

Paths for Communities

End of scheme report

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1.0 Executive summary

- i. Paths for Communities (P4C) was a funding scheme established to encourage and enable local rural communities to work with landowners to develop and enhance local public paths. The scheme aimed to both extend the network and make it easier to use, in ways that deliver social and economic benefit. This report has been prepared at the end of the project to provide a summary of the scheme, to capture lessons learned from running it and to share information on the projects funded.
- ii. The P4C scheme was launched in May 2012 with £2 million of funds provided under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) to spend by March 2014. The scheme closed to new applications at the end of September 2013.
- iii. Expressions of Interest (EOI) were received from 287 potential applicants and 43 communities were awarded grants to the value of £1,970,375 (98.5% of the £2 million budget).
- iv. The P4C fund was invested in over 183.2 km of Public Rights of Way (PROW) including both new creations and improvements to connecting routes. The scheme created an additional 76.29 km of new PROW consisting of 54.87 km of new bridleway and 21.42 km new footpath. In addition P4C secured improvements to a further 106.94 km of existing routes where these were connected to the new PROW created. Most of the routes provided access for walking, horse-riding and cycling and many of the projects also provided specific improvements for a range of users with limited mobility including wheelchair users and those with young children in pushchairs.
- v. P4C did not fund the legal costs of creating PROW but did fund the physical surface works to make the route usable as well as the associated infrastructure, promotion and information. The average cost of P4C grant per metre for all works associated with the project was £46.05. The cost of surface improvement alone was £20.17 per metre.
- vi. Costs to run the scheme were entirely met by Natural England in support of its remit to improve opportunities for people to access the natural environment and enjoy open air recreation.
- vii. Successful projects were dependent of a number of enablers including an enthusiastic community usually with one or two key individuals driving the project; support from Local Access Forum; supportive landowners; local authority involvement and backing; effective partnership; and advice from local grant officers with good understanding of the grant process and public rights of way legislation.

- viii. The things that prevented projects from developing included:
- eligibility mainly because no new PROW would be created or because the PROW would not connect to a rural area;
 - lack of private match funding;
 - lack of landowner support; and
 - communities and user groups being unable to agree on the project priorities.
- ix. P4C supported a range of social and economic benefits to rural communities and levered additional funding from business as well as voluntary contributions. Letters of support were received from 112 rural businesses along with supportive letters from schools and medical professionals, all of which anticipated a range of benefits from the PROW improvements. The projects recorded an input of 11,786 hours of volunteer labour. A more detailed evaluation of the social and economic benefits is being undertaken by an independent evaluation funded by Defra and the RDPE Technical Assistance fund and is due to complete March 2015.
- x. A good level of interest in the scheme was demonstrated along with the ability of communities to develop applications that met scheme requirements. There was still evidence of unsatisfied demand when the project closed to applications.
- xi. P4C was an effective pilot and, with additional funding, the scheme could have been refined to run more efficiently over a longer time span. The main conclusion is that there is potential for local communities to work together to create additional PROW and that when this happens, a range of both social and economic benefits are likely to be delivered. However without funding schemes, such as P4C, it is unlikely that this will happen.

2.0 Introduction

Aims and objectives

2.1 The specific objective of the P4C scheme pilot was to encourage and enable local rural communities to work with landowners to develop and enhance local public paths that both extend the network and make it easier to use, in ways that deliver social and economic benefits¹. To do this the scheme, had to demonstrate:

- PROW network improvements (for example, providing missing links and routes that open up the network to more users including links from residential areas to the natural environment);
- New multi-user routes providing opportunities for different types of public access (essentially walking, horse-riding and cycling) and for all levels of ability (including wheelchair access as well as routes suitable for pushchairs, and for people with additional mobility needs);
- Delivery of economic benefits to rural communities (for example, to rural shops, eateries, attractions and accommodation);
- Delivery of social benefits to rural communities (including evidence of health benefits, social cohesion, outdoor education, safe and active travel)

2.2 This report describes how this pilot project was set up and run; the projects it delivered; the outcomes it achieved; and lessons learned. It covers the period from November 2011 to the end of September 2014.

Background

2.3 In November 2011 Natural England was asked by Defra to set up a grant programme to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits to rural communities in line with the goals set out in the Chancellors Autumn Statement.

2.4 Part of the impetus to set up P4C came from the work done by The Trails Trust. Their publication in 2011 of 'creating multi-user public rights of way'² offered Guidance to using simple voluntary dedications to improve the local rights of way network.

2.5 The funding for the P4C programme formed part of a wider programme of government funding, the Rural Tourism Package, which was identified within the Rural Economy Growth Review to help showcase and strengthen rural tourism in England.

2.6 P4C funding came from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Axis 3, Measure 321 Basic Services for the economy and rural population. The objective of the funding is to *improve or maintain the living conditions and welfare of*

¹ P4C Business case, [Feb 2012]

² <http://www.thetrailstrust.org.uk/pages/creatingtrails.php>

those living in rural areas and to increase the attractiveness of such areas through the provision of more and better basic services for the economy of the rural population.

2.7 The P4C scheme was launched in May 2012 with £2 million of funds to spend by March 2014.

Scheme governance and delivery partners

Role of Natural England

2.8 Natural England was responsible for delivering the scheme and Chaired the Project Board and Grants Panel.

2.9 P4C contributed to Natural England's general purpose "*to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development*" as set out in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. The general purpose specifically includes:

- Securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- Promoting access to the countryside, open spaces and encouraging open air recreation, and
- Contributing in other ways to social and economic wellbeing through management of the natural environment.

2.10 Natural England staff took the idea presented in November 2011 and, over six months, worked closely with Defra and the RPA to develop a new grant programme to fit the RDPE regulations and provide a mechanism to enable community groups to identify and deliver projects that would enhance and improve local access opportunities.

2.11 The scheme was developed and delivered using existing Natural England staff with a range of skills and experience, particularly knowledge of PROW and access legislation as well as community engagement. A small central unit undertook the development and organisation of the scheme. A team of six part time Local Grants Officers (LGOs) led the delivery of the scheme in the field. Senior staff played a supporting and strategic role.

