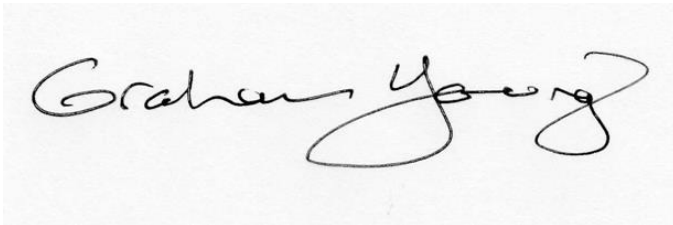
We have had a small but fine team of staff who have worked with the people of SW Durham to make Northern Heartlands happen. We knew what we wanted to happen, but before we started there was no great plan about how we would do it. That had to be worked out with the local communities.

That requires relationships and trust. Our team got to the hearts of these people in an amazingly short time.

Visit County Durham believed, like we do, that attracting people to Durham, whether tourists or residents or businesses, requires vibrant communities. They hosted us to help see if we could make that happen. Thank you to them for their foresight.

Northern Heartlands will continue, it has at its heart a concept which will not die. We hope to take it to its next stage of life.

Stay with us, and thank you.



Graham Young  
Chair  
Northern Heartlands Great Place Scheme.



The Northern Heartlands area (outlined) with (inset) position within the UK. An interactive map showing the places in which all NH performances, projects, workshops and other activities took place can be explored on <https://tinyurl.com/NorthernHeartlandsMap>.

# Northern Heartlands Great Place Scheme Final Evaluation & Completion Report



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October 2020

## Summary

### Introduction

Based around the catchment of two rivers – the Tees and the Wear – and extending from their sources in the North Pennines to the lowland arc through which they flow, the Northern Heartlands Great Place scheme includes six market towns (Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland, Crook, Shildon, Tow Law and Willington), a number of former mining communities of the Durham coalfield and numerous isolated hill farms and villages of the rural upper Dales. Northern Heartlands (NH) is distinctive in that it recognises that the places where people live and work are cultural landscapes, constantly changing and embodying contested heritage and values. It has sought to investigate and manifest the role of arts and artists, working with local communities, through its declared mission:

*“To deliver cultural activities that transform people’s understanding of the heritage, landscapes and places they live in, building their confidence and ability to influence policy and decision-making.”<sup>(1)</sup>*

The five aims of NH were to:

- fund **high quality projects and events** that make people want to get involved in culture and their heritage
- **make connections** between people, places, ideas and organisations
- deliver projects that will **build confidence** by celebrating stories of the people, places and landscapes in this area
- **raise local voices and question existing methods of decision-making** about landscape and place
- **provide long term benefits** to the Northern Heartlands area.<sup>(2)</sup>



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The Great Place (GP) programme was a pilot venture between the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)<sup>a</sup>, Arts Council England (ACE) and Historic England (HE)<sup>(3)</sup> launched in fulfilment of a commitment of the government's Culture White Paper.<sup>(4)</sup> Unlike other major (>£1m) Lottery-funded schemes GPs had no development phase; project development has of necessity taken place in parallel with delivery over a condensed timescale. This, together with a number of additional features specific to *NH* mean that their evaluation (and this Report) is concerned as much with process (how activities were developed and the lessons that can be derived from this) as with product (their benefits for individuals and communities):

- One of just four rural schemes, *NH* covered a landscape varied in physiographic and socio-economic character, from 'deep rural' countryside to post-industrial villages, including areas of significant multiple deprivation.
- Visit County Durham (VCD, *NH*'s Accountable Body) is a partnership and *NH*, working to its Advisory Board, has enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Unlike some other GP schemes, neither tourism nor socioeconomic regeneration were primary aims of *NH*.
- *NH*'s focus has been on cultural activities with local communities with an emphasis on landscape, heritage and place. Almost half of the total HLF grant was allocated to a programme of 'Artists and Events', a Community Initiatives (small grants) Fund, a Community Opera, and to 'Debates'. There were no projects involving physical works to the built or cultural heritage.
- In addition to the activities budget, all *NH* core staff (together with on-costs accounting for over one-third of total HLF grant) have been directly engaged in delivery, reflecting the distinctive nature of *NH* and its component projects. This has been especially a function of the two Community Facilitators (CF), charged with "*working closely with communities, identifying need and areas of interest and brokering relationships.*"<sup>(2)</sup>
- Much project delivery has been led by *NH*'s partners, several of whom have their own established M&E procedures which have of necessity both informed as well as accommodated those of the *NH* programme.
- Quantifiable outputs primarily relate to community engagement and participation and to the inclusion of culture in third-party agendas. Many outcomes are less tangible and some will be manifest only in ongoing activities or changed perceptions subsequent to the submission of this Report.
- Part of the ethos of *NH* was that it included experimental ventures. University research links were one of *NH*'s Approved Purposes<sup>(5)</sup> and seen as a key element of the scheme. However, they were not separately costed and HLF's direction that monies may not be specifically applied to this purpose has meant that such links have been largely informal and based on the good will of the individuals involved.
- Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and the implementation of the government's first 'action plan' in early March required the curtailment of planned activities, including the abandonment of two concluding high-profile celebratory events – a final 'Places in Particular' symposium (April) and performances of 'Song of Our Heartland' (May) - a 'People's Opera', preparations and rehearsals for which have engaged communities across the area. Both have been replaced by virtual activities.

### **The evaluation context**

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a central and required element of all Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Arts Council England (ACE) schemes. The HLF and ACE grant conditions included an obligation

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<sup>a</sup> In February 2019 HLF was 'rebranded' as the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). Most material to date relating to *NH* and to the GP programme refer to HLF and both names and initialisms are used here depending on context.

for NH to “undertake your own evaluation of your project and supply a report on completion.”<sup>(5)</sup> No guidance on evaluation specific to the GP programme was provided to schemes by HLF or by ACE, who jointly commissioned (in parallel with NH’s own launch) an external evaluation of the whole GP programme from BOP consulting; BOP’s own data requirements have significantly influenced NH’s own monitoring arrangements, particularly in relation to on-line exit questionnaires completed by project participants through ACE’s Culture Counts survey platform.

This Final Report satisfies the requirement of HLF and ACE to conduct an evaluation of NH’s work and submit a report; however, the Report is for the scheme as a whole – for all partner bodies, participants and potentially for a wider public — not just for HLF and ACE. It celebrates what has been achieved, considers the lessons that have been learnt, and will feed in to future plans both for legacy activities in the area and to similar schemes elsewhere.

In particular it:

- offers an independent assessment of what NH has delivered; what has worked well and what has worked less well and why - in relation to output targets and value for money;
- assesses outcomes in relation to NH aims, NLHF’s programme priorities and the wider aspirations or expectations of partners and stakeholders;
- reviews the effectiveness of NH governance and of its management and administrative procedures;
- captures the learning of the NH team and partners in relation to what has been a hugely innovative and experimental scheme;
- will hopefully provide an input to plans for legacy activities and future work including funding applications.

## **Methods**

This Final evaluation has involved:

- Assessment of quantitative and qualitative monitoring data collected by the NH project team and partners in particular regarding:
  - Outputs relating to project delivery and progress
  - Wider outcomes and the effectiveness of mechanisms for capturing these, relating to individual projects and to the project as a whole.
- Desk research including examination of a range of documents relating to NH and its work.
- Two on-line surveys addressed to project participants and the public who may have been engaged in whatever capacity in NH activities.
- Semi-structured interviews (on-site and by telephone) with key individuals including funders, delivery partners and project leads as well as project participants and respondents to the survey, above.
- Site visits to project locations, where possible as a participant in NH events and liaison with the NH delivery team and partners including sitting in on Advisory Board and Learning Advisory Group (LAG) meetings.

## **Achievements**

NH has established itself as a unique and ambitious scheme and it has accomplished a great deal in its three short years of delivery. Credit is due to those involved in the years before the award of the GP application who put together such an innovative and pioneering scheme, and to the NH core team,



partners, local communities and artists involved in delivering it. Their significant achievements have already ‘made a difference’ in the area, and in particular to participants and communities involved.

### **Headline indicators**

Some key indicators of activity (outputs) include:

- 27 individual commissioned projects, large and small, ranging from the Man Engine spectacular (Willington, June 2018) to interactive theatre performances, craft workshops, exhibitions and musical performances. These gave funding to 14 arts and heritage organisations, employed an additional 50 independent 45 artists and recorded more than 3,000 active participations and an audience of over 12,000.
- 48 separate community-generated CIF-funded projects involving 3,500 local residents and engaging an estimated participation of over 5,600 individuals and securing £137,000 in leveraged funding and/or additional income.
- 37 schools have each hosted one or more workshops associated with *NH* project activities; over 90 school trips made to arts, heritage and wildlife sites.
- Song of our Heartland community opera workshops and rehearsals in 9 locations involving 187 local residents, of whom 46 took part in live rehearsals and, following Covid-19 restrictions, 32 in digital rehearsals.
- A total of over 6,500 active participations in *NH* sponsored activities plus a further estimated 18,000 individuals in the audience at events.
- 4 emerging artists provided with training and career development by The Forge, with a further 24 artists given professional development opportunities in other projects
- An overall total of 124 separate commissions and 650 days employment to independent artists.
- 5 speaker and discussion events variously covering spatial planning, placemaking, farming and tourism and the role of culture and the arts, engaging 390 individuals over a total of 40 venues over the *NH* area.
- Over 15,000 online views of *NH* project films and podcasts.

### **Landscape, legacy and learning**

Arguably the central feature of *NH*'s success has been the ability of the delivery team and partners to establish close links with and secure the trust of local communities, using a wide and inclusive definition of ‘culture’ to move beyond the distinctions between ‘arts’ and ‘heritage’ and to function not as ‘missionaries’ but rather as ‘mediators’ and ‘mobilisers’. In part at least this has been possible because of *NH*'s freedom from any pre-determined outcomes imposed by ACE and NLHF and, importantly the facilitating role of VCD.

In the three short years of delivery and despite the lack of a development phase, *NH* has proved itself as a unique and ambitious initiative. The commitment and expertise of the *NH* team and delivery partners and the enthusiasm of local residents have meant that *NH* has been able to achieve a great deal

In the process *NH* has challenged common approaches to the arts as comprised of cultural activities delivered ‘from above’ (a focus of some other GP schemes, sometimes extended to local, vernacular ‘cultures’) by emphasising the centrality of place to people’s lives. At the same time it has also challenged conventional ‘views’ of landscape and place – often restricted to the scenic and eminent – by focusing on the commonplace, from ‘remote rural’ to deindustrialised, not just in theory, but in a

practical way, together with local communities acknowledging that values and policies are often contested, representing conflicting social and economic interests. *NH* – along, no doubt with other GP schemes – has also highlighted some of challenges of ‘placemaking’ and the contradictions in National Lottery funding – in the heritage, arts and cultural fields, as in other areas.

Beyond the activities and outputs identified above, *NH* will leave behind a varied legacy of cultural engagement amongst local communities. There is evidence that a number of these at least will continue beyond the end of the *NH* Great Place Scheme. It has also resulted in a deeper understanding of the challenges and strategies for delivering cultural activities ‘from below’.

Credit is due to those involved in the period prior to the award of the GP application who put together such an innovative and pioneering scheme, and to the *NH* core team, partners, local communities and artists involved in delivering it. Their significant achievements have demonstrably ‘made a difference’ in the area, and in particular to participants and communities involved.

They have also pointed the way for related activities in the future.

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October 2020

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## Contents

1	Introduction: The Northern Heartlands Great Place Scheme .....	2
2	The evaluation context .....	6
2.1	HLF / ACE evaluation requirements and NH's central monitoring .....	6
2.2	This Evaluation .....	10
2.3	Methods .....	11
3	Project delivery, outputs and outcomes .....	21
3.1	Commissioned activities .....	21
3.2	'Pulse' - local artist development.....	25
3.3	Communities and co-commissioning .....	26
3.4	CIF - the Community Initiatives Fund.....	28
3.5	HeART of the Matter .....	32
3.6	'Song of Our Heartland' – NH's Community Opera .....	34
3.7	Governance, administration and delivery.....	36
4	Great Place legacy and learning .....	40
4.1	Legacy: 'making a difference' for individuals and communities.....	40
4.2	Learning: research, reflection and lessons for the future .....	46
	Top Tips .....	54
5	Conclusions.....	55
	Appendix Project outputs and outcomes .....	57
	References .....	58



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# 1 Introduction: The Northern Heartlands Great Place Scheme

Northern Heartlands (NH) is one of sixteen English pilot Great Place schemes. The Great Place (GP) programme was a pilot venture funded from June 2017 to September 2020 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)<sup>a</sup> in collaboration with the Arts Council England (ACE) and with Historic England (HE) as an advisory partner.<sup>(3)</sup> Launched to fulfil a requirement of the government's Culture White Paper<sup>(4)</sup>, the aim of the Great Place Scheme in England has been to:

*“enable cultural and heritage organisations to make a step-change in how they work together, and with other organisations in other sectors, in order that arts, culture and heritage contribute more to meeting local social and economic objectives.”<sup>(3)</sup>*

The five programme aims<sup>(3)</sup> of the GP programme were:

1. Everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by arts, culture and heritage
2. The local area/ community will be a better place to live, work or visit
3. The local economy will be boosted
4. Arts, culture, heritage and other local organisations will be more resilient
5. Organisations will have built sustainable partnerships and culture will be reflected in local plans and strategies.<sup>(3)</sup>

NH differs from other Great Place schemes in a number of respects. It is one of just four rural GP schemes. Based around the catchment of two rivers – the Tees and the Wear – and extending from their sources in the North Pennines to the lowland arc through which they flow, the area includes six market towns (Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland, Crook, Shildon, Tow Law and Willington), a number of former mining communities of the Durham coalfield and numerous isolated hill farms and villages of the rural upper Dales. In contrast to many GP schemes, NH is not embedded in the local authority, and has been able to act independently from its accountable body, Visit County Durham (VCD). NH's distinctive approach recognises that the places where people live and work are cultural landscapes, constantly changing and embodying contested heritage and values. And it has sought to investigate and manifest the transformative role of arts and artists, working with local communities and decision-making bodies, through its declared mission:

*“To deliver cultural activities that transform people's understanding of the heritage, landscapes and places they live in, building their confidence and ability to influence policy and decision-making.”<sup>(1, 2)</sup>*

The five aims of NH have been to:

- fund **high quality projects and events** that make people want to get involved in culture and their heritage
- **make connections** between people, places, ideas and organisations

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<sup>a</sup> The GP programme was launched (and NH approved) during HLF's fourth Strategic Framework (SF4, 2013-2108).<sup>(6)</sup> SF4 was extended for a further year until 2019 whilst a major consultation and review of the purposes of Lottery funding for the next (SF5) framework for 2019-2024. The result has been a revised set of generic aims, which alongside community engagement place a new emphasis on individual 'well-being'.<sup>(7)</sup>

In early 2019 HLF was 'rebranded' as the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to secure greater public recognition of the link between lottery playing and the allocation of lottery funds. Most material relating to NH and to the GP programme prior to this date refer to HLF and the names and initialisms of both HLF and NLHF are used here as appropriate to the context.

- deliver projects that will **build confidence** by celebrating stories of the people, places and landscapes in this area
- **raise local voices and question existing methods of decision-making** about landscape and place
- **provide long term benefits** to the Northern Heartlands area.<sup>(1, 2)</sup>

*NH's* Great Place application was submitted to ACE/HLF by VCD in January 2017.<sup>(1)</sup> The bid was approved in April<sup>(5)</sup> together with a revised Activity Plan.<sup>(8)</sup> HLF's Award Letter April 2017<sup>(5)</sup> allocated *NH's* grant of £1.489m as 82% of £1.809m total approved costs under eight 'approved purposes'.

1. Appointment of five staff to deliver the scheme: a Director, Head of Learning, two Community Facilitators and an Administrator.
2. Delivery of a rolling programme of speaker and discussion events to explore and develop strategy promoting the role of landscape, heritage, culture and the arts as drivers of change, including a final 3 day symposium to share learning.
3. Training of artists in participatory practice to be delivered by The Forge.
4. Delivery of a wide reaching programme of community-led arts and creative activity, including artists working with farmers, work with refugees, and community-driven projects to be partially supported by a third party grants programme managed by the Community Foundation.
5. Delivery of an outreach programme to support the Bowes Museum's main exhibition programme, developing co-curated exhibitions of contemporary works and archives in public buildings with community groups.
6. Development of a major immersive multimedia community opera informed by local histories and storytelling in partnership with Opera North. To be performed at Locomotion in autumn 2019 and toured thereafter.
7. Partnerships with Newcastle University (McCord Centre) and Durham University (Philosophy department) to match communities with researchers to further articulate a sense of place to help influence landscape and environmental policy.
8. Delivery of a programme of community activity to build confidence and a sense of place in the run up to the 2025 bi-centenary of the opening of the Stockton-Darlington railway.

Distinctive features include:

- The significant allocation of monies (Figure 1, below) to 'Artists and Events', to the Community Initiatives Fund, to a Community Opera, and to 'Debates' (together amounting to 47% of total grant).
- A relatively high allocation to the Staff Team (together with on-costs, over one-third of total grant) reflecting *NH's* focus on community engagement and the 'experimental' nature of the *NH* scheme.

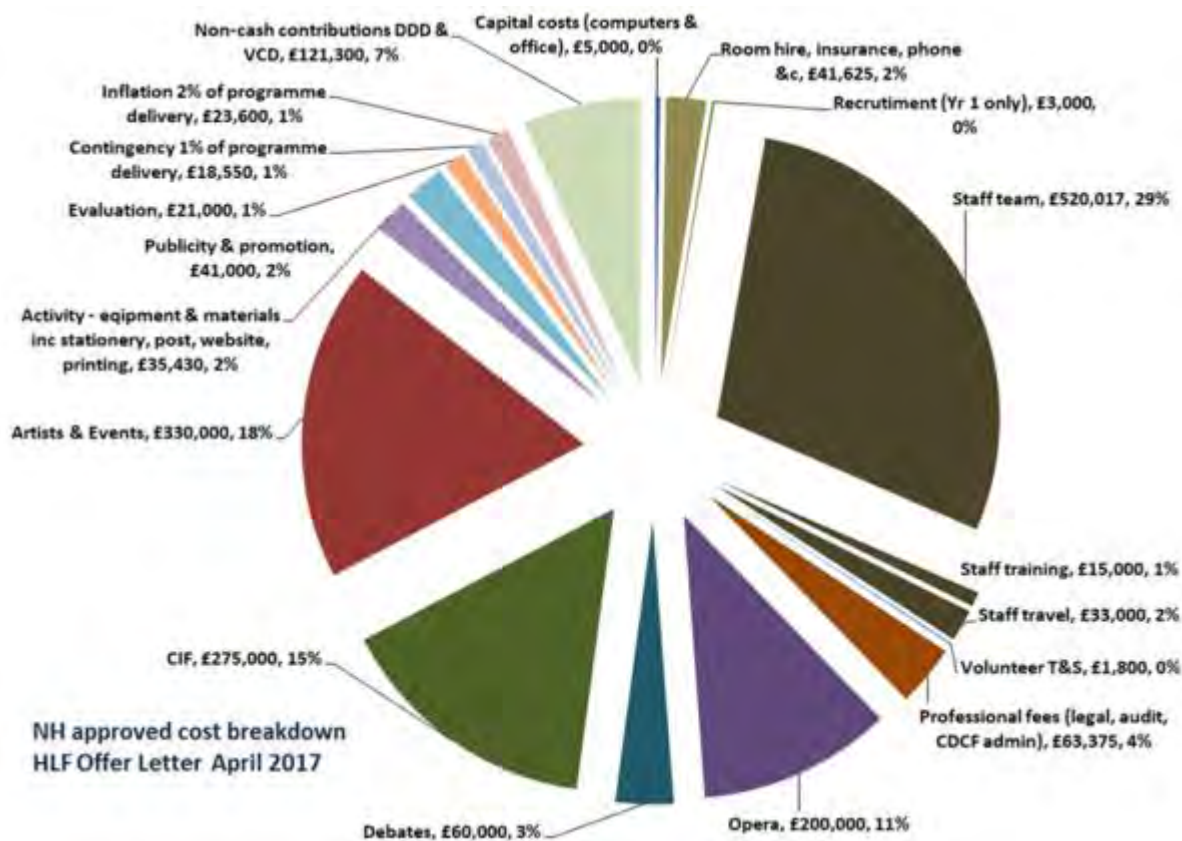


Figure 1 Breakdown of funded elements in the HLF Award Letter, April 2017

The first Partnership Meeting at the Witham (a Community Arts Centre and the location of the *NH* team’s offices) in Barnard Castle was held in May 2017 and attended by 45 partner representative from across the *NH* area, followed by the first Advisory Board (AB) meeting. Permission to Start was received from HLF in June. In July the delivery team was appointed , consisting of a Head of Learning and Influence, two Community Facilitators, and an Administrator, with *NH*’s Director taking up her post in September. In December applications for the first round of the *NH* Community Initiative Fund (CIF) closed. *NH*’s first commissioned work (‘The Town Meeting’ performed in Startforth by the Cap-A Pie Theatre) took place in January 2018. In the same month we were appointed as Independent Evaluators (IE) to work with the *NH* delivery team, partners and project leads to advise and assist on monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Unlike other major (>£1m) Lottery-funded schemes the 16 GP schemes had no development phase. Project development has therefore of necessity taken place in parallel with delivery. In the case of *NH* a number of additional features mean that evaluation has been concerned as much with process (how activities have been developed and the lessons that can be derived from this) as with product (their benefits for individuals and communities):<sup>(1)</sup>

- As one of just four rural schemes, *NH* covered a landscape varied in physiographic and socio-economic character, from ‘deep rural’ countryside to post-industrial villages, including areas of significant multiple deprivation.

