COALFIELD COMMUNITIES LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP:

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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COALFIELD Communities Landscape Partnership

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Introduction

A series of community engagement events and activities were carried out on behalf of the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership, in tandem with a Landscape Character Assessment (conducted by MVGLA) and Historic Environment Audit (conducted by Northlight Heritage). The community engagement programmed has informed analysis of forces for change in the LCA report, helped identify public interest in landscape-related issues (including historic, cultural, ecological and contemporary environment) to inform recommendations, and formed part of the wider representation of the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership.

The approach and methodology were informed by the brief and by discussion at the project inception meeting. Following the inception meeting, the team were able to identify key stakeholders and audiences while avoiding duplication with other CCLP activities. A detailed Community Engagement Plan was then produced by the team.

Aims

The aims of the programme were to:

- generate interest and further raise awareness of the CCLP, identify additional stakeholders and design engaging events to raise awareness of the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and Historic Environmental Audit (HEA) aims and processes.
- develop community interest in further CCLP involvement through understanding how the needs and opportunities match community interests, and by growing the understanding of historical changes in the CCLP study area and potential future pressures for change.
- identifying landmarks, places and traditions that are important to communities in the CCLP area.

Approach

The agreed approach to achieving the above was via the delivery of a series of walking events in the Lugar Valley and the Doon Valley, along with provision of postcards and postboxes in the CCLP area to gather insights from local people.

Digital Posters

Digital posters were produced by Northlight Heritage in conjunction with the EAC and used in local news publications, as well as online (Twitter, LinkedIn and websites associated with the CCLP including the Active Travel Hub, Kilmarnock). Information on the walks was also advertised in the *Ayrshire Post*.

Postboxes

Postboxes and postcards were designed and produced by Northlight Heritage in conjunction with the EAC. These were distributed widely in December 2018 throughout the CCLP area (Patna, Dalmellington, Ochiltree, Auchinleck, Cumnock) and in select locations in New Cumnock (outwith the current Phase 1 boundary). Locations included post offices, libraries, community centres, leisure centres, institutes and cafes. The digital posters were printed and hung close to the post boxes to explain the exercise. In total 17 post-boxes were put out and left for up to five weeks.

Walks/Events

A series of communication events were undertaken in both the Doon Valley and Lugar Valley as follows:

- CCLP launch event, Dalmellington;
- Dunaksin walk;
- Dalmellington walk;
- Knockshinnoch Lagoons walk;
- Cumnock to Dumfries House walk;
- Ochiltree to Auchinleck Estate walk;
- Dalmellington Care Centre, Dalmellington; and
- Ayrshire Railway Preservation Group, Dunaskin.

Limitations

There was limited lead-in time from the launch of the CCLP project website and the walking events. The end of January/start of February weather did cause some people to change their mind about attendance on the day. Many of the public buildings in which the postboxes were located have limited opening hours, which made it difficult for local people to access them.

Results of Postboxes

The postbox results were low in respondent numbers with a total of fewer than 30 responses. A number of the boxes contained no responses at all after a period of five weeks; these were left *in situ* and have not directly informed the results. The participants at the Dalmellington Care Centre were unable to fill in the postcards, so this was undertaken on their behalf.

The most commonly mentioned places and landmarks were Loch Doon, Dalmellington Motte, Dalcairney Falls and pit bings.

Traditions noted on the postcards focused on walking - with particular mention of hill walking, and The Promised Land walk. Other traditions mentioned were the Scouts and the silver band. Social practices mentioned in Dalmellington included bowling, the museum and the community centre.

Results of Walks/Meetings/Workshops

Walks were undertaken in, to and from each of the communities of Waterside, Dalmellington, Cumnock, Auchinleck, Ochiltree and New Cumnock. While the walk locations prompted some of the discourse directly related to the location, the aim of the walks was to encourage discourse on the strategic issues of the coalfields landscape for those who live and/or work there. The results of these are set out below:

Doon Valley: Dunaskin/Waterside Walk

Although only three people took part, the participation of ex-miners from large families dispersed throughout the coalfields area meant that discussion included the area's wider context through time.

Discussion revealed that walking is a valued pastime, with many people involved in walking groups. There is a strong connection with the past through memorials and the voluntary upkeep of these in various locations. Currently popular pastimes include lawn bowling, which is especially popular with the older generation, and involvement in a local boxing group among young people.

Going forward, interest was expressed in building trust between various existing community groups and how this might work, for example by bringing in an external facilitator to overcome some of the legacy of mistrust between groups. Attendees said they would like to record their experiences of growing up in the lost villages as shepherds and miners, but feel they would need help to do this.

Doon Valley: Dalmellington Walk

Five people participated in this walk, and the group was joined after the walk by a member of the local history group.