2.12 Natural England was committed to delivering an effective and efficient scheme. It set out to demonstrate:

- Efficient use of its resources;
- Spending of the budget allocated (£2 million) by March 2014;
- Effective knowledge sharing and partnership work;
- Compliance with RDPE rules.

Role of Defra

2.13 Defra officers were members of the Project Board and Grants Panel. Defra's Landscape, Outdoor Recreation and Forestry team provided guidance and advice to Natural England on the establishment, direction and steering of the project. Defra also took the lead in evaluating the P4C scheme policy outcomes.

Role of RPA

2.14 Officers from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) were members of the Project Board. The RPA provided detailed guidance and advice on the formulation of scheme paperwork, documentation and regulatory processes. All systems and processes were signed off by RPA as fit for purpose before they could be put into use.

2.15 Due to the short term nature of the project and the limited funds being dispersed, it was agreed to operate a manual payment system, whereby Natural England would undertake all processes up to the checking of claims. The RPA, on instruction from Natural England, then carried out the actual payment. The P4C budget remained with RPA and was never part of Natural England finances.

2.16 RPA colleagues also played a significant role in undertaking various layers of accountability (attestation reports; transaction testing; compliance monitoring).

Project Board

2.17 A Project Board was established, Chaired by Natural England, with representatives of Defra, RPA and the project team sitting as members.

2.18 The P4C Project Board met on a monthly basis (by telephone conference) providing formal oversight of the planning, delivery and monitoring of the P4C scheme. Its role was to:

- Agree and review the scope, timing and resourcing of the scheme;
- Provide critical review and sign-off for project plans, schedules and specifications;
- Define, monitor and manage the risks associated with the scheme;
- Provide steer as necessary on any issues pertinent to the delivery of the scheme and support the escalation of those issues to other parts of the business if required;
- Act, both individually and collectively, as champions of the scheme within Natural England and Defra;
- Advise on communications activity about the scheme;
- Advise on monitoring and evaluation of the scheme.

Grants Panel

2.19 The Panel was Chaired by Natural England and was made up of representatives of Defra, Natural England and five independent experts from the Institute of Public Rights of Way (IPROW), ADEPT (representing the rights of way section of local highway authorities), the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Visit England and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

2.20 The Grant Panel were governed by Terms of Reference (annex 1) and empowered to make one of 3 decisions:

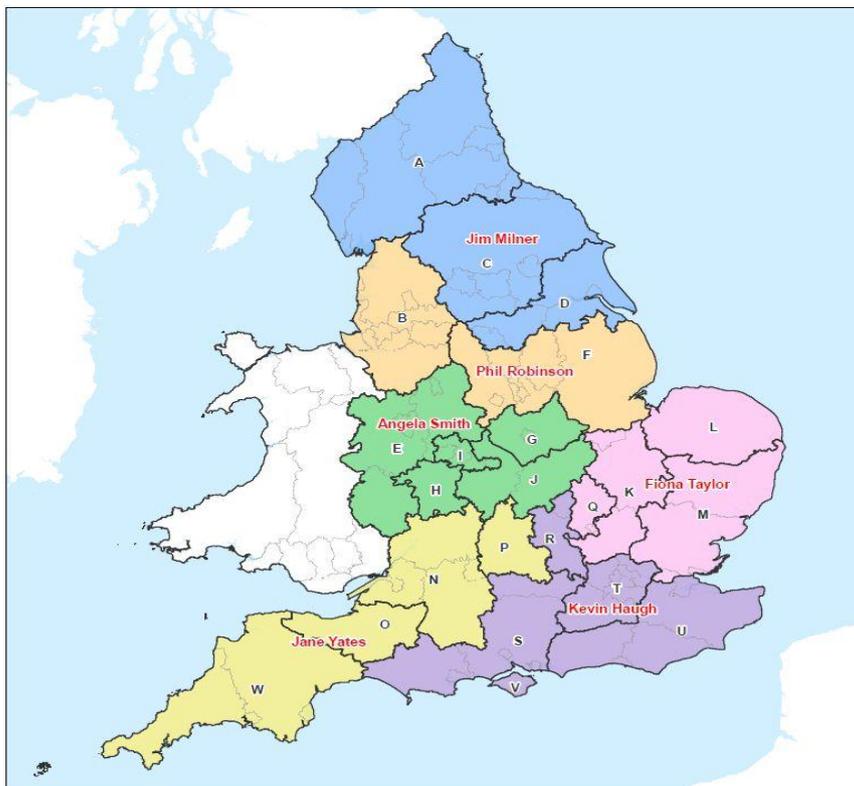
- Award the grant (with or without conditions);
- Reject the application;
- Ask for the application to be reworked and resubmitted.

3.0 Delivery mechanism

Scheme outline

3.1 A P4C team was established, by redeployment of existing Natural England staff, with a Project Manager, national business support and six part-time, geographically targeted, LGOs (see Figure 1). The LGOs worked closely with applicants to support them in preparing applications. A central P4C email address was established to receive general questions and to direct expressions of interest to the appropriate LGO. A P4C web page was created to carry public information about the scheme.

Figure 1: Local Grant Officer geographic coverage



Note – the letters on the map were used when identifying each project through the P4C reference number (e.g. P4C_North_B_20120808)

3.2 The scheme followed a 10 step process:

1. Applicant became aware of scheme and checked their eligibility by reading the online information;
2. Applicant completed an Expression of Interest Form;
3. LGO made contact and offered support to potential eligible projects;
4. Applicant filled in an application form;
5. Officer Group considered application. Suitable projects passed to Grants Panel;
6. Grants Panel considered application resulting in
 - a. Offer,
 - b. Return for reworking,

- c. Rejection;
7. Applicant commenced work;
 8. Applicant submitted claim(s) as set out in offer letter as work completed;
 9. Grant Officer inspected finished project;
 10. On confirmation that all work had been completed in accordance with the offer letter, projects received payment from the RPA.