- Visit County Durham (VCD, *NH's* Accountable Body) is a partnership and *NH*, working to its Advisory Board, has enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Unlike some other GP schemes, tourism or socioeconomic regeneration were not core aims of *NH*.
- *NH's* focus has been on cultural activities with local communities, with an emphasis on landscape, heritage and place. Almost half of the total HLF grant was allocated to a programme of 'Artists and Events', a Community Initiatives (small grants) Fund, a Community Opera, and to 'Debates'. The few projects involving physical works to the built or cultural heritage (archaeological digs, stone wall repair) have been secondary to the primary focus.
- In addition to the activities budget, all *NH* core staff (together with on-costs accounting for over one-third of total HLF grant) have been directly engaged in delivery, reflecting the distinctive nature of *NH* and its component projects. This has been especially a function of the two Community Facilitators (CF), charged with working "*closely with communities, identifying need and areas of interest and brokering relationships.*"<sup>(2)</sup>
- Much project delivery has been led by *NH's* partners, several of whom have their own established M&E procedures which have of necessity both informed as well as accommodated those of the *NH* programme.
- Quantifiable outputs primarily relate to community engagement and participation in individual projects. Significant outcomes include a range of enduring and planned activities (Section 4) as well as the inclusion of culture in third-party agendas. Other outcomes are less tangible and some will be manifest only in ongoing activities or changed perceptions subsequent to the submission of this Report.
- Part of the ethos of *NH* was that it included experimental ventures. University research links were one of *NH's* Approved Purposes<sup>(5)</sup> and seen as a key element of the scheme. However, such links were not separately costed and HLF's direction that monies may not be specifically applied to this purpose has meant that such links have been largely informal and based on the good will of the individuals involved.
- Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and the implementation of the government's first 'action plan' in early March required the curtailment of planned activities, and the rapid transformation of two concluding high-profile celebratory events –the final 'Places in Particular' symposium (April) and the 'People's Opera' performances (May) into online productions. While inevitably some of the enthusiasm and the 'buzz' of live debate and performance has been lost this has to some extent at least been compensated for by accessibility and a wider geographical reach.

The delivery of *NH* has been a significant learning experience for all involved - the *NH* team, partners, and ourselves as evaluators. Subsequent sections of this Report:

- Outline the HLF ACE evaluation and reporting process and summarise the methodology that has been adopted in producing this report (Section 2: The evaluation context).
- Examine the component elements of *NH* – what has been delivered, what its benefits have been, and the quality of governance and administration and delivery (Section 3: Project delivery, outputs and outcomes)
- Assess the likely enduring benefits of *NH* beyond the end of HLF funding, review some of the things which worked less well and draw some conclusions regarding the relationship between the arts and cultural activities, perceptions of landscape and places, and people's ability to influence policy and decision-making (Section 4: Great Place legacy and learning).

## 2 The evaluation context

### 2.1 HLF / ACE evaluation requirements and NH's central monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a requirement for all Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Arts Council England (ACE) schemes and was an obligatory element of the Great Place programme.<sup>(3)</sup> The HLF and ACE grant conditions for Northern Heartlands (NH) included an obligation for NH to “undertake your own evaluation of your project and supply a report on completion.”<sup>(5)</sup> However, no tailored information or guidance on evaluation specific to the Great Place programme has been provided to GP schemes by HLF or by ACE<sup>a</sup> who jointly commissioned (in parallel with NH's own launch) an external evaluation of the whole GP programme from BOP consulting. Evaluation has therefore been informed by relevant elements of generic guidance offered by HLF<sup>(9)</sup>, ACE<sup>(10, 11)</sup> and other bodies<sup>(12, 13)</sup> together with applicable outputs and outcomes specified in the Culture White Paper.<sup>(4)</sup> Evaluation has also had to have regard to other constraints including BOP's national evaluation and ACE's audience monitoring through the Culture Counts survey platform.

#### HLF evaluation guidance

HLF's most recent guidance<sup>(9)</sup> (developed primarily for its Heritage Grant programme) and earlier generic guidance<sup>(14)</sup> emphasises that M&E are related, not separate, processes. They should:

- take place over the whole lifetime of a funded scheme;
- be embedded in a wider process of activity planning and delivery;
- wherever possible be participative activities, engaging project participants in such a way as to enhance delivery and outcomes;
- be formative as well as summative (to do with ‘improving’ as well as ‘proving’);
- focus both on individual projects and the scheme as a whole;
- look beyond outputs (as indicators of activity or work done) to capture outcomes (their benefits for people and communities);
- feed in to planning for legacy (the enduring impacts following the end of funding);
- be the responsibility of everyone involved; partners and project leads as well as the delivery team.

In larger schemes, HLF's good practice recommendations are to produce an evaluation framework at an early stage, followed by a mid-delivery review, which feeds in to legacy planning. They emphasise that the final report should be a document for the scheme as a whole, its partners and its participants, not just for NLHF and ACE; it should celebrate what has been achieved, consider the lessons that have been learnt, and feed in to future plans. It is common for an external Independent Evaluator (IE) to be engaged to assist with the process.

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<sup>a</sup> HLF produced separate evaluation guidance for GP schemes in the devolved nations (which do not involve ACE); a ‘Toolkit’ and an ‘Evaluations Outcomes Framework’ (Audience Finder 2018) which are concerned primarily with audience metrics (the latter incorporating most of the BOP evaluation guidance) rather than longer-term outcomes.



## ACE evaluation guidance and the Culture Counts on-line survey platform

One monitoring procedure adopted by the *NH* team is the Culture Counts (CC)<sup>a</sup> on-line ‘impact and insight’ monitoring platform.<sup>b</sup> CC was developed with significant ACE funding to provide national metrics on audience responses. The platform was launched in October 2018 and has been mandatory for all larger ACE-funded National Portfolio Organisations (NPO) from April 2019. *NH* is not an NPO but subscription to the CC platform was informed by *NH*’s focus on arts participation and performance, unconventional venues, lack of staff time available for data entry, apparent ease of interface for users and ACE’s preference. Like ACE’s own evaluation guidance,<sup>(10, 11)</sup> CC has been designed primarily for single projects or events and for assessing outputs (including artistic quality and audience satisfaction) rather than longer term outcomes. Its primary purpose is to return ‘big data’ direct to ACE. The government’s Tailored Review<sup>(15)</sup> also requires NLHF to collect audience data on its funded projects to monitor participation and diversity.

CC has been the focus of some criticism from the arts community for its cost, for the conduct of the procurement process and for the (financial and administrative) burdens it places on users<sup>(16, 17)</sup> as well as for the more generic issues of the appropriateness of using quantitative metrics to assess artistic quality.<sup>(18)</sup> The CC platform is intended to provide a facility for recording participant experience and perceptions on-line both on-site (using hand-held tablets with data entry by participants or by an *NH* monitor) as well as post-event (by participants themselves using their own smartphones or PC/laptops). Designed primarily for collection of audience response on-site it has significant resource implications. Trained staff or volunteers are needed to administer delivery using handheld devices and while CC has been found useful for ‘events where people are wandering around’<sup>(13)</sup> it is arguably of limited value for exit surveys. Other issues have to do with the relevance of the audience metrics which conflate outcomes with audience satisfaction. In the event CC metrics were not used by *NH* because of the requirement to use BOP questions (below) but a more significant problem was the limited utility of the Culture Counts proprietary digital platform to deliver quantitative summary data for end users.

*NH*’s original intention was that digital surveys would be addressed to:

- Members of the public participating in or affected by *NH* events
- Volunteers and other participants in longer-term and ongoing projects
- Cultural workers engaged to facilitate or lead *NH* projects.

In practice, limited resources – both hardware (tablets) and (more importantly) human (staff and volunteers) have meant that the planned on-site digital collection of data was abandoned at an early stage in delivery.

## The BOP National Evaluation

In May 2017 ACE/ HLF commissioned its own external evaluation of the national GP programme from BOP (the Burns Owens Partnership) consulting.<sup>c</sup> This evaluation would “focus on

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<sup>a</sup> Culture Counts <https://culturecounts.cc/uk/>.

<sup>b</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance-library/impact-and-insight-toolkit](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance-library/impact-and-insight-toolkit)

<sup>c</sup> <http://bop.co.uk/>

*the achievement of outcomes, the effectiveness of partnerships, and the scheme's impact on place-making policy leading to local change*" structured around three 'core questions' addressing both process and strategy as well as delivery.<sup>(19)</sup>

1. How best to re-position culture in local decision-making, planning and delivery?
2. Do new approaches lead to improved social, economic and cultural outcomes for local partners?
3. How do HLF and Arts Council England work together to support these new approaches in future?

As part of this, HLF told GP schemes that *"we require that you support this work through identifying and collecting data relevant to a range of indicators. Further information, support and guidance will be provided to help you undertake this work."*<sup>(15)</sup> In March 2018 BOP, together with HLF and ACE, hosted a 'learning and networking day' in Leeds and in April (twelve months after HLF's Award Letter to NH and subsequent to delivery of NH's first two project activities) emailed the first of a series of requests<sup>(20)</sup> related principally to its own programme evaluation. This included 22 specimen questions required for inclusion in participant and partner surveys to feed in to its own national data collection. This requirement has proved something of a constraint on NH's internal monitoring and evaluation procedures, not least because their prescribed form and format was not readily compatible with the CC platform. In addition BOP has required all GP teams to issue questionnaires to their Advisory/Steering Group members at the end of every meeting.

BOP's first year report<sup>(19)</sup> was submitted to HLF and ACE in October 2018 but was not released until the end of March 2019, reducing its value as a reference point for GP delivery teams and evaluators. A second event held in Coventry in April 2019 provided a valuable opportunity to discuss common problems, as well as insights into NLHF and ACE's own strategic concerns in relation to GP strategic objectives.<sup>a</sup> BOP's second year report<sup>(21)</sup> was made available soon after its submission to HLF and ACE in October 2019. Reference to both reports is made elsewhere in this Evaluation.

### **NH's central data collection and monitoring**

In part as a consequence of the above the NH team have used a variety of methods, adapted to circumstances and refined as delivery proceeded, to capture outputs and learning. These have included:

- Digital post-event surveys of participants and audiences (piloted at the first planning workshop in April 2018 at Bishop Auckland) using the CC platform for those projects managed directly by the NH team. At outdoor events with large audiences, returns have been encouraged by offering a prize draw for respondents who provide an email address for contact.
- Paper participant feedback forms except when the delivery partner required other monitoring (as in the case of projects delivered by an Arts Council NPO).

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<sup>a</sup> One of which was a requirement for all GP schemes to submit participation returns separately to ACE (for 'arts') and NLHF (for 'heritage' activities). BOP itself indicated flexibility as to where the data is allocated as long as this avoids double counting. A widespread view amongst workshop participants was that that the distinction between the two is arbitrary and often meaningless, particularly given the common focus of GP schemes on cultural value and this was in due course accepted by HLF and ACE.

- Projects delivered through the Community Initiative Fund provided summary reports, as per CDCF standard reporting requirements. Following discussion with CDCF, participant feedback forms were sent to CIF project leaders in later funding rounds with a request that participants complete them, but reporting through this route has been patchy.
- Ethnographic/observational evaluation, agreed with delivery lead for More Than Viable, a participatory project in an area of high deprivation. In this case, formal participant feedback methods were considered potentially harmful to trust building with the community.
- Reflective discussion sessions undertaken and recorded with selected project leads, artist participants in the pulse program and members of the *NH* team. Edited versions of audio and film recordings are available on the *NH* website.

**Table 1 Central data collection and monitoring in relation to different activities**

Data collection	Projects
<b>Digital feedback using BOP questions via Culture Counts platform (participant &amp; audience)</b>	Man Engine; Crook Winter Light Parade; Our Willington; Planning a Participatory Art; People Make Places; Not Just a Part of the Scenery; Hefted to Hill; Re:Place
<b>Paper feedback forms using BOP questions</b>	Song of our Heartland; Norman Cornish workshops; Value of Shared Spaces; Hefted to Hill farmers' supper; 'If you go down to the Woods' (CIF); Holwick Stories (CIF); Eggleston Show Folk Music Project (CIF); Thornley Village Hall (CIF); Weardale Wordfest (CIF); Altogether Archaeology (CIF); Wonderful World of Woodhouse Close; <i>NH</i> 2019 AGM & review
<b>Audience Agency audience feedback form req. by ACE NPO</b>	Beyond the End of the Road
<b>Ethnographic/observational</b>	Man Engine; More than Viable; Wearhead Aspirations
<b>CDCF Project impact reports</b>	All CIF projects
<b>Project lead reports</b>	Man Engine; Crook Winter Light Parade; Town Meeting; Blaize; Hefted to Hill; Pulse; More Than Viable; Weardale Folk; Value of Shared Spaces; Wonderful World of Woodhouse Close; Wearhead Aspirations; Category D villages play; Ten Words for a Northern Landscape; Our Willington; Beyond the End of the Road
<b>Reflective interviews</b>	Pulse; Song of Our Heartland/Northern Heartland Songbook; Wearhead Aspirations; Hefted to Hill; More Than Viable; Our Willington; Blaize/Weardale Folk; Beyond the End of the Road
<b>Monitored in line with requirements of lead project partner</b>	Craft in Conflict; Weardale Tub; Durham Brass Festival at Stanhope; Catch Your Breath; Beyond the End of the Road

*When we started, we had no idea what we were going to do and so it was extremely difficult to know what framework or monitoring approaches would be appropriate.(PL)*

*NH's budget for monitoring and evaluation was largely based on experience of the preceding Heart of Teesdale Landscape Partnership. However, early in the project it became clear that the monitoring requirements for the participation and audience numbers generated by Northern Heartlands' arts-led approach were likely to be greater than budgeted for, and this led to difficulties in terms of time and resource allocation for monitoring. Of course, hindsight is a wonderful thing.(PL)*

## 2.2 This Evaluation

Our contract as Independent Evaluator (IE) comprised three stages, each with a nominal (i.e. costed) allocation of 15 days spread over the life of the scheme. Each stage includes working with the *NH* team and project partners to deliver principal outputs as follows:

- 1.Stage 1 (Jan - Dec 2018) Development and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation framework.
- 2.Stage 2 (Jan – July 2019) An Interim (Mid-term) Review (MTR) followed by input into the project's legacy planning.
- 3.Stage 3 (Jan – Dec 2020) End of scheme evaluation and production of a Final Evaluation Report.

A draft evaluation framework was produced in conjunction with the *NH* delivery team over the course of 2018 and a summary presented to the November 2018 AB meeting. This outlined the M&E data to be expected from *NH's* partners and project leads, accepting that this was likely to vary from project to project, and it outlined some principles for evaluation of the impact of the scheme as a whole. A summary of evaluation evidence proposed and of that collected to date was presented (in two Appendices, one for commissioned activities and another for CIF projects) intended as a working guide for the *NH* team and project partners.

The submission date for the MTR, originally scheduled for June/ July 2019 was brought forward to correspond with the mid-point of *NH's* delivery. It anticipated the structure of this Final Evaluation Report but was intended primarily as an internal document. In addition it identified issues for consideration by the AB and partners and it offered some recommendations in relation to the remainder of *NH's* life.

One issue which has become increasingly apparent as *NH's* programme has developed is the compressed timescale for delivery of such an ambitious programme of activities. BOP's first (interim) evaluation of the GP programme drew attention to the time required, in the absence of any development phase, for cultural activities to gain traction, declaring that for significant outcomes to become apparent *"the timescale should be longer, with more time for set-up up front, space for projects to evolve, and time for complex change processes to take place."*<sup>(19)</sup>

This observation applies with especial force to *NH* as does BOP's other comment that in relation to lasting benefits, the *"balance between process/strategy and delivery [is] hard to judge."*<sup>(19)</sup> BOP's second (October 2019) report reiterated both points, adding that most schemes had spent their first year on development, that *"in year two, relationships that took time to establish*

*are now bearing fruit*” and that as a consequence, the majority of schemes had requested project extensions.<sup>(21)</sup> *NH* is a hugely innovative pilot scheme and learning from delivery is as important as the benefits it has delivered ‘on the ground’. Evaluation therefore has attempted to focus on both.

This Final Evaluation Report celebrates what *NH* has achieved, considers the lessons learnt, and reviews the prospects for the future. It was initially intended for delivery before the end of the contracts of *NH*’s delivery team in June 2020 following the planned completion of all *NH* projects. That completion – and this evaluation – has been greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and by the effective shutdown of all public events from mid-March. Whiles negatively affecting several ongoing projects, its major consequence has been the required cancellation of two events, both planned as the culmination of the *NH* Great Place Scheme. ‘Places in Particular’, effectively the last in the series of speaker and discussion events, was planned as a three-day national symposium and programme of public activities to celebrate the end of the scheme in early April. Equally disappointing – for the delivery team and for the participants involved - was the cancellation of the live production of Northern Heartlands People’s Opera ‘Song of Our Heartland’. Planning and rehearsals began in 2018 and the Opera had been scheduled for public performance in Shildon Locomotion at the end of May. Following Heritage Fund’s approval of a three month extension, both the symposium and opera were redesigned as virtual events for delivery in August, September and October.

Taking account of the ‘lockdown’ consequent on Covid-19, this report:

- ‘Tells the story’ of the project, its origins, aims, development and delivery.
- Assesses what has been delivered; where the original ambitions and targets have been met (or exceeded), and where (and why) there may have been a shortfall.
- Reviews the effectiveness of governance and project management structures and identify any administrative weaknesses.
- Identifies the benefits that *NH* activities have achieved, the difference that they have made to the area and for local communities, and the arrangements that have been made to ensure a legacy endures beyond the end of the scheme.
- Examines the extent to which *NH*’s vision, aims and objectives have been realised and identifies what has been less successful or might have been done differently and the lessons that may be drawn from this.
- Will hopefully provide an input to plans for legacy activities and future work including funding applications, both of *NH*’s successor body and of partner organisations in their determination to continue the work that has been started.

## 2.3 Methods

Quantitative data in this Report is based primarily on information supplied by the *NH* team and partners. Our own work has focused primarily on outcomes and legacy. Methods have included the following elements all of which have been conducted in liaison with *NH* team, project leads and partner representatives who have provided invaluable information, advice and assistance.