This group discussion was focused on local creative skills (local artists working in various media, including slate, wood, metal, painting, textiles) and how this incorporated the use of local materials and drew on the landscape setting.

Participants expressed the view that there is much more than mining heritage here. There is also a strong women's identity to be explored. In terms of public engagement with the local history group, participants expressed strong interest in people's family history.

Lugar Valley: Knockshinnoch Lagoons Walk

Six people took part and we were fortunate to have Dr James Begg as a participant. He, along with other locals, recounted not only what had changed in the landscape of New Cumnock but also the use of language and how this has changed - explored through the reading of poetry in the landscape.

Lugar Valley: Cumnock to Dumfries House Walk

The seven attendees came from across the wider coalfield area, including Muirkirk. The conversation explored how the existing landscape had been altered through time under the influence of landowners andestate owners. It also touched on connections between the communities today through education, football and common pastimes. This was prompted by the starting point for the walk, which was the site of a new school that will bring young people from neighbouring communities together. Wildlife/natural heritage was felt to be important and the view was expressed that this knowledge is being lost.

Lugar Valley: Ochiltree to Auchinleck House Walk

Of the ten participants, most were from nearby Ochiltree. Opportunities for improved path networks from Ochiltree to Auchinleck were discussed. The potential for Ochiltree to act as a hub for cyclists and walkers was also noted, including the potential to link to existing longer distance routes in East Ayrshire and to any initiatives relating to the Kyle Forest to the south.

Practical issues such as poor path and bridge maintenance were clearly visible in some places during the walk. Other land-use related issues, such as changes in soil chemistry creating more waterlogging in fields, were also discussed.

A general absence of interpretation was also evident along the route walked. A number of participants highlighted the current redevelopment of the Ochiltree Community Hub and the opportunities it may provide for CCLP.

Doon Valley: Dalmellington Care Centre

There were eight participants, including seven residents and one member of staff. Some residents are still able to enjoy going for a cycle or walk, but most are no longer active and relied on memories of the landscape to guide their narrative. All had been active in outdoor life through work,

sport or enjoying walking. They were very proud of their heritage but saddened that they could no longer experience it easily; many of the walks are not wheelchair accessible. They and their families would like to have a choice of accessible local places to visit (such as the steam trains and The Promised Land walk but also facilities like tea rooms and toilets).

Analysis of Walks, Meetings and Workshops

The objectives of the walks were to deliver a modest programme of community engagement which would generate interest in the CCLP, impart knowledge, and empower the community to engage with wider land management issues in the valley, including the maintenance of historic features.

Increasingly, over the course of the month-long programme of events, a dedicated band of participants returned (some attended more than one walk, and a few attended nearly every event), along with a few new faces. Adapting the discourse to reflect the location and the audience was beneficial, not least in ensuring that the experience was bespoke.

In general, numbers increased over the course of the month.

Conclusions

While the walks were not designed to formally record issues, discussions and comments, it is likely that there will also be areas of the LCA and HEA reports with which they align in terms of forces for change in land use.

The way in which people responded to the walks suggests that further activities focused on walking and cycling during the CCLP delivery phase could be useful ways of engaging some audience segments. This could be readily linked to health and wellbeing outcomes and / or wider issues of active travel to reduce car use.

The poor response to the postcard call highlights other barriers to engagement. Whether these barriers are physical (such as relatively limited opening hours of some public venues) or whether they are intellectual (for example, consultation fatigue) is unclear given the limited scope of this initial study. However, it does highlight the need for CCLP to develop projects and activities for certain audience segments which are relevant and engaging to them.

Recommendations

The community engagement revealed levels of awareness, interest and pride not only in the industrial heritage of the CCLP area but also more broadly. People wanted to know about the stories not just workers in industry, but the wider stories of families, farmers and financiers. They also conveyed a sense that people really enjoyed actively exploring and discussing their landscape and its heritage in more open-ended ways. Providing structure and support to grow groups who link up and explore what they chose to in their landscape could harness this interest and enthusiasm.

It was evident that elements of the industrial landscape are inspiring local craftspeople in creating jewellery, painting, poetry and art from stone and metal, some of which is being sold locally, and there is local pride in this too. Thus industrial heritage can also provide opportunities to address changes in perceptions and attitudes to industrial landscapes, which in the wider sense can provide an opportunity to recognise the context of time in terms of landscapes present and future. Exploring the role of industrial landscapes as part of the wider national and European industrial

context can provide a platform on which to build commonalities and inspiration going forward for landscapes under pressure to remediate.

Opportunities should be explored to work with key stakeholders at the landscape scale, such as the Galloway and South Ayrshire Biosphere Reserve, SRUC and the Crighton Centre, amongst others, to develop more integrated awareness and solutions for the future.