3.3 Experience of running similar projects led to the assumption that the latent demand for grant aid for rights of way work would be high. In an attempt to mitigate this, the scheme adopted the following principles:

- Providing clear information on our website to enable potential applicants to decide if they were eligible;
- The offer of close support from a local grant officer to guide potential applicants through the process.

Project selection

3.4 Potential applicants were directed to Natural England website. If they were interested in making an application they were asked to submit an Expression of Interest Form. This was sent to our central mailbox and then allocated to the appropriate LGO. Allocations were made primarily on geographical boundaries but with the flexibility that LGOs could cooperate across boundaries if workloads needed to be balanced.

3.5 The LGO then made contact with the applicant and discussed the proposed project. If the LGO considered that the project had the potential to fit the requirements of P4C they issued an application form. The decision was taken to make the forms available via the LGO as a way of reducing poor quality applications, and limiting time wasted by communities in completing the form for a project that would have been ineligible.

Officer Group assessment

3.6 Once an application was received it was presented to the Officer Group. This group comprised the LGOs, the Business Manager and was chaired by the Project Manager. It met on a monthly basis, subject to having projects to consider. In preparation for the meeting an assessment form was prepared for each application received. The assessment involved scoring the project against a list of criteria, as set out in the Handbook and guidance, published on our website ([archive of www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c)). This was completed by the LGO working with the project as well as independently by a second LGO. At the meeting the scores and views of both assessors was considered and an agreed view reached on whether to take the application to the next stage or to provide feedback to the applicant as to what extra information / detail might be required.

3.7 The scoring process was developed as a way of filtering projects in case of high demand. However this was never used for two reasons:

- It was judged that there were never too many applications to present to the Grants Panel;

- It was discovered that some low cost projects received a low score but offered value for money.

3.8 The Officer Group and the scoring process were nevertheless critical in offering a mechanism to hone applications so that they were of sufficient quality to take to the next stage.

Grants Panel assessment

3.9 Drawing on experience of other grant schemes (notably 'Access to Nature') Natural England decided to establish an independent Grants Panel, drawing on a wide range of partner expertise to assess applications and select projects to award grant to. All panel members gave their time to the project at no cost other than travel and subsistence which was paid by Natural England where needed. In total this amounted to £1,165.

3.10 The Grant Panel were governed by Terms of Reference (annex 1) and empowered to make one of 3 decisions:

- Award the grant (with or without conditions);
- Reject the application;
- Ask for the application to be reworked and resubmitted.

3.11 By the close of the project the Panel considered 56 applications;

- 45 were awarded; (2 subsequently rejected offers)
- 5 were rejected;
- 6 were asked to rework and resubmit (of which 4 did).

3.12 A note of each Panel meeting was produced explaining the Panel's decision. This was available to applicants if they wished to see it. LGOs would also use the Panels conclusions in feedback they gave to applicants.

Feedback loop

3.13 As projects were assessed by both officer group and grant panel, a clear line of feedback developed which enabled local grant officers to provide clearer direction and advice to applicants and which helped the panel make better informed decisions.

Project offer letter

3.14 Successful applicants received a detailed offer letter which set out the terms of their agreement, a detailed schedule of works and the timeframe involved. The importance of delivering precisely what was specified in the offer letter was made clear to the applicants. Applicants were asked to notify Natural England as soon as possible if any deviation from the offer was likely so that appropriate revisions could be made.

3.15 Offer letters contained one or more claim dates. Some projects asked for a spread of payments in order to ease their cash flow. Applicants were provided with claim forms as part of the offer process.

Rules and conditions

3.16 The conditions applied to the RDPE stream under which P4C was funded were complex, particularly for the community groups that the project was aimed at. Many of the subtleties of these rules only became clear as the project team worked through the development of the scheme and many issues were teased out as the projects evolved. Detailed advice and guidance was provided in the 'Paths for Communities Applicant Handbook' and this was supplemented by a regularly updated 'Frequently Asked Questions' publication. In addition, LGOs were on hand to support applicants and provide guidance.

3.17 The key principles governing the scheme were:

- Applicant had to be a legally constituted body with a bank account;
- Grant payments could only be made retrospectively so applicant needed sufficient cash flow to cover costs;
- The project must include the creation or upgrading of permanent public right of way (NB the actual process of creating the new legal right of way can take many months – for the purposes of P4C, we simply need to see that an appropriate mechanism was in place and consents entered into for the creation to take place);
- The project must deliver benefit to rural areas;
- Match funding could not include any public sector funds (including local authority funds, lottery or Town and Country Planning section 106 agreements);
- The applicant could not be in receipt of more than €200,000 of state aid funding over any 3 fiscal years.

Scheme phases and timing

Developing applications – May-October 2012

3.18 Much of the first six months of the P4C scheme from May 2012 involved promoting it to communities via partner networks, fostering local partnerships and advising on the development of applications. The first applications were received by the Grants Panel in November 2012.

3.19 Whilst learning as many lessons as possible from other projects, P4C was set up from scratch against a tight time framework. Consequently the scheme documentation and paperwork continued to be developed and evolve after the official launch. For example, the claim forms and checklists were only completed just before the first claims were due. There was therefore a continued requirement for the project manager to be involved in the developmental phase of the project well into its actual operation.

3.20 The following risks, which were likely to impact on the time required to develop and deliver projects, were identified by the Project Team and Project Board during the first 6 months and mitigation measures were discussed and put in place to address these:

- Significant time was required to build community capacity to dedicate to projects;

- Dependence on volunteers with limited time to dedicate to lead and deliver projects meant projects progressed slowly;
- The complexity of legal and land ownership issues could cause delays and set-backs;
- Sufficient time was required to complete all work on the ground, before payment could be made. Taking into account adverse weather conditions and use of volunteer time meant that completion of work was often slower than expected.

Awarding grants – November 2012 to September 2013

3.21 From November 2012, LGO support was prioritised to the most promising Expressions of Interest to focus on getting applications sufficiently advanced to reach the Grants Panel before September 2013. This was done to ensure that grants were awarded in time to complete work and claim payment before the end of March 2014.