## **Desk research**

This has included all available HLF, ACE and HE documents relating to the GP programme and other relevant contextual material, together with material produced by the *NH* team and partners relating to its activities to date. The starting point has been *NH*'s application to HLF<sup>(4)</sup> and HLF's Offer Letter.<sup>(5)</sup>

## **Information supplied by project partners and/or the *NH* team**

A summary Evaluation Framework was agreed by the AB in November 2018 committing partners to secure the following M&E information at project level:

- All partners/ project leads would complete a short narrative final report on their activities reflecting on what went well, what went less well, and why, and to identify the likely benefits or outcomes for individuals and communities.  
In addition they would, wherever appropriate:
- Record participant/ audience demographics and other relevant background information.
- Collect participant contact emails. *NH* has maintained its own contacts list including individuals who have subscribed online to its mailing list. GDPR restricts access and use of contact information to the collecting organisation for the purpose for which it has been collected;<sup>(22, 23)</sup> however, all partners agreed in principle to forward a link to evaluation surveys to their contacts list and/or include one in their newsletters.
- Record participant postcodes in order to facilitate an estimate of geographic (and socio-economic) 'reach' of activities.
- Assemble photos or other media/ graphics and submit these with their final reports, together with (copyright/ reproduction/ acknowledgement) permissions where appropriate.
- Several projects undertook to assemble case study material relating to impacts on individuals (anonymised where appropriate) or organisations. In some cases this would be limited to individual testimony or quotes relating to their experience as participants and its impact.
- It was also agreed that it would be important wherever possible to secure feedback from artist/s facilitating all activities and that – since 'influence' can be a two-way process - this should include an assessment by the central providers of their own learning.

In addition it was agreed that exit surveys of participants of relevant projects would be conducted either by the *NH* team using the Culture Counts platform or by delivery partners themselves. Questionnaires would include a set of 'core' indicators common to the whole *NH* programme (including BOP's own programme-level questions or variants thereof) and further closed (categorical, ordinal or interval) indicators specific to each activity together with questions allowing open-ended (narrative) responses to allow the assembly of qualitative (attitudinal and other) material.

Inevitably this has been variable and in some cases has been unavailable or partial particularly for smaller projects and those delivered by partners. As indicated above, limitations in the Culture Counts platform and core staff time meant that surveys were conducted with respondents contacted by email and/or via the *NH* website for only four projects (Willington Man Engine, Crook Winter Light Parade, Our Willington and the four speaker and discussion events). Individual case studies and participant background information is available for workshop groups

from Jack Drum Arts (but only guesstimates for the Crook Carnival); for phases 1 & 2 from Hefted to Hill (but only visitor-book returns for Phase 3); information on work with schools (e.g. Pulse) is necessarily based on Pupil Premium numbers. Moreover some delivery partners have their own evaluation procedures (for example November Club’s evaluation data collected as part of their own NPO agreement with Arts Council for BTEOTR). Data for CDCF-CIF projects varies greatly with context.<sup>(24)</sup>

In parallel with the above, separate evaluations were conducted by members of the *NH* core team or commissioned from project leads for several projects (Table 1, p 9). None of the limitations to M&E evaluation data collected should be construed as a criticism of the *NH* team. Some activities (Startforth, the first speaker and discussion event) took place before guidance (from BOP or ACE) was issued; others (Man Engine, BTEOTR, Trapped) are productions of established works to which *NH* added engagement activities. Many projects have been delivered through partners who have variable approaches to evaluation. Some activities (H2H phase 3, Craft and Conflict) were unstaffed exhibitions so the only information available is visitor book comments. And, importantly, evaluation can be time consuming and intrusive. A difficult balance needs to be struck between delivery and evaluation and the *NH* team is to be congratulated for its realistic and necessarily opportunistic approach to securing evaluation data.

### Participant surveys

An on-line survey was launched via the CC evaluation platform in February 2019 focused on the achieved or expected outcomes of *NH* activities to date and a second survey was conducted in March 2020 for this Final Report. Both were distinct from *NH*’s own project-specific participant surveys based on BOP questions; requests to complete were issued via email to everyone on the *NH* contacts list and all partners and project leads were asked in addition to forward the invitation to their own contacts lists and or include a request to complete in any newsletter. In parallel, separate invitations to complete the survey were sent to an identified group of ‘Self’ assessors – individuals directly connected to *NH*, including the delivery team and AB members, and ‘Peer’ assessors – other partner representatives, project leads and lead artists.

**Table 2 Participant survey invitation and respondent numbers (numbers in parenthesis indicate MTR responses) – data as end March 2020**

	Public	Self	Peer	Total
<b>Issued</b>	1197 (870) <sup>a</sup>	18 (17)	47 (41)	Unknown
<b>Received</b>	195 (89)	8 (8)	15 (14)	217 (110)

A total of 217 responses were received to the surveys (Table 2 above). ‘Public’ respondents are those resulting from the *NH* general circulation and to invitations extended by partners and

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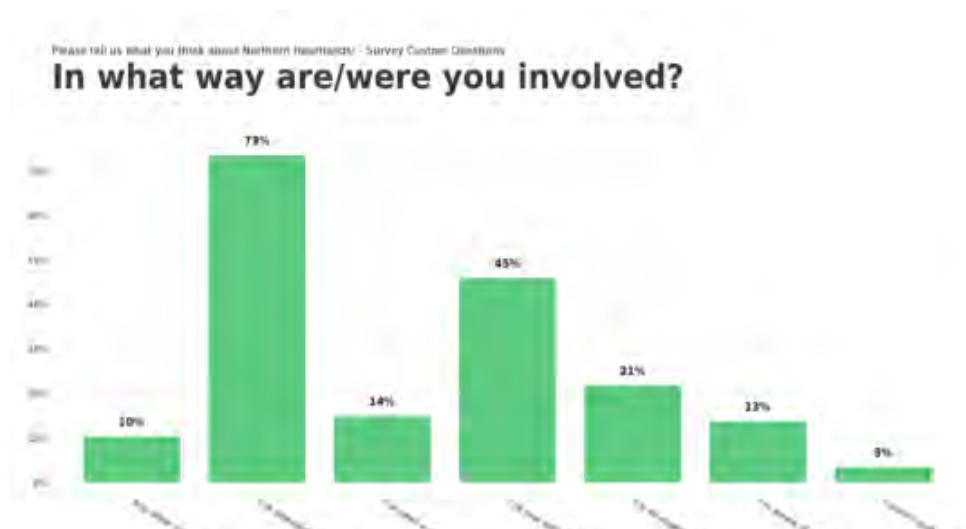
<sup>a</sup> Indicates invitations circulated via the *NH* contacts list; the number of invitations extended by partners (directly, or via newsletters &c) is not known.

others. Self-assessors are those directly involved with delivery including project leads and commissioned artists. Peers are those not directly involved with project delivery but with some knowledge of what has been achieved and able to provide feedback.

In place of the standard CC questions the questionnaires were designed in sections, each commencing with a closed question designed to elicit perceptions of or attitudes to aspects of *NH*'s projects, but which importantly then provided the opportunity for (what were sometimes extended) open narrative responses on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of delivery to date in regard to each area.

It is important to note that responses do not constitute a representative (and much less a statistically significant) sample of those who may have been in contact in any way with the work of *NH* and its constituent activities; summary data must therefore be treated with caution. No questions were mandatory and 'skipped' questions mean that aggregate responses to individual questions are generally less than the number of respondents overall.<sup>a</sup> Nevertheless the narrative responses received, including those of individuals who had limited engagement with the scheme, as well as the presence of some critical or hostile comments, suggests that these are likely to be reasonably representative of a wider spread of perceptions, attitudes and opinion regarding the scheme as a whole.

Beyond the issue of the tablet delivery format and the inflexibility of standard dimension questions, analysis and presentation of survey results have been restricted by CC's restriction of summary quantitative information provided to percentages, with the relevant numerical data from which they have been calculated being unavailable. Graphical material presented in this Report includes direct downloads from the CC platform as well as reformatted presentations from original data. Finally while as intended, the survey remained live until the end of May 2020, data presented



**Figure 2 Nature of respondent engagement with NH activities (MTR)**

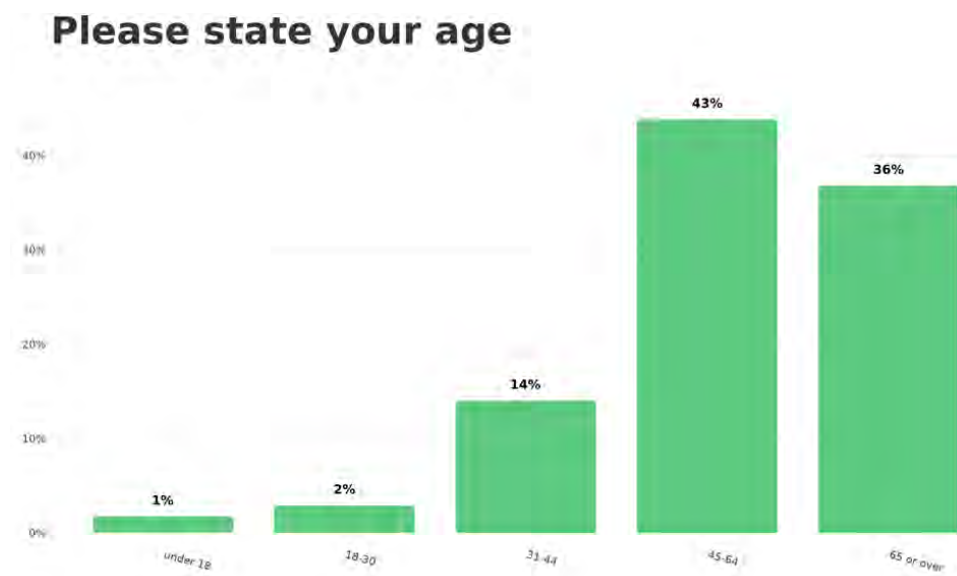
<sup>a</sup> Multiple choice questions mean that total responses to each question are generally greater than the number of respondents (i.e. percentages in each category are those of total respondents, not of responses to each question).



is as at mid-March, before the abandonment of *NH*'s Final Symposium and of live People's Opera performances and the imposition of 'lockdown' restrictions on activity and movement consequent upon the Covid-19 pandemic.

Other glitches in the CC platform mean that it has not been possible to analyse overall nature of respondent engagement with *NH* activities, but it seems likely that this is similar to that reported in the MTR, where over three-quarters (78%) of respondents had participated on one or more *NH* activity or event (observation suggests 94% in the final survey); 40% (32%) had met with *NH* Community Facilitators, individually or at community meetings. Less than 3% of respondents (2% in the final survey) indicated they were unaware of *NH* before receiving the invitation to complete the questionnaire.

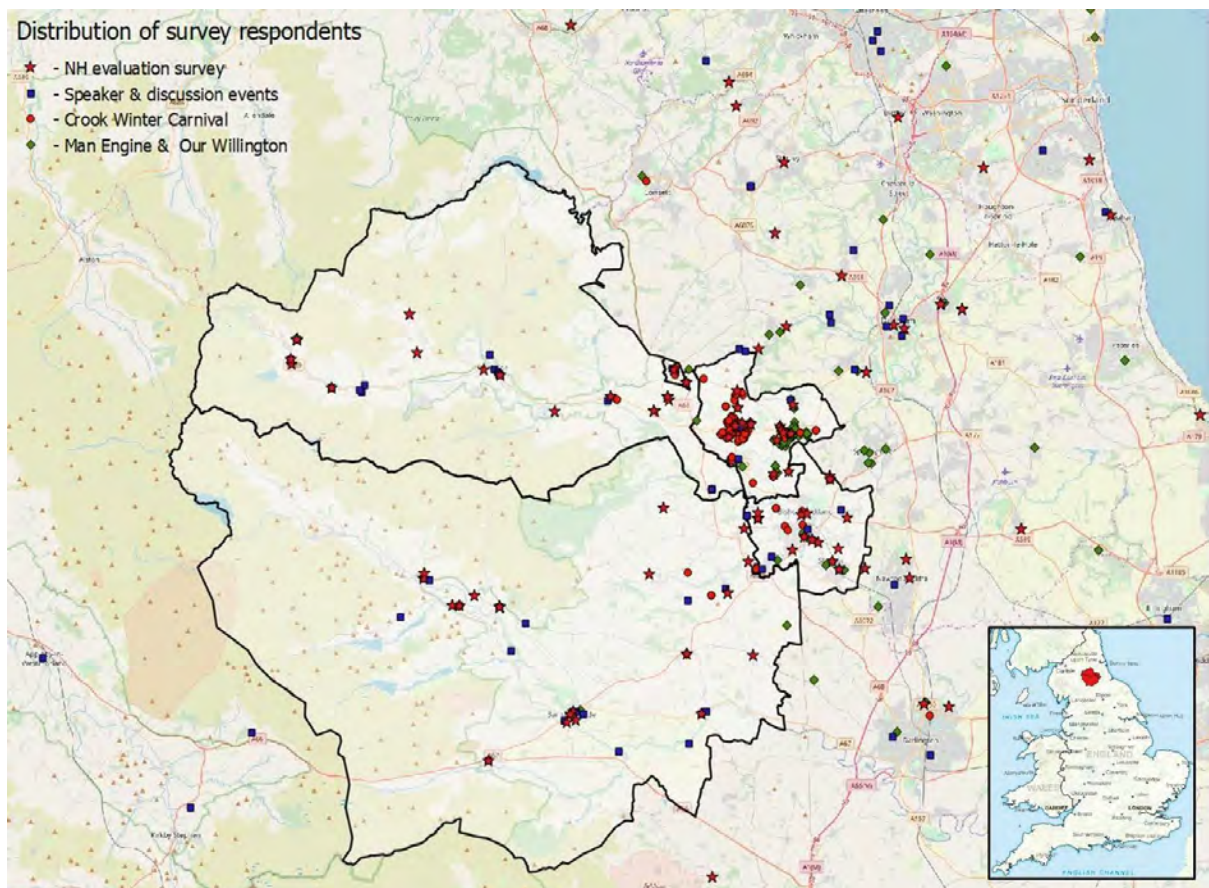
As with other multiple-choice questions (indicated by MC) including project involvement (below) these are non-exclusive categories and data cannot be summed. Limitations of the data analysis functions of CC mean that responses to all questions are only available as percentages rather than raw data.



**Figure 3 Age distribution of questionnaire respondents (FR)**

Demographic information provided by survey respondents indicates that:

- 44% of all respondents were aged between 45 and 64, and a further 36% over 65; only 14% were between 31-44 and only 3% under 30.
- More women (68%) than men (29%) responded to the survey.
- 12 respondents (7%) reported having a disability.
- Postcode data was provided by 81% of respondents



**Figure 4** Distribution of survey respondents who provided their postcodes with (inset) location of the NH area.

In place of the standard (but problematic) questions on ethnicity and occupation, respondents were provided the opportunity to volunteer further personal information. Of the 89 individuals who chose to do so, only one described their ethnicity as other than 'White', 'British' or 'English'; a distribution corresponding with that of County Durham as a whole. Most detail was provided on employment status, with a significant number of respondents declaring themselves as 'self-employed' or 'retired' and several chose to provide information on their personal circumstances including domestic commitments.

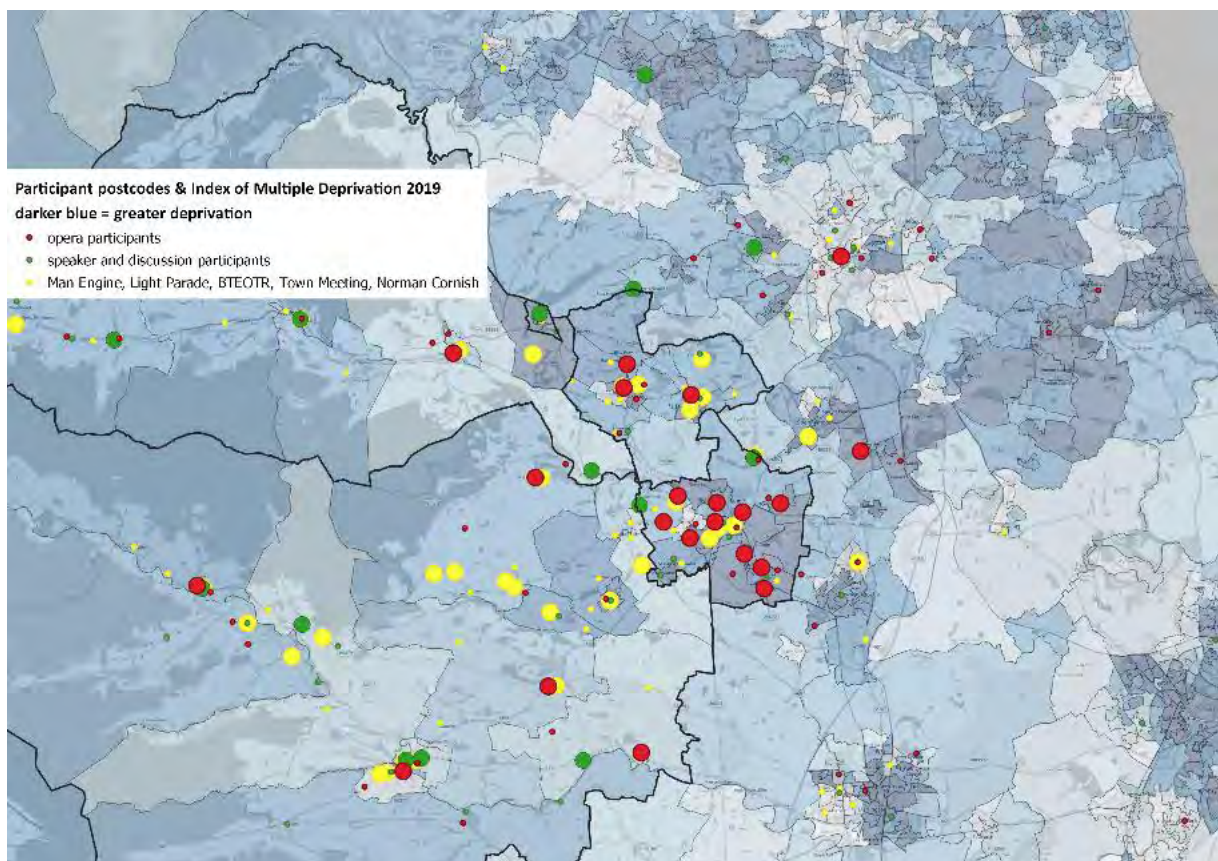
Demographic data for individual activities – for those projects for which it has been collected - reveals some interesting differences both with each other and with the MTR survey returns. For example while workshop participants for both Man Engine and the Winter Light Parade almost all described themselves as 'White British', returns to the audience surveys suggest a rather wider demographic. Both had a significant proportion (18% and 12% respectively) of disabled participants, however, gender breakdown in all three surveys was similar (2/3 female, 1/3 male).

NH activities have taken the form of a large number of events spread over the NH area some of them discrete entities; others linked workshop or other activities, in several cases culminating in a performance or other celebratory event. The 172 main survey respondents who provided a postcode (many opting to provide only the first half of the code) were likewise relatively well spread throughout the NH area, whilst those of the example project surveys show varying clusters (Figure 4, above). The map does not discriminate between locations of single individuals and those of several.

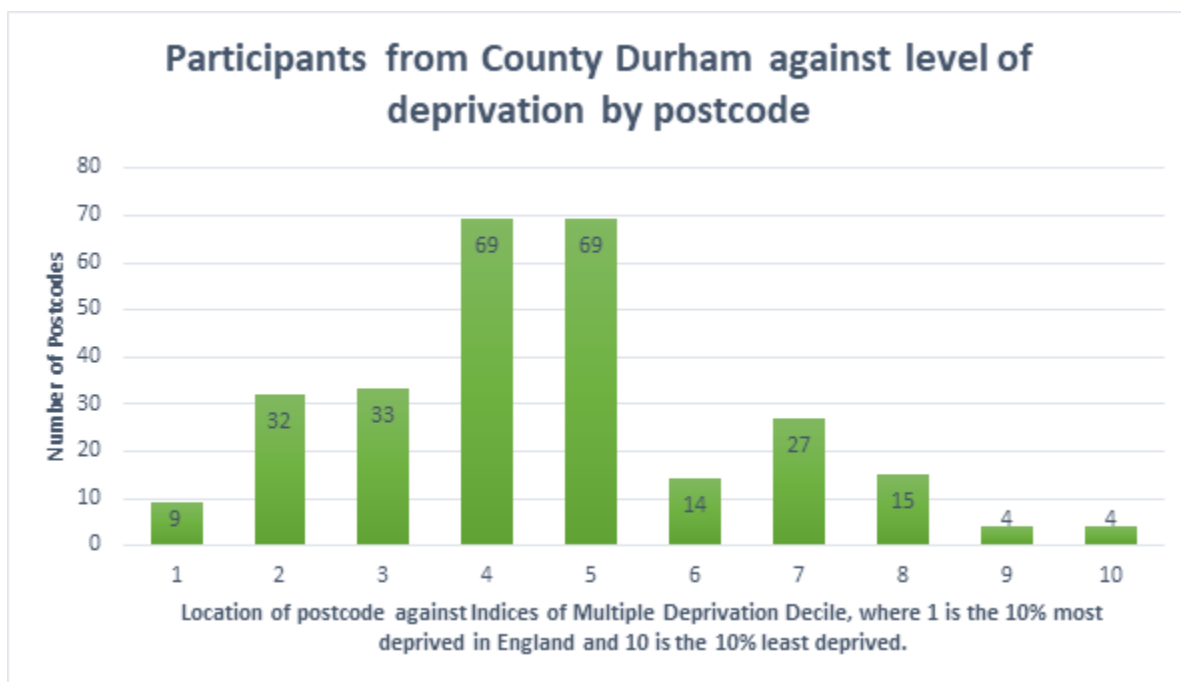
Respondents were asked to identify those projects or activities with which they had been involved to any degree, both in relation to commissioned projects and CIF funded projects. The engagement of survey respondents in *NH* activities is as likely to reflect the efforts of partners and project leads to encourage participants to complete, as it is to represent the levels of community participation with different projects. Nevertheless, every commissioned project is reflected in the responses provided by at least one survey respondent (Figure 9 page 23) although predictably (because no central records of CIF participants' contact details were held) CIF project participation is much less well represented (Figure 10 page 31).

Where individual surveys have been conducted, responses are proportionally much higher. For example, a total of over 100 participants responded to the surveys conducted for the three "Heart of the Matter" speaker and discussion events, as against just 26 for the final survey. Respondents involved in both categories of event were well distributed across the *NH* area (Figure 8 page 21).

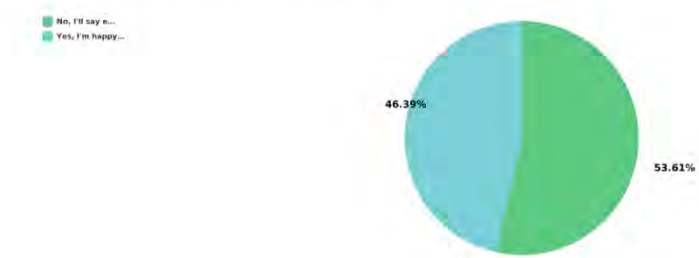
Analysis of postcodes secured for individual projects provides an indication of the 'reach' of the scheme in relation to indices of social and economic deprivation (Figure 5, below).<sup>(25)</sup> As with spatial distribution more generally, data suggests a representative distribution of participants in relation to socioeconomic factors across the *NH* area.



**Figure 5 (Above) spatial distribution of project participants against levels of deprivation across the *NH* area and (below) distribution by postcode in relation to indices of multiple deprivation**



**We would like to follow up this survey by contacting a small number of respondents by telephone. Would you be willing for us to contact you for a short telephone interview?**



**Figure 6 Responses to an invitation to provide contact details to enable subsequent interview**

provided with an invitation to respondents to contact us if they wanted to provide more information than they were able to do on the questionnaire; two individuals did this, both amplifying what they had already said in their responses to open-ended questions

For simplicity in the remainder of this report, no attempt has been made to identify categorical or narrative responses with an individual project or with respondent categories unless this appears particularly relevant.

### Key Informant Interviews

A programme of (telephone and on-site) interviews with individuals who might reasonably be considered to have expert or 'inside' knowledge of *NH* and its achievements was conducted throughout the evaluation, including the following categories:

The questionnaires concluded with an invitation to respondents to indicate if they were willing for us to follow up with a short telephone interview. 46% of respondents who answered this question volunteered their contact details for this purpose.

In the event time has prevented more than a limited amount of follow-up. Our own contact details were

- *NH* team members and project leads
- ‘Experts’ including those involved in local cultural and natural heritage works
- Representatives of funding and partner bodies.

In parallel with the above, the on-line survey secured responses from individuals in the following categories who provided their contact details for follow-up interviews:

- Volunteers
- Project participants
- Indirect potential beneficiaries including local businesses and residents
- Others, including individuals who had little contact with *NH*.

### **Liaison and networking**

Alongside ongoing liaison with the *NH* delivery team, attendance at meetings of the AB and LAG has been important in providing a window on (and allowing engagement with) policy discussions and decisions. Participation in the two national briefing and networking events and the associated telephone focus groups (April 2018 and March 2019) hosted by HLF/ACE/BOP have also provided additional insights.

### **Site visits**

A programme of site visits to all *NH* project locations conducted through the life of *NH*'s delivery has provided valuable supplementary information to the above and enabled us to ‘ground truth’ information secured from other sources.

Codes used to identify respondents to surveys and interviews throughout this report are as follows:

**PA** = participant in one or more *NH* events or activities

**PL** = project lead or Partner representative

**V** = volunteer

**CF** = met with an Community Facilitator

**NP** = aware of *NH* but non participant

**NA** = unaware of *NH* until approached as part of this evaluation.

27

## Case study 9 NORTHERN HEARTLANDS

**Who:**  
Northern Heartlands is one of the Great Place schemes, jointly funded by ACE and HLF with an ambition to empower communities through culture, heritage, and the arts. The Great Place programme is designed to pilot new approaches that enable cultural and community groups to work more closely together and to place culture heritage at the heart of communities. There are 16 programmes in England, and it is being rolled out across the rest of the UK.

**What:**  
As one of the only schemes not to be embedded within a local authority, the bid itself left space for the strategy and direction of the process to be owned and directed by the community. 2 community facilitators have done extensive work over 9 months, listening to communities and co-creating briefs for work in their area.

**Key principles and practice:**

- constant investment in a listening process, spending time in knitting circles, working men's clubs, community cafes and clubs
- a commitment to process as equal to artistic output
- a commitment to taking time
- artists can be great catalysts for other peoples' ideas
- one-off artistic interventions can catalyse communities, build pride, show what's possible but legacy has to be built in from the start
- The activities across the programme are designed to help use creativity to impact other areas of local life such as influencing local policy and politics, agriculture and transport

**Outcomes:**  
Through one of the activities designed to help the community develop a local neighbourhood plan (plus subsequent community events on planning) one participant has decided to stand for her local parish council, feeling empowered to make change in her area.

*'People have had culture and arts done to them, there has been damage done where something has been given and then taken away. We have been breaking barriers down and starting from what they want.'*

Tariq Imam  
Community Facilitator

IMAGE CREDIT: Claire Collinson Photography for Northern Heartlands

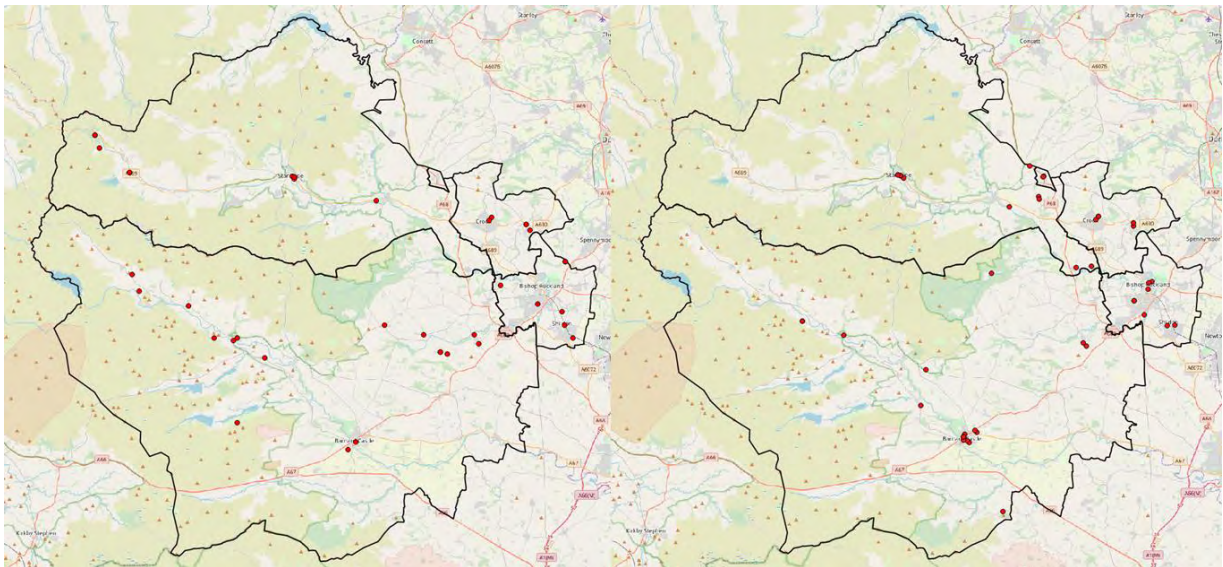
Figure 7 Northern Heartlands features as a case study in the ACE publication Cultural democracy in Practice <sup>(26)</sup>



### 3 Project delivery, outputs and outcomes

NH's approved delivery programme is based on multiple projects which fall into five categories:

- **Commissioned projects** intended to explore place, heritage and landscape, and deliver high quality public engagement.
- **'Pulse'**, a program of local artist development delivered by the Forge, developing schools as cultural hubs and assisting their progress towards ArtsMark accreditation.
- **Co-commissioned projects**, matching artists and researchers with communities to develop projects together, facilitated by the two Community Facilitators (CF).
- A **Community Initiative Fund (CIF)**, delivered through the County Durham Community Foundation (CDCF) facilitating projects promoted by local communities and groups.
- **HeART of the Matter** - a series of speaker and discussion events to explore wider themes to do with community engagement in 'place-making'.
- **'Song of Our Heartland'**, a multimedia immersive community opera led by Opera North and based on the history and stories of the area, planned (prior to the onset of the Covid epidemic) to be performed at Locomotion, Shildon and subsequently toured.



**Figure 8 Distribution of commissioned projects (left) and CIF projects (right) over the NH area. An interactive map showing the places in which all NH performances, projects, workshops and other activities took place can be explored on <https://tinyurl.com/NorthernHeartlandsMap>.**

A summary table of all project outputs and outcomes is provided online as Appendix 1 to this report.

#### 3.1 Commissioned activities

An impressive range of 23 projects producing 253 individual events, activities and workshops were directly commissioned by the NH delivery team, supported by an allocated £330,000 or 18% of the initial NLHF grant (also covering co-commissioned projects and Pulse). Projects ranged from musical theatre in community venues (Beyond the End of the Road), to outdoor 'spectaculars' (The

Man Engine, Willington; Crook Winter Light Parade), to interactive theatre about planning decisions (Town Meeting), to a touring craft exhibition exploring migration (Craft & Conflict), to creative research with farmers in the upper Tees and Wear catchments (Hefted to Hill), to participatory arts and activism with communities in the post-industrial villages of the Dene Valley (More Than Viable), to digital engagement extending the reach of the Bowes Museum (Norman Cornish). Eight of the 23 projects included creative or heritage research.

Many projects featured multiple activities at different locations over the *NH* area. In total, commissioned activities resulted in 2900 participations; audiences estimated at over 12,000; support to 10 arts/heritage organisations; an additional 341 days of employment to independent artists (paid at Arts Council standard rates) and collaborations with Newcastle and Durham universities. Table 2, below, presents a summary of some of the key projects. A full list of commissioned projects with a summary of outputs and outcomes is provided in Appendix 1.

**Table 3 Examples of commissioned projects and activities**

Project/ group	Notes
<b>Man Engine</b>	Outdoor performance of the ‘Man Engine’ on Willington town green, 30th June 2018, with community banner parade, brass bands, choirs and refreshment sites given to local businesses. The estimated crowd of 6000 was drawn heavily from local areas, but also from across the North East. It was preceded from April to June by school and community-based activities focussing on local mining heritage, including banner-making. The event generated significant regional press, won the 2019 North East Culture Award, generated a number of following projects in the community and led to the town council deciding to repurpose the council office into an arts and heritage centre.
<b>‘Hefted to Hill’</b>	"Hefted to Hill" — an innovative creative research project exploring farmers’ knowledge of landscape. Lead artist Ewan Allinson provided dry stone walling in return for in-depth recorded discussions with hill farmers accompanied by a photographer. Two audio visual exhibitions were put on in churches in the upper dales, the project tied into a Heart of the Matter discussion event and the research will feed into a PhD at Newcastle University. The lead artist now sits on the Uplands Alliance, and there has been interest in the project from both Natural England and DEFRA.
<b>Bowes museum</b>	<i>NH’s</i> initial bid included delivery of an outreach programme to support the Bowes Museum's main exhibition programme, developing co-curated exhibitions of contemporary works and archives in public buildings with community groups. This proved difficult to develop in a way congruent with <i>NH’s</i> ambitions; in its place a new project linked with a countywide touring exhibition of Norman Cornish works was delivered between November 2019 and February 2020 with former coalfield villages.





Practical activities in particular received praise:

*Loved the Weardale tub workshop - a chance to get hands on and actually create something. Good location at Low Barnes.*

*'Beyond the end of the road in County Durham' was a great project to be involved with and I enjoyed it more on each occasion I took part - 4 in total.(PA)*

Two events – the (June 2018) Willington Man Engine appearance and the (November 2018) Crook Winter Light Parade received acclaim both from spectators and from those who participated in preparatory workshops. Typical comments regarding Man Engine were:

*Man Engine Willington was great. It brought a whole community together. One of the nicest days I've had in this town after 25 years of living here.(PA)*

*I had goose bumps as I have never in my life seen anything as beautiful as the man engine...it brought what I think was a broken community back together, I have never felt so proud in my life to have just been a spectator.(PA)*

*The man engine visit to Willington where I live was a fantastic day and involved the village generating interest in other projects and bringing economic benefits to businesses.(PA)*

*When the Man Engine came to Willington the whole Town changed. It took on the mantle of celebration, pride, togetherness. Everyone smiled. Young and old laughed together, licked ice creams, shared and made memories. The story of Willington became their story. The legacy is not just the banners in the schools or the photos on the phones. Nor is it the smaller celebration this year. The real legacy is in the hearts and minds of the people of Willington.*

*When the Man Engine came to town it came for us. Thankyou!(PA)*

*Willington – just want it to thrive.(PA)*

NH's own separate evaluation of Man Engine<sup>a</sup> makes it clear that – beyond its impact in Willington and the surrounding area, the event (with 5,000 individuals registered and an estimated 6,000 spectators on the day) also served to put NH 'on the map' – securing interest and subsequent engagement from those who might otherwise not have become involved. In addition to NH's own website the event is celebrated on social media and a public record remains accessible on YouTube.<sup>b</sup> Pritchard's 'autoethnographic' evaluation<sup>(27)</sup> perhaps sums up the event effectively:

*Slowly but surely, the whole town came out. People suddenly streaming from every direction. [...] No Pied Piper. No false promises [...] Willington doesn't need a Man Engine. It has its own People Engine. This town survived its "death knell" pit closure. The visit of the Cornish Man Engine serves as a metaphoric lift to Willington – the beginnings of the town's own resurrection [...] People in Willington were surprised, sometimes bemused, that the Man Engine had come to*

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<sup>a</sup> <https://mk0northernhearc9wdh.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/man-engine-report.pdf>

<sup>b</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=In0qpgVxPU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In0qpgVxPU) and [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX2hbcA1LD4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX2hbcA1LD4) including an interview with NH's Director (also on [www.youtube.com/watch?v=584ZARptHmo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=584ZARptHmo))

*their town. But they came. They all came. They clapped and cheered and shed a tear. The brass band played. Children and parents and teachers proudly displayed colourful banners. Banners brimming with hope and pride [...] like the words emblazoned upon Hunwick Primary School's banner, "In Partnership We Learn, We Share, We Succeed".<sup>(27)</sup>*

Narrative evaluations of the Crook Winter Light Parade by Jack Drum Arts and by NH were also produced in addition to a commissioned video<sup>a</sup> which summarises the impact that the event had on participants. In content, the Parade was a 'bottom up' event very different from Man Engine (which was agreed with the Willington Mayor and Town Council but with little initial community consultation due to the short lead time) and it builds on earlier activities of a related nature. The 'theme' of the 2018 Festival, supported by NH, was the heritage of Crook past and resident's hopes for the future. Preparations for the Parade itself involved significant time and resource from the two CFs and included preparatory workshops with schools, the local Cheshire Homes (vulnerable adults), youth centres and community groups.

*Crook Winter Light Parade was an incredible example of what a community can achieve, and was delivered in a way that reached and engaged many members of the public. The parade itself was spectacular and innovative. The production value honoured the community contribution and engendered a sense of pride among all participants. The artists involved and artwork produced were of an incredibly high quality.(PL)*

*Crook lantern parade- great atmosphere, varied performances by community groups, excellent support from residents.(PA)*

*I've been involved with Jack Drum Arts for many years, so it has not made any difference [to me personally]. Must admit though, Crook does quite often get bad press, it was so nice to see something positive happening and the attendance just goes to prove it is appreciated.(PL)*

### 3.2 'Pulse' - local artist development

An innovative program of local artist development delivered by the Forge,<sup>b</sup> focused on developing a group of four schools (Parkside Academy, Wearhead Primary, Butterknowle Primary and Cockfield Primary) drawn from the four Northern Heartlands regions (Weardale, Teesdale, Bishop Auckland and Shildon and 3 Towns) as cultural hubs and assisting their progress towards ArtsMark accreditation.<sup>(1, 5)</sup> Originally two secondary schools were recruited but one withdrew due to curriculum pressure.

Four emerging artists — a photographer, film maker, graphic artist and a writer, two of whom were self-taught, without formal arts education — were selected for training to develop their participatory practice. Three experienced artists (an animator, photographer and a visual artist) both worked in the schools and mentored the emerging artists to create and deliver their own

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<sup>a</sup> <https://vimeo.com/307553193>

<sup>b</sup> [www.intheforge.com/](http://www.intheforge.com/)

sessions, with additional support from The Forge. Prior to working in schools the trainee artists went through a period of training, all artists supporting each other to develop their practice.

In total, 42 sessions were delivered to 119 pupils in the four schools, employing three established artists for 40 days and providing 24 days of paid training for the four emerging artists. Work with the schools used themes of place and included:

- Animations created by children and shared with parents and wider school communities (Butterknowle and Wearhead);
- Photography-based “zines” themed around “A Place called Me” created by Parkside students, and shared with the wider public in the No Man’s Land exhibition at Bishop Auckland Town Hall;
- Cockfield – work with artist Paul Merrick was shared with wider school community.

The emerging artists all reported on positive impact of the training and agreed that it had given them the confidence to apply for paid work opportunities. As a result of taking part:

- One participant was selected from a wide field of applicants to lead The Forge’s Paul Hamlyn funded Teacher Development Programme.
- One participant made a successful application for an ACE Developing Your Practice award (which she credited directly to the course), took part in a pioneering spoken word programme at Consett Academy, was instrumental in developing the Durham University Poetry Pop Ups and successfully applied to a Northern Heartlands open commission in 2020.
- One participant went on to work for Bigfoot Arts Education delivering sessional work
- One participant was commissioned to the Weardale Tub project.