3.22 Potential applicants were given a lot of detailed guidance about the scheme (Applicant Handbook; Frequently Asked Questions; Promotional Leaflet; Six Steps to P4C; Assessment Form – see [archive of www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c](http://archive.of.www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c)). Particular care was taken to explain the eligibility rules for the scheme (e.g. the need for a rural element and the creation of some new Public Right of Way). In addition, a community focussed project such as P4C required a significant amount of LGO time to build capacity and develop quality applications.

Completing works and processing claims for payment – March 2013 to September 2014

3.23 The first claim was received in March 2013 followed by a further 58 claims by August 2014. A claims checklist was developed that set out a clear process and separation of duties to ensure claims were paid within the allocated time (6 weeks) and any irregularities and issues picked up at an early stage. For final claims a site visit was carried out by the LGO and a full report supported by images sent to the central P4C team as evidence that the work had been completed according to the offer letter and any subsequent amendments.

3.24 Once the checklist was complete, the claim details were sent to the RPA through a manual payment system. The applicant would then receive payment from the RPA within a couple of weeks.

Checking and audit processes

3.25 As an RDPE funded project, P4C was subject to a rigorous set of checks and balances. These are covered in detail in Chapter 9.

Scheme promotion and communication

3.26 A P4C communications plan was developed at the start of the project to identify key partners and messages.

3.27 Initial promotion of the scheme focused on providing information to potential applicants through a variety of partners including the Local Access Forums, Institute of Public Rights of Way (IPROW), National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Association of Directors of Environment, Planning and Transport (PROW sub-group of

ADEPT), local authorities, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Ramblers, British Horse Society (BHS) and a range of other user groups. Information was provided on the Natural England web site, in P4C newsletters and in articles written for partner journals and newsletters.

3.28 A stakeholder meeting, which involved the organisations listed above, was held at the outset of the scheme and again in December 2012 to inform key organisations on progress, seek views and to encourage dissemination of information through their own networks.

3.29 P4C Newsletters were produced throughout the project to raise awareness, promote good practice and celebrate success. Simple promotional leaflets were also available on request.

3.30 As the scheme progressed, the focus of communications activity changed from attracting new applicants to spreading the news on projects that were delivering on the ground. This reflected confidence that the scheme had attracted sufficient projects to fully spend the £2 million budget, and the desire to encourage other community groups to follow the example of successful P4C projects and continue with their projects by seeking other funds. The December 2013 P4C Newsletter included a list of alternative sources of funds to support projects that P4C was unable to fund.

3.31 In February 2014 the communications plan was revised to reflect the need to: draw together the collective experience of P4C projects; and, to inspire other funding scheme managers to see the benefits of supporting P4C type projects and initiatives.

4.0 Interest generated

Overview

4.1 By the end of August 2014:

- 287 Expressions of Interest (EOI) were received.
- 235 EOI were rejected or withdrawn.
- 52 applications were received.
- 6 projects were asked by the panel to rework and resubmit. Of these 4 were resubmitted to the panel and awarded.
- 5 projects were rejected by the panel.
- 45 offers were made (totalling £2,143,844).
- 1 project did not accept its offer of a grant.
- 1 project was withdrawn in early 2014.
- 43 projects were completed
- 59 claims (interim and final) had been sent to RPA for payment with a final spend of £1,970,375 (98.5% of the £2 million budget)

Expressions of Interest

4.2 Figure 2 shows the spread of EOIs and applications across England. Each bar depicts the total EOI received in each P4C area which is then broken down into rejected/withdrawn EOI, unsuccessful applications and offered projects. It was hoped from the outset that an even geographic spread of projects would come forward; both in terms of fairness and the spread of labour around the country. The scheme handbook drew attention to the use of threshold scores which could be used as part of the selection process if some form of rationing were needed. In the end the spread of applications received was fairly even so no extra measures were required.

4.3 The completion of an EOI by a potential applicant simply involved providing a project name and contact details. Much effort was put in to making the scheme as clear as possible, helping people to decide for themselves if their project was eligible. The EOI process was very straightforward and perhaps this encouraged a high number of speculative bids. Whilst the initial net was cast wide the quick follow up from an LGO to check on whether a project would be eligible reduced the number of potential applications before they spent time compiling information on an application form. In total 235 (82%) of EOIs were rejected or withdrawn. The most common reasons for projects not being taken forward were (see Figure 3):

- Located within urban area (8%)
- No permanent PROW created (17%)
- Funding found elsewhere (3%)
- Not eligible (unspecified) (11%)
- Landowner issues (14%)
- Contact did not respond to call from LGO (23%)
- P4C scheme closed before application submitted (15%)
- Lack of time (3%),
- partner/community issues (6%).

Figure 2 – Chart to show spread of Expressions of Interest (EOI), Applications and offers across England (divided by P4C scheme administration areas)