*The methodology allowed us to gain an insight into how we can best support new and emerging artists by working closely with schools and experienced artist mentors. [...]. The programme also allowed us to develop good relationships with the schools in that area which we will continue to build upon in the future.(PL)*

The project initially aimed to assist all the participating schools to become ‘arts hubs’ for their local communities, and help them in gaining their Arts Mark awards. While the latter was successfully achieved for the participating schools and the Forge’s working relationship with all the schools involved was strengthened (and in two of them led to further activities directly with the community) pressures on curriculum time and exam-focused cultures meant that the creation of arts hubs was not fully achieved.

### 3.3 Communities and co-commissioning

Community engagement has been central to NH activities and is reflected in the high staff allocation —£520,000 or 29% of the initial NLHF grant — for the NH delivery team when compared to other Great Place Schemes. NH’s original bid stated that the Community Facilitators would “work closely with communities, identifying need and areas of interest and brokering relationships.”<sup>(1)</sup>

During early planning and development in 2017, a methodology for co-commissioning projects was devised and worked through by the NH delivery team. The aim was for the CFs to

identify a community or community group and conduct listening and facilitation sessions to establish collective interests. This would lead to the appointment of an artist(s) who would then develop a project with the group and/or wider community, leading to delivery.

In practice, co-commissioning in the context of GPS was problematic. Establishing, building and developing relationships to the point where co-commissioning was realistic took a great deal more time than projected within the bid. It took time to identify a group, establish that they wanted (and were able) to take part in a project, undertake initial facilitation and create a project brief. Prior to *NH*, co-commissioning was an unknown for most groups, and there were understandable concerns from community representatives (the majority of whom were volunteers) in relation to the time commitment involved and to the contractual implications of commissioning. And, importantly, the extent of the *NH* area meant that travel time between rural locations was a real issue, reducing the time that the CFs could spend with community partners.

In the event, only three community-led projects were developed using the method as originally devised. Two of these - Woodhouse Close AYCC (November 2018) and Shildon Youthy, (Autumn 2019) - were with young people and so necessarily involved negotiation with adults in authority (e.g. social workers) which added delay and complexity, particularly in the case of Shildon Youthy.

*The consensus was that this type of co-commissioned project needs more project management and involvement from NH to keep it on track. The time between NH engagement with AYCC/Shildon Youthy and commissioning artists was too long. A meeting between [all parties] should have taken place before the work started to set some expectations and recap the work and aims.”(PL)*

A third project, ‘Wearhead Aspirations’, more closely followed the method as envisaged, in that initial discussion and a facilitated session at Wearhead Primary (a key community hub in Upper Weardale) identified concerns around the opportunities and aspirations for young people living in the dale. Writer & researcher David Naphine was commissioned and over several months in 2019 undertook an ethnographic/participatory exploration of the impact of landscape on the lives and opportunities for residents of all ages across upper Weardale, as well as creative writing workshops with schoolchildren and community writers. Outputs include a report of findings, creative prose about Weardale and a performance at the Weardale Wordfest with local writers of work produced during the project.

While this anticipated method of co-commissioning has not always gone smoothly, the activities of the two CFs have been of central importance to the delivery of *NH* particularly in relation to:

- alerting communities to – and stimulating discussion around - the objectives and potential of *NH*’s work;
- maintaining relationships from projects to continue and develop community engagement. For example, ongoing engagement by CFs after Beyond the End of the Road led to one community that had refused to host BTEOTR later taking part in the Town Meeting;

- relationship building, enabling commissioned projects which might not otherwise have taken place. For example, More Than Viable (community-led practice, although not co-commissioned) followed eighteen months of relationship building by CFs in Eldon and Dene Valley;
- enabling the extension of other ‘top down’ commissioned projects through community activities, with 212 school and community workshops associated with commissioned projects;
- working with communities and groups to identify and develop proposals for the Community Initiative Fund and supporting groups through the application process (below).

*I find they really understand the area they are hosting events/ workshops in. The community involvement is essential for projects to flourish.(PL)*

*Northern Heartlands actually engage with the community and care about the area they cover (PL)*

### 3.4 CIF - the Community Initiatives Fund

One of the features of *NH* – in part included as a consequence of the success of an earlier venture in the HoT LP scheme – is allocated funding of £275,000 or 15% of the initial NLHF grant to the delivery of small projects to be supported by a third party grants programme – the Community Initiatives Fund (CIF). In the case of *NH* a decision was made at an early stage for this to be managed by the County Durham Community Foundation (CDCF). Applications were required to be ‘community led’ and linked with *NH*’s aims, responding to place and landscape. Applications were invited for up to £10,000 though most awarded grants were between £2,000 and £5,000. While the *NH* team — in particular the two CFs — provided critical support in advising on and assisting funding applications and helping to manage projects, decisions on funding were made by a community panel independent of *NH*.

Four rounds of funding – in March and July 2018 and March and July 2019 saw a total of 47 applications approved. These 47 separate community generated CIF-funded projects resulted in 3,500 participations by local residents, engaged an estimated audience of 5,680 and provided additional benefits to a similar number from projects such as heritage archives and new walking trails. Additionally, CIF projects secured £137,000 in leveraged funding and/or additional income. Over the course of the three years, *NH* CIF project supported 13 arts companies or heritage organisations and 240 days of paid employment to independent artists.

Projects ranged across a variety of heritage, arts and landscape activities (with many having improved wellbeing as a primary or additional aim) as follows:

#### **Heritage:**

- community archaeological digs
- heritage research including local history story gathering
- celebrating local composers of traditional music
- creation of heritage walking trails
- exploring the spiritual value of a village church to the wider community
- making of a new stained-glass window for Durham Miners’ Hall
- provision of equipment needed for poultry fanciers’ society to continue traditional shows

- a new heritage centre in a village hall.

#### Arts:

- community-created displays in shop windows
- outdoor theatre and performances in Hamsterley Forest
- support for young folk musicians and traditional music
- new folk music composition
- landscape & astronomical photography
- a literary festival in upper Weardale
- hosting the Highlights Craft & Conflict exhibition in community venues
- ceramics workshops and exhibition
- increasing access to artists' studio open days
- banner creation.

#### Landscape/environment:

- woodland and landscape-based wellbeing activities
- new interpretation for a wildlife centre
- school trips for children to take part in landscape and wildlife activities, including farm visits
- wildflower planting
- youth theatre production exploring local impacts of climate change.

A full list of CIF funded projects is provided in Appendix 1 and some examples are summarised below.

**Table 4 Examples of CIF projects selected to show the range of activities and outcomes**

CIF Project	Notes
"Discovering Holwick's Past" - Altogether Archaeology	£3,900 to fund 16 days of professionally-led excavation at Holwick with 65 volunteers (of which 15 were new to the group) and approximately 25 on site each day. Evening presentations and archaeological walks were organised before and after the excavation and local residents visited informally to observe progress. Outcomes include confirmation of existing knowledge but also new features (a Bronze Age burial cairn), new recruits to and publicity and status for the group, and proposals for further work.
"As You Like It" - Drama in the Dale	£500 to support an outdoor performance of Shakespeare's <u>As You Like It</u> set in the 1920s with a community cast and local trainee director with a professional mentor and musicians in St Thomas Church in Stanhope as part of the RSC Open Stages project, sold out (audience 200) across all 4 performances.
"At Home with Heritage" - St John's RC School	£7,500 to support 24 visits, outreach from cultural organisations and visiting professional artists, involving 16 groups of secondary students and staff (210 individuals in total) exploring themes ranging from traditional crafts, local

	legends, inspirational people past and present, agricultural shows, local sights of interest, changing landscapes, language, mining, tea, recycling & renewable energy.
"Native Wild Flower Project" - Tow Law Community Association	£8,950 to fund a year-long arts, environment & heritage project across three sites: Burnhill Nature Reserve, Stanley Moss Sunnyside & Tow Law Millennium Green, with 345 volunteers, planting seeds and plugs for a wild flower meadow, making environment inspired artwork (murals, ceramics, a banner) with a professional artist, coupled with outdoor family activities (pond-dipping, origami) & sound scape, culminating in exhibitions at St Thomas's Church Stanley Crook and Tow Law Community Association, and recorded in an excellent film and e-book, the latter itself the most effective, publicly available evaluation record of achievement.

## Have you been involved in a project funded by Northern Heartlands' Community Initiative Fund?

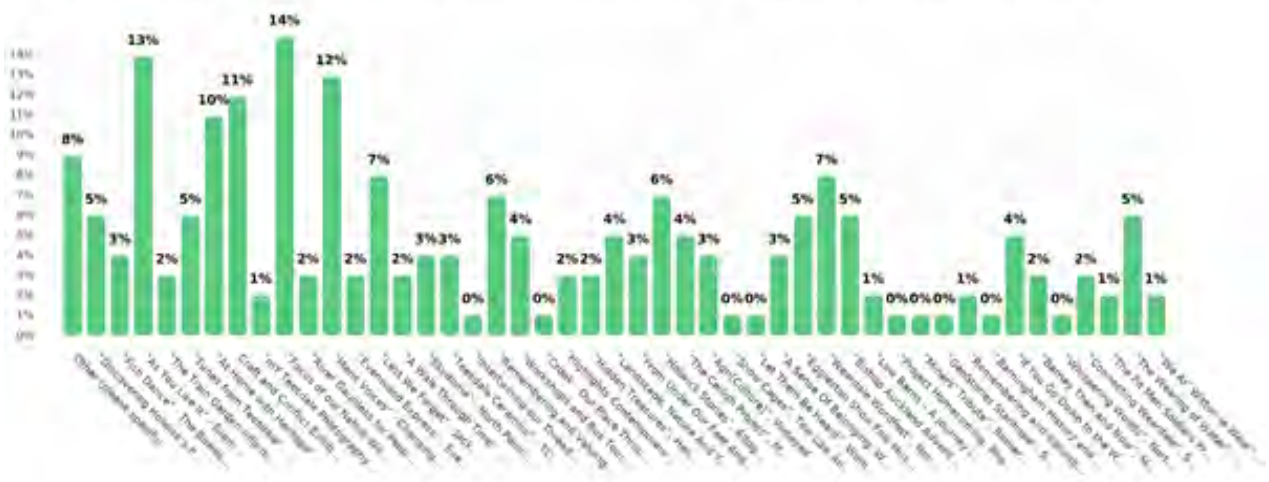


Figure 10 Involvement of survey respondents in NH CIF projects

Over a third (87) of survey respondents had been involved to some degree in CIF funded activities (Figure 10 above). Most had also participated in (and perhaps heard about NH via) other, commissioned projects. Their comments have proved valuable alongside the impact reports from grantees. However, of 47 CIF projects listed in the survey, 37 involved 5 or fewer respondents (and 9 had none).

CDCF has its own evaluation procedures which include a Final Impact Report (FIR) required from all grantholders. The reduced reporting requirement is a deliberate policy to encourage small voluntary groups to apply for funding. FIRs vary considerably in detail but several contain testimony from individuals, including children with special needs who have clearly benefited significantly, and a case study of an adult with physical and mental health issues who has gained confidence as a result.



From the evidence available it is clear that NH's CIF has been one of the most successful elements of NH's programme. Delivery though CDCF has provided a very efficient and ready-made 'arm's length' body for selecting projects and administering funding with good existing contacts and 'local knowledge'. Feedback from participants and project leads in CIF projects has been overwhelmingly positive, in terms both of the experience and impact of activities themselves, and of the support offered by the NH team, in particular the two CFs.

*People who do not normally volunteer in the village have engaged with this project and the effect has been excellent. The banner work has included so many participants and has encouraged residents to talk to one another.(PL, FIR)*

*The installation of the storage/study unit has encouraged us to plan further development in the village hall to provide additional study facilities . We have already obtained a computer for users and plan to install more furniture and a display unit.(PL, FIR)*

*The walk has been established in the minds of people as a way of exploring the heritage of the villages while in the process offering health benefits and a feeling of well-being.(PL, FIR)*

*[we] can continue to stage poultry shows for the foreseeable future, preserving 120 years of heritage... We are able to avoid increasing entry fees for the shows by avoiding the high cost of cage hire, encouraging continued and wider participation. (Tow Law & District Fanciers' Society FIR)*

*My heart attack peers describe depression, fear, tearfulness, worry... I think that there are a number of reasons for my positive state of mind. I have to place somewhere near the top my unexpected experience with Drama in the Dale.(PA feedback in FIR)*

*As an organiser of the Altogether Archaeology project I particularly appreciate the helpful support we have received from Northern Heartlands staff.(PL)*

*Children who came with bed head screen eyes went away rosy cheeked and wanting to stay in the outdoors. Behaviour was excellent throughout which is a good indicator of enjoyment. Participation was constant and what children achieved was quietly impressive.(PL)*

*The grant has made a huge difference in the lives of our members, but also the local audience that came along to see the four sold out performances of As You Like It! (PL)*

*The grant application and reporting has been a straight-forward process, without excessive bureaucracy. All interactions with CDCF and Northern Heartlands have been friendly and prompt. We are very grateful for all the help and advice received from the staff of Northern Heartlands.(PL, FIR)*

*I just wanted to say thank you to everyone, for drama. I've made some lovely friends and met some lovely people and I have defo become more confident through-out the past few months!! So I'm very grateful for your help and for the experience. Thank you!x (PA, 13yrs)*

Like other elements of NH however, CIF has also involved a learning process. Negative comments have been noticeably few and primarily related to rejected applications:

*[NH] led us to make an application for funding which was turned down. While this was always accepted as possibility, we were given optimistic feedback for our project, and have wasted a great deal of time.(PL)*

Work of the two CFs with prospective applicants led to an improvement in applicants' confidence and the quality of applications has steadily improved over each round. Experience has brought new project initiatives more into line with *NH's* aims and being able to 'lock in' to an established scheme has avoided some of the barriers and risks of co-commissioning. Their first-hand knowledge of projects also assists the CIF panel with their decision-making process and, as an outcome of *NH's* experience with CIF, CDCF is considering ways of working more closely with other potential grant beneficiaries and is keen to continue partnership with the new *NH* CIO.

Public visibility (and praise) for successful projects, including local press coverage, has also been important. Several projects have produced films, one a series of podcasts, and the flipsnack booklet record of the Tow Law Community Association's Wild Flower Project<sup>a</sup> is itself a really effective evaluation of what appears to have been a high quality initiative – bridging the gap between 'art', 'heritage' and 'culture'. As a record of what was achieved it seems likely to have itself enhanced the benefit to participants – including their sense of achievement in (and hopefully commitment to maintain the benefits of) their work.

### 3.5 HeART of the Matter

HeART of the Matter was as a rolling programme of speaker and discussion events which provided a platform for cross-sector debate on a range of issues to explore and develop strategy promoting the role of landscape, heritage, culture and the arts as drivers of change. Supported by an allocated 3% (£60,000) of the initial NLHF grant, topics have included spatial planning, placemaking, farming and tourism with six events across the *NH* area involving a total of 390 individuals. Although promoted as speaker and discussion events these activities have varied significantly in format as well as focus, variously including a theatre presentation, music and site visits as well as workshop sessions.

**Table 5 Heart of the Matter events**

What is Northern Heartlands? November 2017, Crook	Artist-led creative research workshop with representatives from organisations/communities across the NH area. Using participatory mapping and other creative techniques the workshop aimed to explore issues, priorities and local knowledge.
Planning: A Participatory Art? April 2018, Bishop Auckland	Event exploring the place of artists in spatial planning and local democracy, partnered with Town & Country Planning Association and Newcastle University. Including two musical/theatre performances and with representatives including local government, developers, residents associations and community groups, planners, artists and academics.

<sup>a</sup> [www.flipsnack.com/hilltopcommunityproject/the-wildflower-project.html](http://www.flipsnack.com/hilltopcommunityproject/the-wildflower-project.html) ; other videos have been placed on You Tube, see <https://vimeo.com/321539841>; <https://vimeo.com/321538388>; <https://vimeo.com/321537108>;

People Make Places, September 2018, Wolsingham	Jointly hosted with November Club and focussed on rural 'placemaking', this artist-led event was aimed at 'active citizens' and local organisations from across the NH area, bringing highly experienced practitioners (Dead Good Guides, Encounters Arts, Incredible Edible) to meet people from remote/rural places, who are unable to attend placemaking conferences in cities due to distance/cost.
Hefted to Hill, July 2019, Stanhope	Linked to the Hefted to Hill project, this brought together farmers, farming and conservation organisations, artists and academics to explore the place and value of farmers' knowledge in upland landscape management, including a preview of the Hefted to Hill exhibition.
Not Just a Part of the Scenery February 2019, Barnard Castle	Jointly hosted with Visit County Durham, the event focussed on community involvement tourism. Bringing the latest academic research and an internationally renowned thought leader in sustainable tourism, the event attracted community representatives from the Northern Heartlands area and staff from visitor destinations from across the north of England.
Re:Place, September 2019	Jointly hosted with Durham County Council and Town & Country Planning Association, this event developed out of 'Planning: A Participatory Art?' exploring in greater depth joint practice between artists, planners and developers, and launching a new national network hosted by the Town & Country Planning Association.

Each of the events was structured in such a way that community representatives, artists, policy and decision makers were on an equal footing and all have been well received, securing positive feedback from participants. Some of the positive outcomes include:

- The creation of a new network linking artists and planners, hosted by the Town and Country Planning Association.
- The adoption by TCPA board of a strategic area of work focussing on the role of arts in spatial planning
- A commitment by Durham County Council to trial creative methods of community engagement
- A commitment by Visit County Durham (VCD) to involve County Durham communities in the development of their new tourism strategy
- A new relationship between Visit County Durham and Leeds Beckett University School of Sustainable Tourism
- The creation of a partnership with Incredible Edible, leading to support for the community to develop food growing projects as part of More Than Viable
- "The Value of Shared Spaces" produced by Chris Ford which also includes working with Cap-a-Pie and Dr Paul Cowie
- A CIF funded project from Hilltop Community Projects in Tow Law directly inspired by People Make Places.

*Really enjoyed the Planning Heart of the Matter... good mix of speakers and time or discussion.(PA)  
The speakers were superb, so knowledgeable , interesting and stimulating.(PA)  
We were all committed to fight a common enemy: the land-owner who wanted to build houses on a site most of us thought was inappropriate...we succeeded in stopping the devp & it felt good to be involved in that & great that Northern Heartlands brought us all together to talk & think about those things.(PA)  
At the workshop I attended the attitude and involvement of the delivery team was great. It was well organised and everyone was so friendly.(PA)  
There seemed to be an atmosphere of openness and that's hard to manage into being - it grows on its own.(PA)*

Places in Particular', effectively the last of the programme of speaker and discussion events, was planned as a three-day national symposium and programme of public activities to celebrate the end of the scheme in early April 2020 but had to be cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. In its place the remaining event budget has been used to create a digital platform<sup>a</sup> in partnership with digital agency Lexicon Learning UK, allowing both the symposium and opera to be converted into virtual events. The Symposium was replaced by a series of five virtual events streaming weekly over August and September 2020 including online chat with speakers and an interactive website. Topics have included funding and the impact of the pandemic on the cultural sector; working with supposedly 'hard-to-reach' communities; community and participatory art and artists' responses to landscape; and the relationship between 'folk' music and place in the context of the musical heritage of the dales. To mid-October (i.e. including post-event views of the recorded seminars) a total of 2,271 individuals visited the heartlands.online site, and of these just over a fifth returned subsequently for further visits.

### **3.6 'Song of Our Heartland' – NH's Community Opera**

Costed at £200,000 or 11% of NH's total NLHF grant, 'Song of Our Heartland' was planned as an immersive multimedia community opera informed by local histories and storytelling in partnership with Opera North. Initially planned to culminate in a major public performance to be performed at Shildon Locomotion in autumn 2019 and toured thereafter, commitments of Opera North personnel prior to award of HLF grant meant that the final performances had to be rescheduled to the anticipated end of the NH scheme at the end of May 2020.

Community Opera workshops and rehearsals began in early 2019 in 9 locations including Barnard Castle, Bishop Auckland (2 locations), St John's Chapel, Wolsingham, Hamsterley, Shildon, Crook and Willington. A total of 95 participants took part in these initial workshops, with Opera North's team comprising the composer, the director and a librettist. These initial sessions facilitated the development of themes, story and melodies as part of the composition process. There was a change of librettist during 2019, and further activities took place with the composer, director and new librettist to continue developing the composition. A community choir was recruited and took

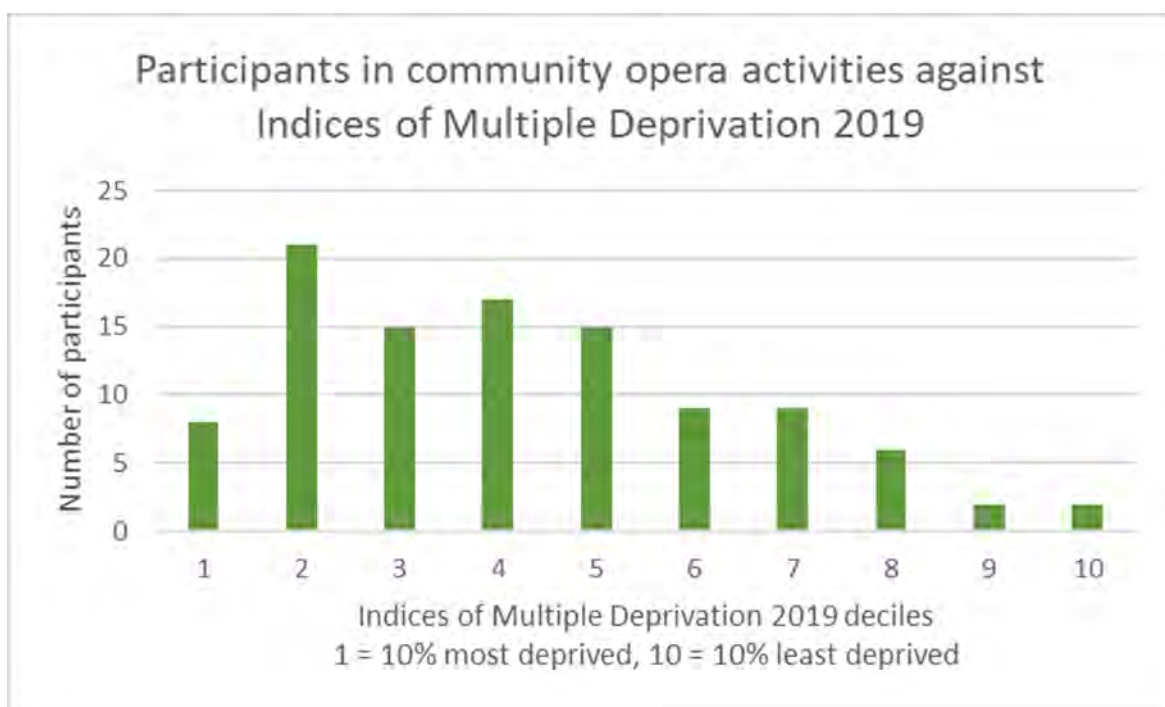
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<sup>a</sup> [www.heartlands.online](http://www.heartlands.online)

part in rehearsals of draft compositions, providing feedback to the composer before moving into rehearsals of the final opera composition and auditions for larger roles. Melodies developed in initial workshops have been included in the final compositions, descriptions of place and stories told by the community have been incorporated into the libretto, and the choir have been encouraged to sing in the County Durham accent.

In addition to community involvement in the performance, internships and mentoring were advertised for backstage and production roles, to increase the skills of local musical and theatrical professionals/committed amateurs.

Participants have been drawn from across (and outside) the Northern Heartlands area and this project has been successful in attracting wider participation than is normally expected for opera; 28% of participants in all opera projects were from residents of areas in the top 10-20% most deprived areas.<sup>(25)</sup>



**Figure 11 Location of participants in NH's Community Opera in relation to IMD character**

*Community opera- put at ease by everyone involved, huge fun.(PA)*

*Enjoyed participating in the singing with Opera North. Really enjoyed helping to create a poem/song with the help of the poet and composer.(PA)*

*Opera North meeting fully involved all who were present in sharing and developing ideas. Impressed by calibre of presenters and looking forward to next stage (PA)*

*Enjoyed participating in the singing with Opera North. Really enjoyed helping to create a poem/song with the help of the poet and composer.(PA)*

*The privilege of being taught by Will Todd. He is superb at his job and achieves so much in a short space of time.(PA)*

*Seeing old friends, seeing our words in music, singing and enjoying being creative.(PA)*

Unfortunately, in March 2020 the decision had to be made to cancel the performances and shortly afterwards Opera North staff were placed on furlough. Initially, Opera North stated that it might be possible to restage the opera in 2022 and/or provide a theatrical performance in Leeds in 2021. These options were not acceptable either to funders or *NH* team, who felt strongly that the input and commitment of the community needed to be honoured. It was subsequently agreed that unless Covid restrictions prevent it, Opera North will use its unspent funds to record the opera and film a closed Covid-secure performance at Locomotion, Shildon using the professional orchestra, choir and community performers. Whilst this will be small consolation for those participants in rehearsals who had been expecting to perform at live presentations and outcome has nevertheless been secured<sup>(28)</sup> and it seems likely that the online ‘reach’ of the recorded version will be significantly greater than what had been the expected audience for the live performance. Professional mentoring and internship opportunities could not be delivered, however Northern Heartlands retained an intern who was meant to be shadowing event production but shifted to working with the *NH* team and is now contracted to the new CIO on marketing and social media.

The funds not paid to Opera North have been used to record and film four compositions developed in workshops but not included in the final production. Entitled *The Northern Heartlands Songbook*, this was produced in collaboration with Opera North’s composer, independent musicians, the community choir and Lexicon Learning UK. Unfortunately due to further Covid-19 restrictions, film premieres planned at Shildon Locomotion in October 2020 had to be cancelled. A live streaming event is being planned and ongoing discussions ongoing with Highlights Rural Touring may make it possible, Covid permitting, for the films to be toured to rural venues during 2021.

*The opera has given us opportunity to explore and think more about the different landscapes and the heritage of Durham. It has increased our sense of pride in the place. It has also made me see opera differently – it’s just story telling really but these are our stories, not alien ones.(PA)*

### **3.7 Governance, administration and delivery**

*NH*’s atypical governance structure has involved a clear demarcation between procedural accountability through VCD and strategic guidance via the AB which in practice has acted as a Board of Management for the scheme. VCD has contributed significant officer time to *NH*’s financial oversight but otherwise has been ‘hands off’ in terms of policy and delivery. Leadership of the AB by an independent Chair has been important in emphasising the autonomy of the scheme.

*The small team seems to work really well and communication has been great, plus they are available to assist with new projects.(PL)*  
*Seems to be well run. From what I know of the Chair and the Director you've got excellent people.(PL)*  
*Heartlands is well-managed and led, with excellent staff and very good Chair.(PL)*

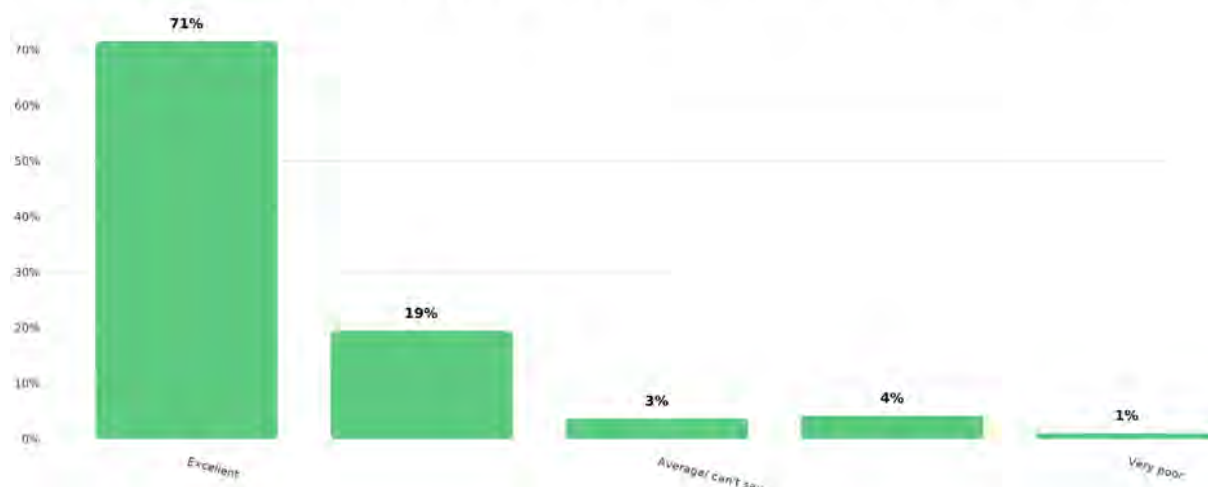
Management arrangements with day-to-day decisions taken by the PDG as a sub-group of the AB have worked well. A significant factor in *NH*’s success to date is the architecture of the team

and their complementary skills and shared commitment. The success of the *NH* scheme has also in large measure been due to the dedication, energy and competence of the AB, its Chair and all members of the *NH* team.

Survey responses to questions relating to project design and management, to overall co-ordination and delivery and to representation of local needs and interests, have been hugely complimentary particularly in relation to the work of the team and their communication with project leads and artists. This perception is broadly supported by the views of all those interviewed and by our own independent observation. Comments received accord with our own assessment that the management administration and delivery of the programme has been competent and efficient. The *NH* team, working to the Advisory Board and to VCD/ has applied good project oversight, and this has been done in a way which has been open and accommodating. In terms of delivery on overall objectives, participant responses to both the survey and our interviews – relating to commissioned, co-commissioned and CIF funded projects - indicate a high level of satisfaction with the quality of activities.

*We have had full support by the delivery team who have kept us informed about any developments and have fully immersed themselves in our project. Communications have been first class.(PL)*  
*[...] all staff are helpful, experienced and have shown huge love for the area they work.(PL)*  
*They whole team is lovely and nothing is too much trouble.(PL)*  
*This is a very approachable team. They show genuine interest and enthusiasm in engaging the community. They listen to stories of the past and encourage communities to think about how they would like to develop their future.(PL)*  
*They always seem very well organised.(PL)*  
*Very professional but realistic and great to see local people employed who are aware of issues affecting communities.(PL)*

## Please rate your overall impression of the activities/events you have been involved with



**Figure 12 Opinions regarding conception, organisation and delivery of activities**

Very few critical comments were received in relation to overall conception of activities but the few that were offered raise some important issues. For example:

*Focused on a romantic view of the past. Relationship to place means so much more and embraces the recently arrived as well as those whose families have been here for generations. We can shape what the future of the area could be but I see little evidence that Northern Heartlands will influence it. [...] An event advertised as asking people to share 'memories' turned out to be only interested in memories of Category D villages thus excluding half of those who had turned up. Purpose of 'Heart of the Matter' was unclear. Presenters all told us how wonderful their projects were with no evidence, assessment, critical thought or room for challenge.(PA)*

Other criticisms, such as there were, primarily relate to particular aspects of organisation and delivery or to concerns about follow-up. For example, in respect of the Man Engine:

*I was disappointed on the turn-out [at a Parkside School workshop in preparation for the Man Engine visit] as only a few adults and four children attended. The children really put their hearts and souls into making up the song about the Willington Lasses. I talked to one of the grandparents and apparently they had sung the song all the way home.(PA)*  
*I was a volunteer at the light festival in Crook. I was a Marshal. I was very impressed by the whole thing, it was very well attended, a lot of hard work and organising had gone into it. My only criticism is ... it was a very cold night, the parade went without a hitch, we got to the end, I was on my own, cold to the bone and was just left to.... go home. First of all it would have been nice to get a thank you and secondly to have at least been given hot drink. I had really enjoyed doing the Marshalling, it was just such a disappointing end. (V)*

While the NH team have been near-universally commended for their openness, responsibility, enthusiasm and commitment, a recurring comment, particularly from project participants, concerns publicity. Beyond one stray questionnaire response; "I've never heard of Northern Heartlands and don't live in the project area."(NP) a comment from many of those who had immensely enjoyed an activity was that they wished they had heard of NH earlier.

*I've only got to know about most projects after the event [...] or once they're well under way.(PA)*  
*Advertisement of events - I wouldn't have known anything if it wasn't for school.(PA)*  
*I only learnt of it via Facebook. Not everyone has access to fb.(PA)*  
*Advertising events. It was only through a friend I had heard about them. And now that I see other events I think I'd like to have attended some of them too if I had known about them.(PA)*  
*It's difficult to maintain the initial interest over a long period, so regular contact and updates are essential.(PA)*  
*I haven't been aware of any of these events. Why I haven't seen or heard of them going on? (NA)*  
*Profile is too low. Needs much more media coverage and connection with local arts groups.(PA)*

Much of the above evidences an appetite for participation but also the inherent difficulty of developing a scheme of this sort without a significant lead-in and where forging connections with



local groups is itself an object of delivery. It also reflects the lack of a development phase which has proved a significant obstacle, and the *NH* team are to be congratulated on having overcome it to a large degree. It has taken some time for *NH* to become known in the area and spectacular events such as Man Engine and the Crook Winter Carnival have been important in securing recognition. Had it been possible for these to have been promoted earlier, perhaps as launch events, the work of the two CFs who have had to 'go in blind' to local communities, often spending significant time explaining what *NH* is all about, and then slowly building trust and confidence, would have been easier.

The problem has been exacerbated by what is now recognised as an inadequate communications budget in the original bid and a restriction on the viring of monies between categories, requiring the *NH* team to take on the majority of marketing and communications, in addition to other roles. Notwithstanding these problems, *NH* has done well to secure recognition in the area. The revised *NH* website <https://northernheartlands.org/> is already proving its worth, has secured an identity of its own alongside VCD, CDCF (and other) websites and is a potentially invaluable resource for the area beyond the life of the scheme itself, for example as a hub for news and events linked to other sources of information beyond activities solely to do with *NH* funded activities. A second website [www.heartlands.online](http://www.heartlands.online) has been created to provide a platform or stage for virtual projects, hopefully furthering awareness of Northern Heartlands and its mission.



Figure 13 A word cloud analysis of survey respondents' 'three words which sum up how you feel about Northern Heartlands' indicates a high level of engagement and enthusiasm, with only a very limited number of reservations or critical comments

## 4 Great Place legacy and learning

Two features of Northern Heartlands not only distinguish it from other Great Place schemes but arguably make it unique as an intervention in cultural practice:

- It has been a multi-project endeavour to manifest cultural democracy – “*an approach to arts and culture that actively engages everyone in deciding what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it, and who experiences it*”<sup>(26)</sup> across a wide area.
- Its starting point has been the notion of ‘cultural landscape’ going well beyond scenic quality and endeavouring to engage with the totality of people’s lives – their history and heritage, how they live and their hopes for the future.

In delivery, *NH* has challenged common approaches to ‘culture’ as performing arts and creative industries (a focus of some other GP schemes, sometimes extended to local, vernacular ‘cultures’) by emphasising the role of place. At the same time it has also challenged conventional ‘views’ of landscape and place – often restricted to the scenic and eminent — by focusing on the commonplace, from ‘remote rural’ to deindustrialised. And this has been done not just in theory but in a practical way, together with local communities and acknowledging that values and policies are often contested, representing conflicting social and economic interests. In this, *NH*’s ambitions have gone well beyond institutional debates and policy statements such as the Arts & Humanities Research Council’s (AHRC) Cultural Value Project (CVP)<sup>(29, 30)</sup> and they have taken forward significantly the aspirations of the Culture White Paper.<sup>(4)</sup>

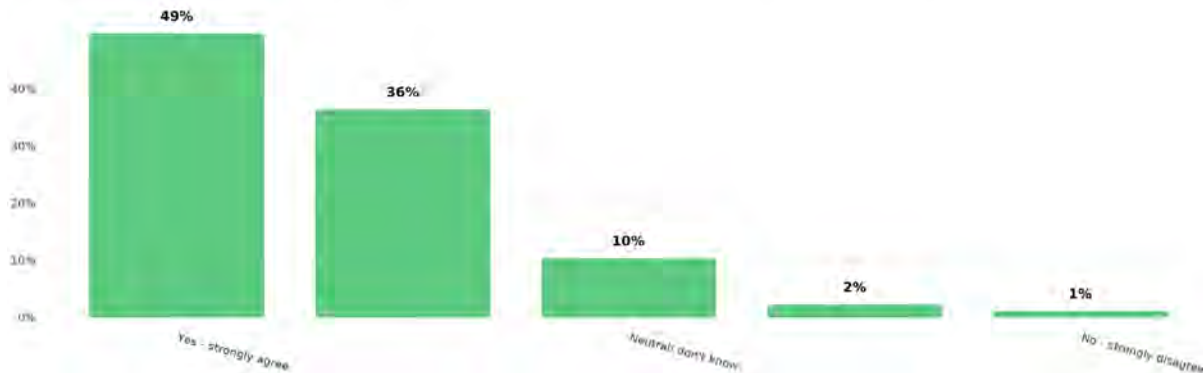
BOP’s interim national evaluation declared – in respect of all national GP schemes — that in relation to lasting benefits, the “*balance between process/strategy and delivery [is] hard to judge.*”<sup>(19)</sup> This section focuses first on the outcomes of *NH* as a whole (the longer term, enduring benefits for people in the area) and then on the learning that has been a central element of *NH*’s activity particularly in relation to process and strategy.

### 4.1 Legacy: ‘making a difference’ for individuals and communities

*NH* projects exist amongst, and complement, numerous other activities promoted both by *NH* partners and by other bodies in the area. So while the outcomes and legacy of individual projects are important, they are part of a wider mosaic of activity. All project outcomes may count as ‘legacy’ to the extent that their benefits – or the project activities themselves - endure beyond the end of HLF funding. Appendix 1 identifies the expected outcomes of individual projects.

A key element in *NH*’s funding from HLF is the expectation that it will deliver a legacy that goes beyond the outcomes of individual projects. Asked to comment on the degree to which *NH* as a multi-project scheme was delivering on longer-term intended benefits, participants’ comments were overwhelmingly positive:

## Has Northern Heartlands delivered "cultural activities that transform people's understanding of the heritage, landscapes and places they live in"?



**Figure 14 Perceptions of NH's impact on understanding of heritage, landscapes and places**

While Man Engine and the Crook Winter Light Parade were particularly successful - and visible - public events, all *NH* projects have been felt by the great majority of survey respondents and interviewees to have contributed to its objectives. Asked to rate achievement on *NH*'s key aims, 82% of survey respondents were positive about the impact of *NH*'s activities on people's understanding of heritage and place and (significantly) a lesser proportion (62%) about the impact of those activities on people's confidence and ability to influence policy and decision-making.

In this context it is greatly to the credit of the *NH* team and partners that so much progress was made relatively early in delivery. The MTR on-line survey concluded with a supplementary set of questions relating to Northern Heartlands' achievements in relation to its four initial programme aims:

- funding high quality projects that make people want to get involved in culture and their heritage
- making connections between people, places, ideas and organisations
- raising local voices and questioning existing methods of decision-making
- building confidence by celebrating stories of the people, places and landscapes of the area.<sup>(1)</sup>

Remarkably, 70% of respondents chose to provide their views on these optional questions with broadly positive responses to all questions (Figure 15) particularly in relation to the delivery of projects and participant's engagement (69% favourable), 'making connections' (82%) and 'building confidence by celebrating stories' (92%). The least favourable responses were in relation to giving voice to local people 'in questioning existing methods of decision-making' (57% positive responses). This last was arguably the most significant challenge to *NH* and one which raises the issue of constraints on the decisions which can be taken both on the part of decision-makers and those affected, particularly in relation to issues which both *NH* and NLHF might consider to be beyond their remit if they progress beyond 'dialogue' to explicitly political questions about power and control. However, if GP's emergent overarching programme aim of "demonstrating the value of

culture in addressing contemporary challenges”<sup>(21)</sup> is to be taken at face value, these are questions which cannot be ignored, least of all by ACE and NLHF as funders.