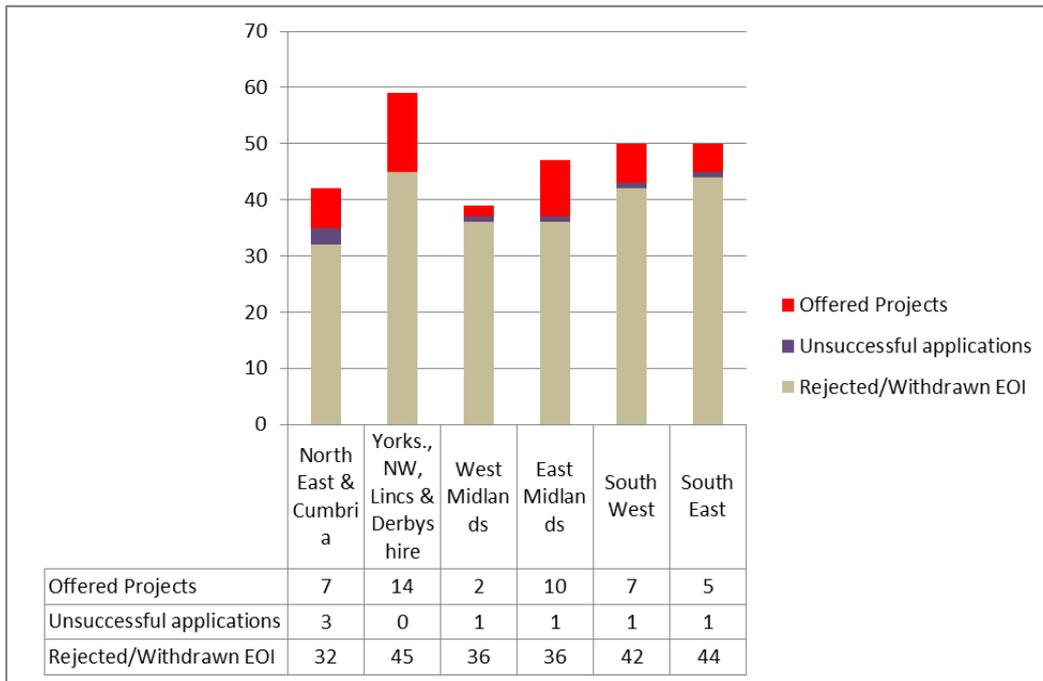
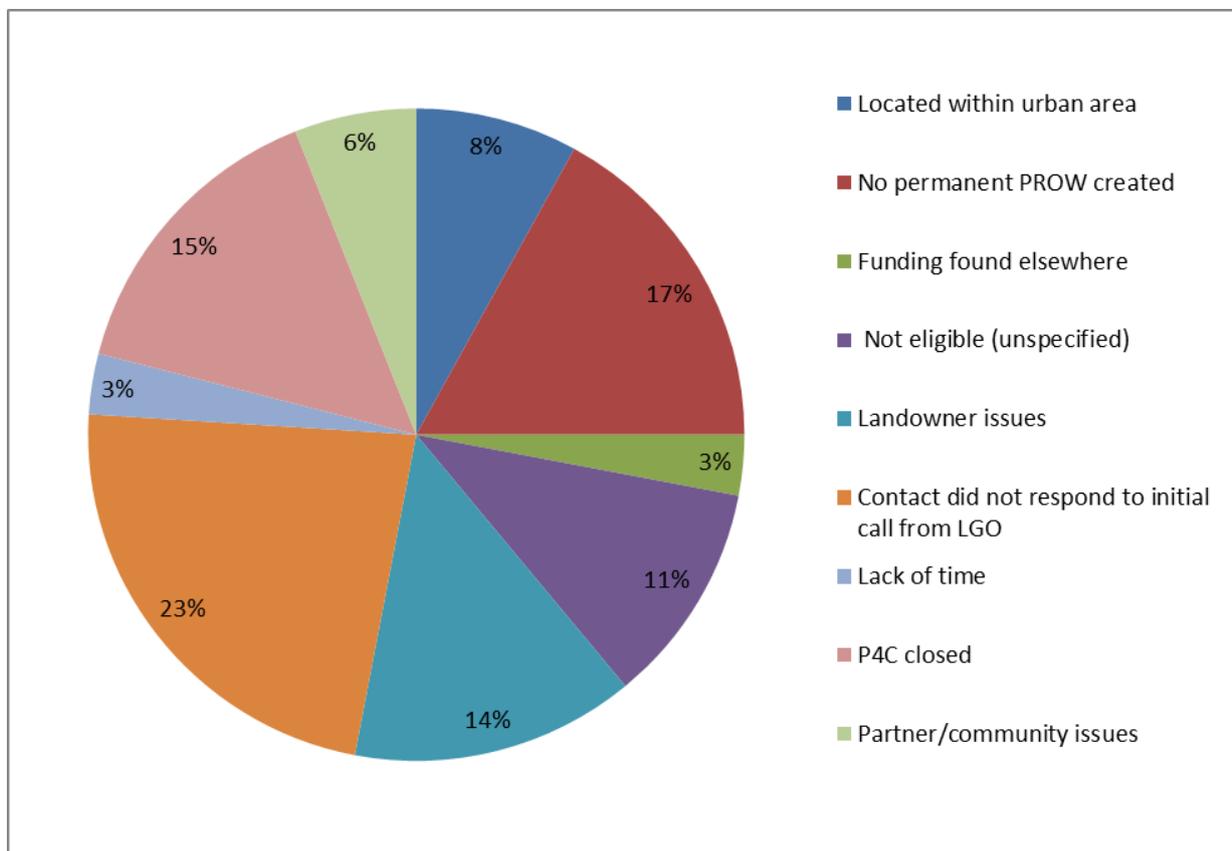
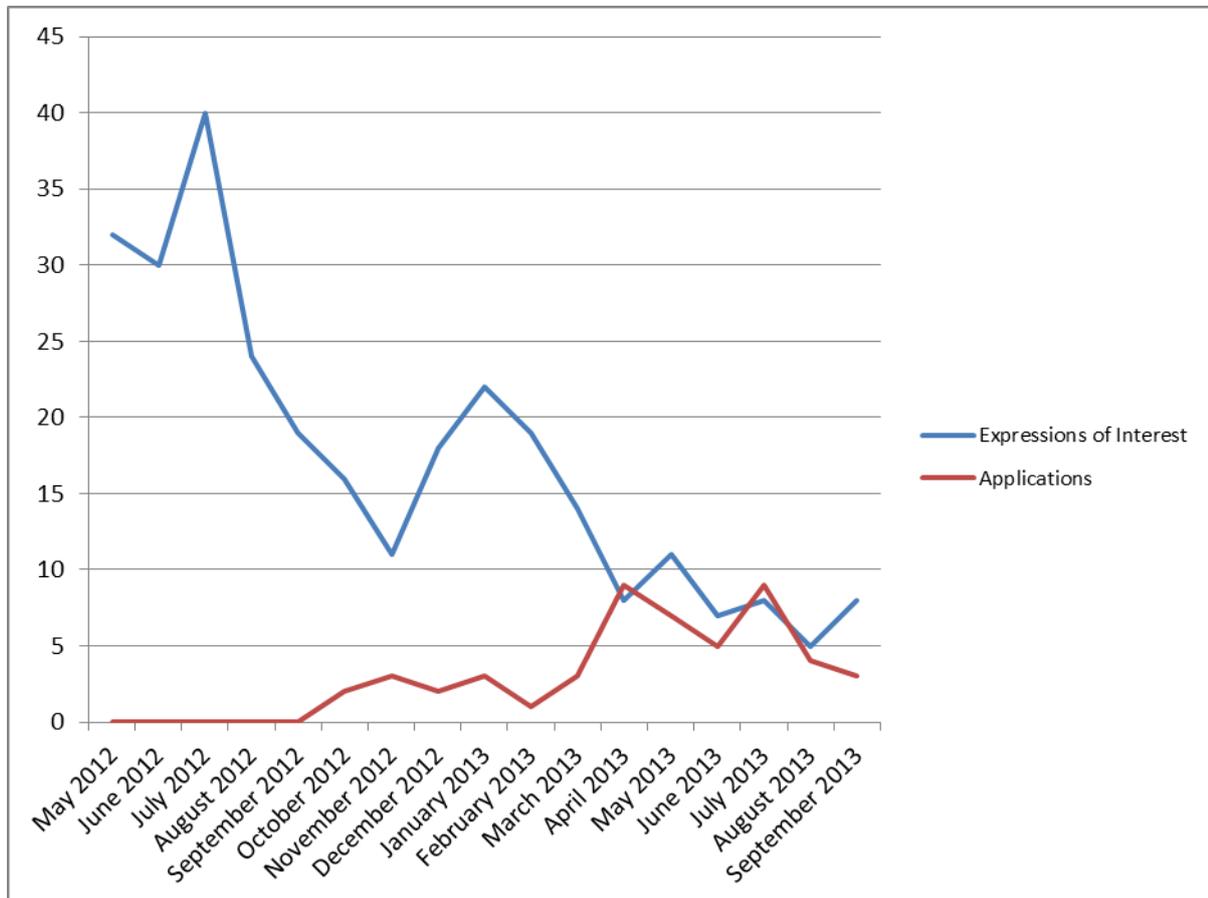