In the final survey these ‘slider’ questions were replaced by the opportunity to provide narrative responses to a series of related questions. Representative comments include:

*Strengthened my sense of community, and showed me how anyone could make a smaller or larger difference. I'm setting up a basketball group for children which I'm sure I would not have felt confident enough to do otherwise.(PA)*

*Northern Heartlands support enabled Altogether Archaeology to do more to engage a wider range of people with the cultural and archaeological heritage of Upper Teesdale.(PL)*

*The 'Planning a Participatory Art?' event was brilliant. It was thought-provoking, well organised, the speakers where well balanced and the event allowed local residents to get involved alongside policy makers, workers and projects.(PA)*

*It's fired me with an improved sense of community; as an "outsider", I need these things to help me get into local stuff.(PA)*

*I think history and heritage are an essential part of our community and need to be cherished. To record/share information around what's happened in the area is fantastic and a priceless gift for the future.(PA)*

*It brought people to Willington which often feels a neglected part of County Durham.(PA)*

Comments regarding the artists involved were also overwhelmingly enthusiastic, but with some reservations about the local provenance and awareness of speakers and participants.

*There could have had more people there who weren't 'usual suspects' but that will always be a challenge; It would have been good to have had a local speaker (my memory fails if there was one).(PA)*

*[Could have] invited more of the local organisations / businesses to take part.(PA)*



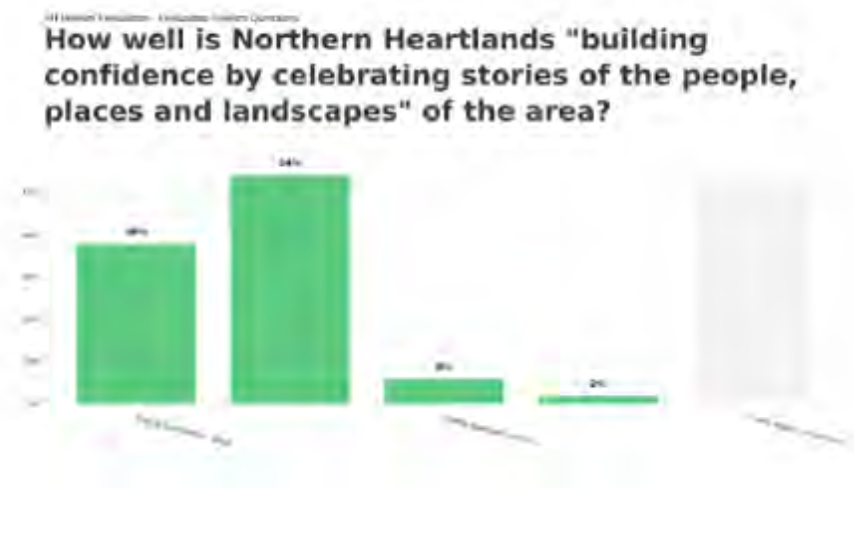
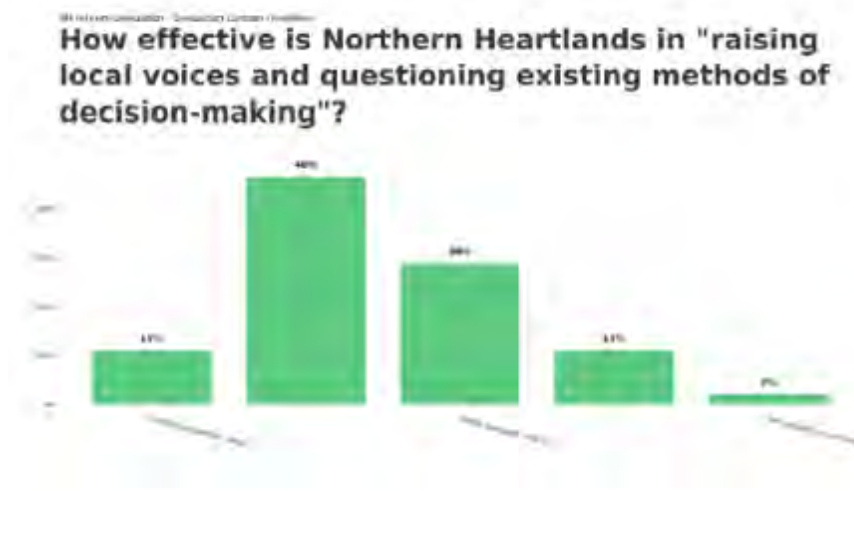
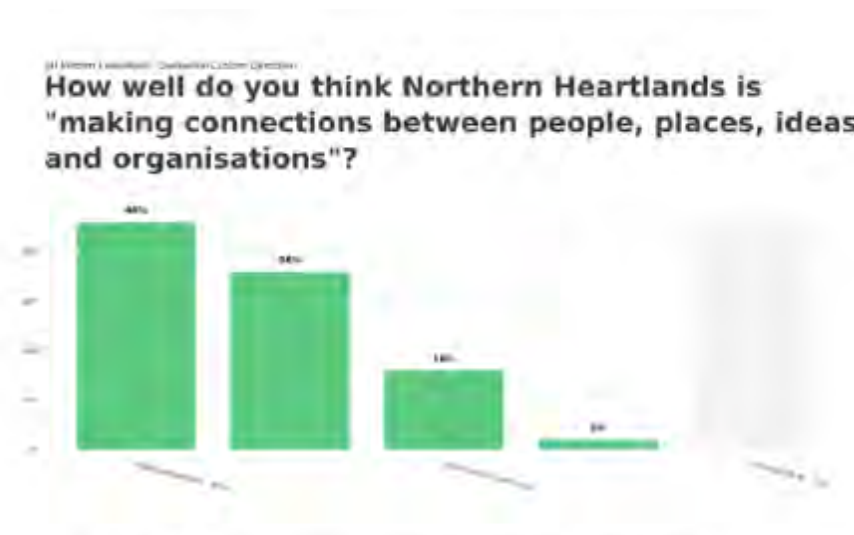
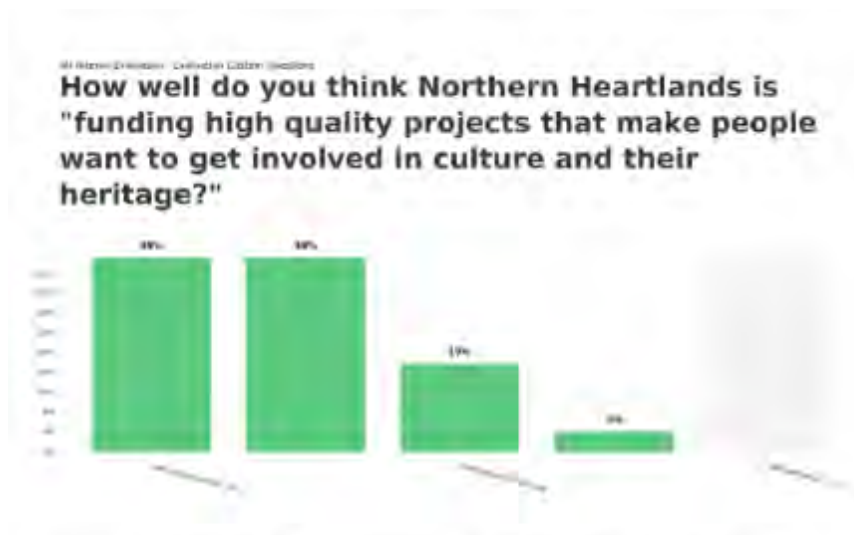


Figure 15 Survey respondents' assessments of Northern Heartlands' achievement in relation to its four programme aims (MTR)

## *Evaluation criteria and evidence*

During the deliberations of the LAG a set of combined outcomes were elaborated, capturing the ambitions of the national GP scheme, *NH's* application to HLF and relevant approved purposes, as follows:

1. People are more actively engaged in arts, culture and local heritage;
2. Communities are better able to articulate their sense of place and influence decisions made about their area;
3. Groups and organisations across sectors are working in new ways with each other and are more resilient;
4. Arts, culture and heritage are contributing more to the local economy and to making the area a better place to live, work or visit;
5. The role of landscape, heritage and culture and the arts as drivers of change are included in plans and strategies that affect the area.

These have provided a useful focus for planning. They have also focused discussion on ways in which the impact and legacy of *NH's* activities might be assessed, particularly following the end of HLF grant. Some outcomes for self-sustaining participation and engagement are already evident. For example: Northern Heartlands Singers has been running independently for two years; Willington town council plans to create an arts & heritage centre; several artists have gained new commissions or funding after receiving training through Pulse (and other projects); the new community garden & food growing project and lane clearance in Eldon is planned to continue; two new accessible local archives have been created in Eldon & Barningham from documents previously held by local residents; heritage walking trails in Teesdale and Evenwood are in use.

In other cases long-term benefits are likely only to become apparent some time after the end of the GP programme. For example in relation to combined outcome 5 above, BOP's first year report indicated that while most GPs (including *NH*) are located in areas subject to local authority cultural strategies, very few of these have any significant mention of culture in their other strategies and plans. In the case of *NH*, the RSA Heritage Index 2016 identifies activities relating to heritage, identity and place within County Durham as lagging behind assets<sup>(31)</sup> and the County Durham Cultural Strategy is cited as lacking in any ambitious and clearly articulated concept of how culture can contribute to other policy areas.<sup>(19)</sup> The strategy is currently under review (but the latest draft makes no mention of Northern Heartlands or its activities).<sup>(32)</sup>

*NH*, through its delivery team, advisory board and partners, has already influenced other plans of Durham County Council and of the North East Culture Partnership, County Durham Cultural Education Partnership as well as national bodies such as the Town and Country Planning Association. DCC has indicated an interest in exploring the potential of using theatre as a tool for community consultation and have committed to supporting *NH* as a CIO. VCD have said that they are considering ways of adapting *NH's* work on engagement for the consultations leading up to their next 5 year Tourism Strategy. One relevant focus might be the role of culture and heritage in the policies of local Area Action Partnerships (AAP). Culture and heritage (linked to tourism) are ranked relatively low in priority ratings for most *NH* AAP areas and sixth for all those voting in the County's participatory budgeting events.<sup>(33)</sup> This is not an effective baseline against which to judge legacy, but it would be

interesting to see if the activities of *NH* could be linked to any changes in the next round of consultations.

Northern Heartlands' work has also resulted in the inclusion of an arts program in the Tees-Swale Landscape Partnership and has influenced the development of the new (2019-24) strategic Management Plan for the North Pennines AONB Partnership, with community engagement creativity and culture now a key element in the Plan.<sup>(24)</sup>

*Heartlands helped to influence the content of the North Pennines AONB Management to better reflect the importance of making the connections between nature, culture and heritage. Having Jill Cole as a sounding board for ideas was very helpful.(PL)*

*The collaboration between Northern Heartlands and the Town and Country Planning Association was a key milestone in the re connection between planning and the creative arts. It exposed planners to the multiple ways the creative process can help co-create places which reflect peoples aspirations as well as communicate the often complex parts of the planning process. It led ultimately to a new strand of TCPA work which has re explored our artistic roots and led us to a new realisation of the importance of art as the foundation of our philosophy of place making.(PL, Policy Director, Town and Country Planning Association)*

### **Succession planning**

The view of all those consulted accords with that of this evaluation that some form of successor body will be important to continue the work already started and to provide a forum for the generation of new ideas and the organisational basis for applying for funding from other sources.

It seems clear that the national GP programme will not be continued through any further funding round: however HLF has stated that it is committed to supporting and promoting place-making in some form as a key funding priority from 2021. Details have yet to emerge: it is unclear if this will take the form of a predicated grant programme and any new funding stream is likely to have different or modified aims and criteria. Even if *NH* were to find itself well placed to apply there would be a gap of at least a year between the end of HLF funding and any award.

The *NH* team and AB are to be commended for considering legacy issues at an early stage. Discussion has inevitably focused on the possibility of continuation of *NH* in some form. The AB at its meeting in December 2018 considered a paper from the *NH* PDG identifying different legacy scenarios following the end of HLF grant in 2020 and subsequent discussion has led to the setting up of Northern Heartlands as a Community Interest Company.

*It's a shame that it is only a three year funded project and I can see the positive change their activities can have at all levels, given that it's only been delivering for a relatively short time, developing from scratch, it's a fab replication model for any area.(PL)*

*You cannot improve on perfection. It was just so amazing and perfect.(PA)*

*Keep up the inspiration and support.(PL)*

*Find a way to add more years on to the process!(PA)*

*Long may it continue.(PL)*

*I do hope Heartlands can be extended beyond the current funded programme.(PL)*

*A very worthwhile project. Heartlands 2 would be a nice thought! (PL)*

A Northern Heartlands Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was established in 2019 as a successor organisation to NH GPS, but with a wider geographic focus. As of October 2020, NH CIO has three trustees, has developed a range of policies and is building governance, has transferred financial & employment authority from VCD and has retained the NH Director and most of the NH team at reduced hours and/or freelance. Since April 2020, NH CIO has delivered two ACE funded programs, including participatory practice training for 24 artists ('Art of Invitation') and eight artist-led projects supporting wellbeing during the Covid pandemic ('Creativity in Crisis'). Existing partnerships (such as with the TCPA) are continuing, while new ones that were formerly outside the scope of the GPS are being developed (for example with local NHS and DCC social care and with university departments for PhD research studentships).

## 4.2 Learning: research, reflection and lessons for the future

An important element in *NH's* original proposal, and agreed in HLF's Award Letter<sup>(5)</sup> was a programme of research partnerships *"to match communities with researchers to further articulate a sense of place to help influence landscape and environmental policy."* This was not separately costed in *NH's* application to HLF who subsequently determined that GP funding could not be used for research. The absence of a formal research element in the *NH* scheme has been partly compensated for by structured reflections on the part of its delivery team and by the deliberations of its Learning Advisory Group (LAG).

Beyond the core team members (GY, JC, ED, EA) the LAG has been fortunate to have the participation of Dr Maggie Roe of Newcastle University's McCord Centre for Landscape<sup>(34, 35)</sup> who was also a member of *NH's* AB and, for the first half of the Scheme, of Gary Charlton, Senior Adviser on Landscape for Natural England. The remit of LAG has been to 'step back' from the day-to-day delivery of activities and consider wider issues to do with *NH's* aims. It has played an important role in facilitating reflection on *NH's* outcomes and progress, feeding in to strategy and planning and its work has contributed significantly to this evaluation.

In addition, a good working partnership has been established with Dr Paul Cowie of Newcastle University's Centre for Rural Economy<sup>(36)</sup> who has been closely involved with the Cap-a-Pie theatre productions.<sup>(35)</sup> Good links were also established with Durham University, in particular its Engagement Officer. This led to *NH* funding a geographic extension to the project 'Catch Your Breath' with the University's Wellbeing Team, delivering activities in schools in former mining settlements. Links have also been established with Teesside, Cumbria and Northumbria Universities, and NH CIO is developing a research studentship with University of Leeds. The role of *NH* Ambassador, created for EA, has allowed *NH* to be part of academic conferences and discourse, as well as membership of the AALERT 4DM (Art & Artists Leading Environmental Research Today For Decision Making) research collaboration, funded by AHRC.

The role of ED as *NH's* Head of Learning and Influence has been important in relation to the deliberations of LAG and to the work of the two CFs whose experience has commendably been captured in a series of 'reflective conversations' with ED. Their accounts of interactions with different communities and organisations in the area have considerable value and have fed in to *NH's* own



strategy and working practices, as *NH* has developed its approach to community engagement and community-led initiatives.

### ***Placemaking and politics***

The experience of *NH* also relates to wider issues around the contested nature of ‘placemaking’, particularly in relation to the role of arts and cultural activity which is sometimes accused of ‘artwashing’ – using the arts and cultural activities as a neutral ‘social capital’ that acts to obscure political realities of inequality and disempowerment. One prominent commentator in this regard has been *NH*’s project lead for the ‘More Than Viable’ project in Dene Valley, Stephen Pritchard, who was also commissioned to conduct preliminary evaluations of *NH*’s activity in Willington including the possibility of follow-up activities with local community groups. In his academic writing, Pritchard describes (corporate and local authority) ‘creative placemaking’ as a “neoliberal function”<sup>(37)</sup> in which artists have been increasingly complicit: *‘their aesthetic and participatory practices celebrate the empty and falsely unifying notions of “people,” “place”, “community” and “the public”, reinforcing the depoliticising functionalism prescribed by the vested interests of corporate, financial and state power.’*<sup>(38)</sup> For Pritchard, in addition to corporate and development-led activities, there can also be ‘arts-led’ and ‘community’ artwashing – *“perhaps the most pernicious, deceitful form of artwashing.”*<sup>(39)</sup>

One of *NH*’s many strengths is that its activities have been the reverse of this. By coincidence, and during the second half of *NH*’s delivery, a (non-*NH*-funded) activity illustrated the potential overlap between performance art and political engagement. The Bradley open-cast site, some 12 miles North of Tow Law was once the National Coal Board’s Eden mine. Now privately owned, it has been the focus of protests by local residents and Extinction Rebellion activists against the planned expansion of mining activities. A survey interviewee suggested that the on-site dramatization of the protests – costumed demonstrators caged as ‘human canaries’ (slogan: *‘coal is our heritage, not our future’*) – prompts a comparison with some of *NH*’s own cultural activities and highlights the blurred boundaries between performance art and public protest - often with a good deal of movement between the two.<sup>(39)</sup>

While there are limits to what *NH* as a recipient of Lottery monies could engage with in relation to ‘political’ issues, no projects have attempted to gloss over social and political realities and most, in different ways, have provided a space for participants to explore them, albeit within a restricted arena. In the rural parts of *NH*’s area, conversations forming part of *NH*’s Hefted to Hill project have revealed many of the anxieties and problems facing farmers and their families, including the challenge of the loss of or revisions to the Single Farm Payment system following Brexit. Cultural interventions such as those of *NH* can do little to compensate for the impact of neoliberal policies, for example the abandonment of the concept of integrated rural development (IRD)<sup>(40)</sup> but they can help to articulate the consequences of those policies.