Figure 3 – Reasons why EOI rejected or withdrawn



4.4 Figure 4 shows the rate at which EOIs and applications were received and completed. The increase in EOI being received in January/February 2013 was most likely due to the release of the first P4C newsletter before Christmas and a national press release in January 2013. After that the rate of new EOIs coming in reduced but as expected the rate of applications coming in steadily rose.

Figure 4 – Receipt of P4C applications and EOIs month on month



4.5 The time between an EOI arriving and an offer being made to a project ranged from 4 weeks to 68 weeks with the average project taking 33 weeks. These figures help illustrate the complexity of the application process and if a similar scheme was being devised consideration needs to be given to the work needed to pull the information together and establish partnership working. The 2 years available to P4C was not long enough for some projects to work up viable applications.

4.6 A complete list of applications that were taken to the P4C grants panel and the decisions made is shown in Annex 2 along with a complete list of projects awarded with their key deliverables (Annex 3).

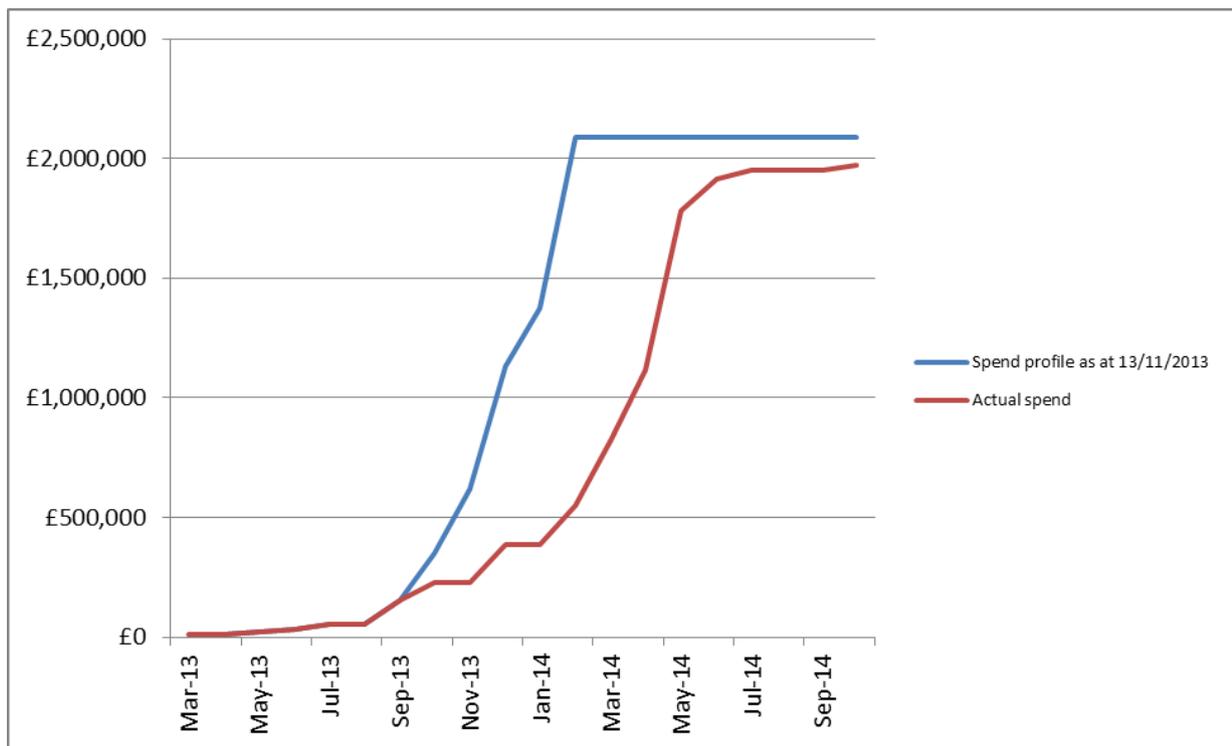
Summary of spend

4.7 The latest date for final claim to be received by the P4C team was set at 28 February 2014 to allow the P4C team to process the claims before the end of March 2014 and enabling all spend to occur in the financial year 2013/14. All offer letters were sent out accordingly. By autumn 2013 the Project Team had clarified that as long as project work was completed by the end of March 2014 the budget could be accrued against the 2013/14 financial year. The Project Team recognised that this would give projects slightly longer to complete should delays occur.

4.8 In order to manage the budget and spend the full £2 million, the P4C Project Board agreed to a 10% over commitment of the budget in July 2013. This allowed for project underspend, be it shortfall in predicted spend or the withdrawal of a project (the Berrow Coast scheme was withdrawn at a very late stage).

4.9 Figure 5 shows the predicted profile of payments from November 2013 alongside the profile of the actual claims. The actuals line moved away from the predicted profile late in 2013 as projects began to notify us that work was slipping and claim dates needed to be changed. The adverse weather conditions of a particularly wet winter resulting in flooding in some areas which stopped work on the ground completely.

Figure 5 – Graph to show actual spend and predicted spend profile



4.10 A time limited scheme such as P4C with a significant component of practical infrastructure works on the ground, was always at risk from delays due to bad weather and the winter of 2013/14 was one of the wettest on record. But thanks to the dedication of the applicants and the hard work of the P4C team, the scheme delivered

on time, with all work complete before the end of March 2014, with the exception of two small elements from the Coton and Kingfisher Way projects, which, with the prior agreement of Natural England, Defra and the RPA, slipped into the 2014/15 financial year.

4.11 However, it should be noted that in order to manage the budget outturn so effectively, 54 grant offer amendments were required to change the final claim dates, which placed an unexpected burden on Natural England central team.

4.12 Natural England specified the final claim date as 28th February 2014 in anticipation that some projects would miss the deadline and need March to complete work and claim the grant. If the final claim date had been set at 31st March any slippage would have had a greater impact on the 2014/15 budget.

4.13 In October 2014 all of the final claims were paid resulting in a final spend figure of £1,970,375, 98.5% of the £2 million budget.

4.14 The size of projects and the funding provided varied considerably:

- total project costs ranged from £3,449 to £203,281 with an average of £59,439 and a median of £37,472;
- total P4C grant ranged from £2,052 to £146,083 with an average of £46,890 and a median of £26,495;
- average grant provided was 78.94% of the total costs;
- A total of £527,151 was brought in to the projects through match funding. £387,148 (73%) of this was cash match and £140,004 (27%) through volunteer time.³ Projects brought an average of £12,551 match funding.

³ Volunteer labour is costed equivalent to the going rate for that type of work, and the actual hours delivered are recorded (source – P4C handbook V3)

5.0 Community interest in P4C

Enabling communities

5.1 P4C was aimed at grass roots organisations, often with little experience in both applying for grants and in PROW related work. However, the short timeframe available to P4C meant the scheme was best suited to facilitating existing partnerships and long held ideas, rather than supporting new partnerships set up on the back of P4C. It gave communities an opportunity to realise often long-held dreams of local access improvements, and provided support for them through the application process.

Case story: working with a new volunteer group

Bottesford Beck - Whilst setting up a new group from scratch within the P4C timescale was hard for many, some succeeded. A volunteer group, Friends of the Beck, was set up specifically to address pathway issues and P4C offered a focus for this enthusiasm. As is often the case, successful groups are inspired by one or more individuals. In this case, it was Margaret Armiger, a retired teacher with a passion for Bottesford Beck and its environment, who has led a major campaign to clean up the Beck. She doggedly and tirelessly pursued the goal of getting the P4C project approved. She is often, if not looking for funding, up to her knees in the Beck cleaning out rubbish and debris. She has developed close ties to the local authority and other relevant organisations such as the Environment Agency and because of her tireless efforts for the community Margaret has been asked to look into the possibility of her standing as a local councillor. Under Margaret's leadership Friends of the Beck are seeking further funding from Living Waterways. The Friends of the Beck have also been awarded the Point of Light Community Award and Margaret is in receipt of a congratulatory letter from the Prime Minister.

5.2 For a lot of projects it was clear that one individual made all the difference in terms of the effort and leadership they invested in the project. It was also important to have a local person working alongside landowners to seek their consent and involvement.

Case story: Individuals making a difference

Nesscliffe – The project would not have happened were it not for Zia Robbins exhaustive efforts over a 25 year period. She had campaigned for increased numbers of and improvements to the bridleway network. She lobbied MPs, Councillors and the local authority relentlessly. When the P4C money became available Jim Stabler, Shropshire Council Outdoors Recreation Officer, recognised this would fulfil the ambition of Zia, a LAF and British Horse Society member, and local authority ambitions too. They worked together to complete the application form with Zia providing evidence, maps and surveys. She and others had surveyed all 52 miles of the Humphrey Kynaston route and presented a detailed document showing where improvements to the route were required such as groundwork improvements, gates, styles and fences to be removed or replaced.

Weald Country Park – The Country Park lies just west of Brentwood and is owned by Essex County Council (ECC). Although tracks existed in the park, it was not clear whether they could or should be used by walkers, cyclists, or horse riders and this led to conflict. Signage was poor and the vast majority of routes were permissive only.

A proposal from Essex Bridleways Association (EBA) aimed to create over 6km of bridleways in and around the park linking in to the PROW network beyond. Clear signage and appropriate surfacing on boggy sections formed part of the bid as did regular multi-user volunteer sessions to bring together different user groups.