### ***Communication and dialogue in planning policy***

One of *NH*’s core propositions is that arts and culture can act as a medium for communication, understanding and policy development, helping to articulate the diversity of views ‘from below’, facilitating ‘better listening’ from above encouraging *‘meaningful dialogue between those who make decisions about places and communities, and those who live in them’*<sup>(41)</sup> and *‘even examining entirely new approaches to making decisions.’*<sup>(42)</sup>



**Figure 16 NH's 'hour-glass' conceptual rationale**

An early paper to LAG<sup>(43)</sup> conceived *NH*'s mission as an hour-glass (Figure 16). It's 'neck' represents the meeting-point between decision-makers and communities who often feel themselves to be at cross purposes. The former may feel restricted by a legal or policy framework and wary of making, or unable to justify decisions based on the informal understanding and awareness of communities, who in turn may be alienated or feel themselves excluded by *"impenetrable processes and opaque language, leading to disengagement, scepticism or apathy."*<sup>(43)</sup>

*As a long experienced Community Development worker (VCS sector) it was refreshing to see topics such as planning addressed with humour and courage [...] this event raised not only issues and challenges but solutions that were genuinely listened to by policy makers, planners and those who can influence positive change.(PA)*

Many local authority planners feel constrained – and communities disempowered - not by local authority 'bureaucracy' or by planning legislation, but by the wider context of land ownership and capital funding – particularly in relation to land ownership, housing and public space. For example, much of the rural part of *NH*'s area is owned by a single landlord.<sup>(44)</sup> In the de-industrialised areas around the ex-mining villages a good deal of previously publicly-owned land was lost with the privatisation some decades ago of the National Coal Board or has been lost subsequently. Durham CC itself has reportedly had to sell over 280 public spaces between 2014 and 2018, raising just over £30m to compensate for the reduction in central funding.<sup>(45)</sup> To the extent that this is the case, the 'problem' may not be so much a lack of communication or understanding between planners and planned-for (the 'hourglass' model) or a lack of 'vision' on either side, but, rather, political and institutional constraints in relation to what is 'possible'. It is to the credit of *NH* that its activities have provided space to explore these issues in an inclusive and non-confrontational way. Moreover *NH* has done well to avoid engagement with contentious schemes such as Community Asset Transfer, promoted by some other GP schemes (and by the BOP evaluations) but criticised by others as an *"extension of rollback neoliberalism, permitting the state to withdraw from welfare and transfer risk from local government to ill-defined communities."*<sup>(46)</sup>

*DCC Draft Plan includes "Create and enhance vibrant communities for all of our towns and villages". I have asked DCC Spatial Policy Team how this pulsating, vigorous, full-of-energy outcome might be achieved and am still awaiting response. Is Northern Heartlands involved in this? And if so, how is waving the flag of "culture" going to have a chance of helping to deliver vibrancy for "all of our towns and villages"?(PA)*

## *Social inclusion*

In this respect *NH* must be deemed a success in relation to several of the ‘combined outcomes’ above, in particular by facilitating opportunities for individuals and communities to articulate and debate issues relating to sense of place. Comparative data on representation of different demographic groups in *NH* participation is fragmentary. However, participant data (using postcode as a proxy) shows a wide geographical and socioeconomic spread and 28% of opera participants were from areas falling within the government’s 20% most deprived areas.<sup>(25)</sup> Anecdotal evidence and our own observations as IE suggest that one of the strengths of *NH*’s approach to arts and culture has been its wide appeal and its engagement with very different communities within the area.

In terms of more focused strategies to engage underrepresented groups *NH*’s bid answers to HLF and ACE<sup>(47)</sup> speak specifically of work with the traveller community and refugees; of working with young people including Deerbolt Young Offenders’ Institution (YOI); and of ensuring that *NH* has a profile where people meet, such as agricultural shows and other events. Time and pressure on staff resources have meant that progress in these areas has been limited. Despite an initial period of engagement by the CFs early in the *NH* scheme, no targeted projects with traveller communities emerged and work with Deerbolt YOI failed to materialise. While good initial links were established with the Syrian refugee community engagement with refugees has been hampered by the fact that most individuals are housed outside the *NH* area and significant activity has been limited to a visit to the ‘Craft and Conflict’ project exhibition and associated practical activities.

Overall, while demographic data from *NH* projects is incomplete, evidence suggests that, as with other GP schemes<sup>(21)</sup> project audience demographics (for example in relation to socio-economic status) run counter to national trends and that the novel approach, particularly in relation to large-audience projects (such as Man Engine) and the co-commissioned and CIF projects, have indeed been socially inclusive. This has not been merely a matter of ‘cultural consumption’. While speaker and discussion events have provided the opportunity for issues to be raised and debated in a structured context, the responses received to surveys and participant interviews suggest that public events (such as Man Engine) and ticketed performances (such as BTEOR) have stimulated debate amongst local communities and groups both about the content of the activity itself and about wider issues to do with place.

The HeART of the Matter speaker and discussion events have been of particular value in this regard, (including for ourselves as evaluators) in addressing issues around place which might not otherwise have been considered. For example in one of the virtual debates that replaced *NH*’s planned concluding symposium, a contributor to a discussion on funding pointed out that while the loss of public facilities in some of the ex-mining villages has restricted the range of venues available for cultural activities ‘doors can also be a barrier: not all cultural activities need buildings.’ Another remarked that in ‘deep rural’ areas sometimes the only available venue is the local church. This may restrict not only the range of activities that can take place, but also the range of participants that might attend.

*I worry about the use of the word "culture" which can be interpreted as the "arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement". As such I suspect very significant numbers will feel it alien to their world in this 'Great Place' - which it is! I like the word "Heartlands" a lot as a southerner originally [...] because this place is the Land of Big Hearts.(PA)*

## **ELC**

It is significant that *NH*'s outward emphasis on 'cultural landscape' has receded as delivery has progressed. The European Landscape Convention's (ELC) definition of landscape is "*an area perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*"<sup>(48, 49)</sup> ELC emphasises the significance of all landscapes – the vernacular and degraded as well as the eminent, and the importance of public engagement in determining what that significance is. The *NH* team reported that ELC terminology was a hindrance during the early phase of the project, particularly with respect to community engagement and the CFs in particular found that most people did not understand the concept and/or found it too theoretical as a basis for project development. While largely dropping the terms from public use, cultural landscape has been the focus of high-profile projects such as Hefted to Hill, as well as a number of CIF projects and Northern Heartlands has attempted to 'translate' a theoretical concept into concrete activities.

It is clear from the experience of *NH* that particular perceptions of place vary between individuals and groups and their priorities in any given area may vary. If an understanding of cultural landscape 'as perceived by people' is to go beyond an abstraction, it needs to reveal different perceptions and priorities in relation to places and their potential. *NH* has done well to build this in to most of its activities.

## **Communities and co-commissioning**

In all the above, *NH*'s commitment to working directly or indirectly with communities has been central. In other GP schemes, co-commissioning has been interpreted as the promotion of activities with existing cultural organisations in the area. This itself has proved a challenge, with only 5 out of the 16 England schemes reporting progress in this regard.<sup>(21)</sup> In the case of *NH*, co-commissioning has been interpreted rather differently as working directly with local communities — the majority of which have little or no formal arts or cultural provision — matching artists and researchers with communities to develop projects together. The allocation of two of the five members of the delivery team to this, working directly as community facilitators, was unique amongst GP schemes: the result has been a steep learning curve:

One of the key learning points of delivery to date has been the time required to build relationships and trust within distinct and widely separated communities, itself made more difficult by the travelling time required over *NH*'s large area. Both CFs agreed at a mid-point in delivery that they had "*not achieved the depth of engagement that they hoped to. In addition, because Northern Heartlands is a new organisation people often want to discuss what it is and what they can get from the project, particularly funding. So, while groups have been interested and welcoming, it was not always easy or appropriate to lead the conversation into a deeper discussion about place, values and*

landscape. As a result, the CFs consider that many of their conversations about place and landscape have been ‘surface only’.<sup>(50)</sup>

Moreover, many communities within the NH area “have a heritage that includes devastating decisions by national and local authorities, and they have also been at the receiving end of various initiatives and funding approaches over recent decades. People are naturally suspicious of new projects, and highly alert to anything or anyone being ‘parachuted in’.”<sup>(50)</sup> They may also have a justified scepticism about the ability of cultural activities to challenge the *status quo*.

In one of NH’s concluding on-line debates, the distinction between ‘participatory’ and ‘community’ art was highlighted. Both have featured in NH’s programme. While the former (for example, Man Engine, and several theatre productions) aim to engage participants and the wider community, the nature of activities are planned in advance and led by the commissioned artists. Community art, by contrast, can ‘transcend conventional limitations’ – and sometimes, bypass gatekeepers. Participants themselves have agency. The role of the artist is to ‘explore uncertainties and possibilities’ – and often, just to ‘be there’ with “an absolute commitment to the autonomy of all taking part.”<sup>(51)</sup> In one NH project based in an area of high socio-economic deprivation the lead artist found that young adult participants rejected a suggestion that they might engage in some ‘cool’ art – in favour of watercolours. As a result, he led outdoor watercolour sessions for them.

The work of the two CFs, structured reflective activity by the NH team, and the testimony of commissioned artists and project participants have yielded — at least for ourselves as evaluators — new insights into the potential of activities of the sort that have been pioneered by NH. Small things can be important. NH has on occasion needed to tread carefully as the result of previous interventions, such as a project (initiated by another organisation) that was abandoned when local residents reacted angrily to a suggestion that theirs was a ‘deprived community’. As one interviewee pointed out: “Language is important; terms like ‘giving’, ‘facilitating’, ‘empowering’ ‘building confidence’, ‘hard to reach’, ‘difficult to engage’ are all deeply problematic and raise fundamental questions about the role of art and artists themselves.”

### **Impact beyond the NH area**

NH has rightly secured national interest and has had an impact beyond the local area. It is one of the case studies in ACE’s own report on Cultural Democracy in Practice<sup>(26)</sup> and features as a case study in new guidance ‘Neighbourhood Planning for the Environment’ – a toolkit published by the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England and the Forestry Commission.<sup>(52)</sup> The latter cited the January 2018 Startforth Town Meeting (one of NH’s first events) as ‘demonstrating that going beyond newsletters and questionnaires can help to engage more of the community and bring in a wider span of views.’<sup>(52)</sup> Artist-led work with hill farmers has created links with the Uplands Alliance and interest from Natural England and DEFRA.

‘Re:Place’, a national network of artists and planners focussing on the role of arts in planning was launched at a well- attended symposium in Durham in September 2019. In parallel the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), building on this partnership with NH, now includes arts and culture as a strand within its organisational strategy although a TCPA seminar planned for April 2020,

has been postponed as a consequence of Covid-19.<sup>a</sup> At the same time, the replacement of ‘Places in Particular’ — NH’s planned celebratory concluding symposium — with a series of online seminars has secured interest beyond the UK, with ‘hits’ from the United States, Finland, Pakistan, Malaysia, Australia and elsewhere. It is likely that the variety of virtual activities planned as a replacement for the final ‘Song of Our Heartland’ community opera performance will manifest a similar ‘reach’.

NH has featured in a number of academic and other publications.<sup>(e.g. 53)</sup> Along, no doubt with other GP schemes, NH has highlighted some of the contradictions in National Lottery funding – in the heritage, arts and cultural fields, as in other areas. NH, its delivery team and partners are to be congratulated in that virtually all of their activities have demonstrated clear ‘additionality’ – a founding principle of lottery funding – challenging what John Major (under whose premiership the National Lottery was launched) declared, without the slightest apparent sense of irony, to be its ‘larceny’ for funding matters “*that should be funded by the taxpayer*”.<sup>(54)</sup> NH has demonstrated that – again in the heritage, arts and cultural fields, as in other areas - it is the smaller, independent organisations, rooted in communities, that may be best placed to achieve results.

At the same time it has arguably fallen victim to the related issue whereby Lottery funding patchily and inadequately increasingly compensates for the loss of local authority core grant, transforming elected bodies from grant givers into grant applicants in competition with the third sector. The NH team spent significant time developing relationships with the NHS Adult Mental Health teams in the area. In order to continue at least some elements of the work that they had pioneered, the team was considering applying for one of the six national ‘healthy communities’ grants offered by the King’s Fund and National Lottery Community Fund to groups that evidence partnerships between LA, NHS and voluntary/community sector. They were unable to proceed further on discovering that the local authority’s Public Health team had prepared a parallel (but in content rather different) application. However, subsequent discussions have led to collaboration and the new CIO will be engaged in delivering elements of the programme.

In the above, in its emphases on delivery where people live (not necessarily in established cultural venues) and on working directly with local communities, often without preconceptions of what those activities or their outcomes should be, NH has articulated in practice what is effectively a developing institutional, spatial and conceptual ‘reterritorialisation’ of the role of culture and the arts, particularly in regard to place.

NH’s approach and successes to date also pose some interesting questions in relation to the declared missions of both ACE and HLF. ACE’s role in defining excellence in arts and culture has been accompanied by moves for it ‘*to be more directive in shaping partnerships and programming in places of low cultural provision*’.<sup>(55)</sup> As a consequence the emphasis in ACE’s 2010-2020 Strategic Plan *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*<sup>(56)</sup> has been replaced by a more inclusive and community-oriented definition of culture and creativity in its current (2020-2030) Strategy *Let’s Create*.<sup>(57)</sup> At the same time HLF’s former emphasis on facilitating local initiatives, a new focus of the National Lottery

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<sup>a</sup> The Heart of the Matter - Long term stewardship in new communities [www.tcpa.org.uk/Event/tcpa-seminar-the-heart-of-the-matter-long-term-stewardship-in-new-communities](http://www.tcpa.org.uk/Event/tcpa-seminar-the-heart-of-the-matter-long-term-stewardship-in-new-communities)

Heritage Fund (itself the subject of some discussion on NH's LAG during HLF's consultation phase)<sup>(7)</sup> is on 'inspiring' and 'leading' (as well as 'resourcing') the UK's heritage.<sup>(58)</sup>

NH has consciously avoided a directive approach in its relation to local communities, in favour of encouraging debate, articulating needs and responding to proposals as they emerge. NH's emphasis has been on local decision-making in which the nature and content of arts, culture and heritage are matters for negotiation and engagement. This has helped to raise debate, within the area and beyond, about definitions of culture and its social-and political role. In a very practical way it has challenged ideas of culture and the arts as something primarily the province of professionals, to be 'consumed' by a public. In this context the experience of NH may go some way to meeting "the need for an extensive research project which is able to develop a detailed understanding of the opportunities for a place-based approach at such an uncertain time for investment and partnership [which] would help the Arts Council and partners to develop more structured and evidence-based approaches."<sup>(55)</sup>



## Top Tips

Individual GP schemes, like the GP programme as a whole, are pilots from which learning is intended to feed in to other ACE and HLF funded activities. Below is a summary of some of the lessons learnt – mostly from things that have worked well but also from some of the things that maybe have not worked so well – offered for future similar initiatives. These ‘top tips’, culled from interviews with the delivery team, partners, project leads, and from participant feedback may prove helpful as a focus for discussion by future initiatives aimed at linking cultural activities to communities and place.

1. **Small is beautiful**

CIF, the third-party small grants scheme was a key element in *NH*, enabling local communities to action some of the things that they had been thinking about for ages – and also to think creatively about possibilities that would probably not have been considered in the absence of the scheme.

2. **But start with a bang**

*NH* took some time to get known. Man Engine was a hugely significant event that put the scheme ‘on the map’ and secured not just awareness but a degree of confidence that *NH* could ‘get things done’. It could have come earlier in delivery although this would have required a degree of pre-planning before the grant was awarded.

3. **Developmental groundwork is vital**

*NH* has done extraordinarily well to deliver from a standing start, without any formal development phase. But this might not have happened without such a dedicated team and commitment from partners.

4. **Autonomy is important**

*NH* has worked closely with the local authority but operated independently of it. *NH*’s highly supportive accountable body, the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) Visit County Durham maintained a ‘hands off’ stance in relation to operational matters, which allowed the *NH* team to respond to needs and opportunities as they arose and to deliver unencumbered by the constraints of local authority decision-making.

5. **Humility and language are critical**

*NH* has generally avoided language such as ‘empowerment’ which suggest an intervention from above - ‘doing things to/for you’ - in favour of terms like ‘facilitation’ or ‘articulation’ – its presence has encouraged people to do things that would otherwise have been difficult.

6. **Be honest, realistic and aware of social and political realities**

Towns and communities in the *NH* area are likewise sceptical about interventions which offer ‘fun ways of being ignored’. Cultural activities of all kinds can heighten awareness and lead to action but will not of themselves challenge other realities of disadvantage.

7. **Young people and children are important**

They are the future, and people care at least as much about what their children’s lives are and could be, as about their own. Include in your programme activities designed to engage a range of ages and backgrounds.



8. **Use local knowledge and expertise**, but spread it around.  
Both in planning (it'll help you avoid mistakes) and delivery (local artists and others, otherwise there may be resentment). Think before you 'parachute in' artists or performers from elsewhere. At the same time avoid accusations of local favouritism.
9. **Match ambitions with the practicalities** of delivery  
and don't raise expectations beyond what you can realistically satisfy.
10. **Share it!**  
Consider opportunities for knowledge-sharing, mentorships, peer-to-peer support. Share problems as well as successes.
11. **Reward your volunteers**  
With acknowledgement – and at least a cup of tea (or something stronger) after the event. And don't forget their contribution when you're reporting on what you achieved.
12. **Acknowledge gatekeepers and footsoldiers**  
Most organisations also have a gatekeeper – don't by-pass them. But don't ignore others, either. Sometimes it's the person in the room who says (or is paid) the least who gets things done.
13. **Be there! Join in!**  
It's vital that the delivery team have a presence, are seen, that they show up to events including those that may not be directly associated with the scheme. Just 'being there' is important – if you're not, it will be noticed! And join in – people don't like being 'observed'!
14. **Performance is a vocation.**  
Artists are generally committed. They can bring unique skills, vision and a lack of agenda to projects. Artists can be trusted to bring their expertise to the situation, without being directed towards a desired 'end point'.

## 5 Conclusions

*NH* has proved itself to have been a unique and ambitious initiative and — despite the lack of a development phase — it has accomplished a great deal in the three short years of delivery. It will leave behind a legacy of cultural engagement amongst the varied local communities with which it has worked. It has also resulted in a deeper understanding of the challenges and effective strategies for delivering cultural initiatives 'from below'.

Arguably the central feature of *NH*'s success has been the ability of the delivery team and partners to establish close links with, and secure the trust of, local communities, using a wide and inclusive definition of 'culture' to move beyond the distinctions between 'arts' and 'heritage' and avoid (in the words of one of *NH*'s own commissioned facilitators) accusations of 'artwashing'.<sup>(59)</sup> In this *NH* and its delivery team have acted not as 'missionaries' but rather as 'mediators' and 'mobilisers'.

One of the great strengths of *NH* – and to a large extent the reason for much of its success – is the freedom from any pre-determined outcomes imposed by ACE and NLHF. BOP’s first year national evaluation suggested that many GP schemes were over-ambitious – with perhaps an implication that responsibility for this somehow lay with naively ‘passionate’ project managers.<sup>(19)</sup> *NH*’s Director has suggested in response that both the level of investment of public funds and the rationale for the GP programme as a whole demanded ambition.<sup>(41)</sup> Indeed, the evaluation evidence contributing to this Report suggests that it is largely because of that ambition – manifest in the work of the *NH* team and partners – that *NH* has been able to deliver so much in such a short space of time.

At the time of preparing this report, the *NH* team with the support of its AB and Chair have established the institutional base for a successor in the new Northern Heartlands Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). It is to be very much hoped that in its new guise, ‘NH2’ will succeed in securing funding for taking forward the work that has been commenced. In the meantime the claim of *NH*’s Director that the *NH* ‘pilot’ has “*demonstrated that using heritage, culture and creativity to explore issues can build confidence, inspire new solutions and enable meaningful dialogue between those who make decisions about places and communities, and those who live in them*”<sup>(41)</sup> is amply confirmed by our evaluation.

In the process it has also enriched our understanding of the theoretical and policy dimensions of community engagement with arts and culture in relation to heritage, landscape and place. Credit is due to those involved in the period prior to the award of the GP application who put together such an innovative and pioneering scheme and to the *NH* core team, partners, local communities and artists involved in delivering it.

Their significant achievements have demonstrably ‘made a difference’ in the area, and in particular to participants and communities involved, and have pointed the way for related activities in the future.


*I'm concerned that at the end of their final year, all of the hard work being done by this small team will just be starting to have a positive impact across communities and that 3 years funding is not enough to sustain lasting change., as with many short term funded projects.(PL)*  
*We will not discover the impact of Northern Heartlands for at least 5 years. An evaluation should take place then.(PL)*

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## Appendix Project outputs and outcomes

A table of all *NH* projects and activities with a summary of their delivered outputs and their existing and projected outcomes coded against the five England Great Place Scheme aims can be accessed online at <https://www.heartlands.online/impact>



delivered **80** performances, parades and cultural events in County Durham

**260** days of art & heritage exhibitions



More than **90** school trips were made to arts, heritage and wildlife sites

**22** projects took on creative or heritage research



more than **600** workshops in schools & communities



including more than **80** recordings of local knowledge and stories.



and **130** landscape & environment activities.



We supported **22** arts, heritage and wildlife organisations

gave grants to **47** community projects & groups



In an area without large towns or cities

our audience total was over **18,000**



provided income to **40** local venues and community centres



People took part more than **7600** times

and **700** days of paid work to independent artists



and an extra **£300,000** was raised for projects

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