Unexpected opposition by the local community led to ECC convening a public meeting. It was clear that there were strong feelings against the proposal. But it also became clear to Helen Chester from the EBA that people hadn't fully appreciated the difference between the routes that they currently used with permission from the landowner and legal rights of way. Nor that "bridleway" status means that people have the right to ride horses *and* cycle, walk and use mobility scooters (hired out free of charge by the Country Park). Helen explained this and added that with a number of local authorities considering selling off their parks or transferring their management to others, routes risk being lost unless they are afforded the legal protection of being dedicated as public rights of way. She reported, *"I started off with a room full of people against the project and by the time I'd finished there was a room full of people in favour. It was a fantastic feeling! This has been a great experience."*

Local partnerships

5.3 Offers were made to a range of organisations

- Community group (8)
- Parish/Town councils (8)
- Regional organisation (10)
- National organisation (5)
- Corporate business (2)
- Local authority (11)

5.4 Applicants were asked to explain the breadth of the partnership involved in delivering their projects. It can be hard to define 'partner' but this analysis excludes those simply offering support and captures a list of those active in the development and delivery of the project:

- Local authorities (Parish Council, Highway Authorities, District Council, National Park)
- Local Access Forums
- Access interests (Ramblers, health walk groups, Cycling Tourist Club, Parish Paths Partnerships, Sustrans, BHS)
- Environmental organisations (local environmental groups, wildlife trusts, Country Park Friends group, National Trust)
- Community groups (local residents, youth groups, church, local trusts, disability groups, Rural Community Council, Rotary Club)

- Local services (schools, museums)
- Public bodies (Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, AONBs)
- Private Firms

5.5 P4C is a consensual scheme and a successful project required a community to bring together a number of factors including:

- a. landowner consent for public access on their land;
- b. formal creation of new public rights of way working with the often complex system of legislation;
- c. local authority agreement to maintain new rights or failing that another way to secure long term maintenance; and
- d. secure funding that is eligible to match the RDPE grant.

5.6 For many this proved to be a daunting task. For eight of the projects the formal applicant was changed, as the project progressed, to an organisation better able to cope with the demands of the scheme (such as a local authority), whilst the community group remained involved in the project.

Case story: Changed applicant

Friends of the Carrs - The application was approved by the Grants panel in September 2013. It became clear that the group had misunderstood the guidance about having to pay upfront from their own resources. Once this was realised the group approached Natural England requesting that the offer letter be reissued to Cheshire East Council who had the funds to pay up front for this high value project (£125,000). Retaining this level of flexibility, within the funding rules, was important in maximising the delivery potential of P4C.

Community cohesion

5.7 P4C gave communities an opportunity to improve the PROW network in their localities without waiting for initiatives to originate from individual Highway Authorities (with the inherent delays and pressure on reduced resources). It provided an opportunity for local organisations to cooperate in projects to enhance local facilities for the benefit of all. Overall P4C has demonstrated how 'localism' works to the advantage of local communities.

Case story: Community cohesion

Connecting North Lichfield - A new footpath, along with improvements to the connecting Public Rights of Way, have transformed a small area of greenspace making it more attractive to the local, most deprived neighbourhood in Lichfield. The project has encouraged greater use of the site through walking and volunteer opportunities.

More visitors to the site were anticipated but what was unexpected was the reduction in anti-social behaviour. Comments from users of the site include:

"I feel much safer coming here now."

"It is much nicer than it was.....It's good that more people are coming here and using it."

5.8 All applicants praised the input of their local PROW officers who steered them through the thorny issues of access legislation. Another common thread running through all successful projects was a strong partnership of generous landowners, companies providing match funding and expertise, and a host of local organisations, working together to deliver benefits for the people in their community.

Landowner contributions

5.9 All projects were dependent on landowners giving consent to access on their land. None of the new routes would have been created without their goodwill and generosity. The project included a wide range of landowners including notable contributions from private landowners. Of the 43 projects funded, only 3 involved a facilitation payment to the landowner. Each landowner affected by the proposed project had to give their consent to the project taking place across their land. The percentage of consents received are shown below by landowner type: ⁴

Private landowner – 39.5%

Public sector – 36%

Voluntary sector – 18.5%

Corporate business - 6%

Case story: Landowner contributions

Nesscliffe - A householder was approached by Shropshire County Council and asked if they had any objection to the bridleway coming across their land to adjoin with the existing PROW. They agreed to gift a small section of land at the side of the house. Without this small piece of land the route wouldn't have connected the new section of bridleway to the rest of the 83 km Nesscliffe trail. The householders were presented with a special award by the British Horse Society in recognition of their generosity.

Mid Cheshire Bridleway – The project was awarded P4C monies to create a new 4 km long bridleway link in the local network. Much of the route skirts around the edge of the Lafarge Tarmac working quarry. Lafarge Tarmac, a large private company, took the time and effort to engage with the local Bridleway Association to form an effective partnership to deliver the project. Besides giving permission for the route to cross their land the company bankrolled the scheme, managed the

⁴ The % of consents does not necessarily correspond with the amount of land, as consent for 1m would be required as much as consent for 100m;

finances and helped with contractors and technical/design issues. The project could not have gone ahead without their assistance. The company's contribution in time and effort was well beyond that which was initially agreed as part of the match funding.

Why some applications failed

5.10 The Grants Panel invited seven projects to resubmit applications with more detail and six projects were rejected. The most common reasons for project failure were:

- lack of clarity (as the project evolved it was easier to offer clearer advice to applicants and to have a better sense of what the panel were looking for);
- poor value for money (particularly where no reasons given for very high surface specification);
- very high promotion costs but little access secured;
- failure to explain why higher rights could not be created;
- confusion over eligibility (on larger projects, failure to separate out P4C element from other sections paid for by local authority);
- failure to explain the context of the proposal and how it links with other routes;
- failure to demonstrate the use of least restrictive options to maximise access for all users;
- failure to demonstrate access benefits;
- lack of clarity over technical elements of the bid;
- more information required over landowner consent and involvement.

6.0 Improvements to the Public Rights of Way network

What P4C funded

6.1 Making improvements to the network of PROW is a key aspect of the P4C scheme. The 43 projects (see Figure 6) completed have delivered (see Figure 7):

- 21.43 km of footpath creation
- 54.87 km of bridleway creation.
- 84.43 km of bridleway improvement⁵
- 22.51 km of footpath improvement

6.2 P4C did not fund the legal costs of creating PROW but did fund the physical surface works to make the route usable as well as associated infrastructure, promotion and information. The work funded included:

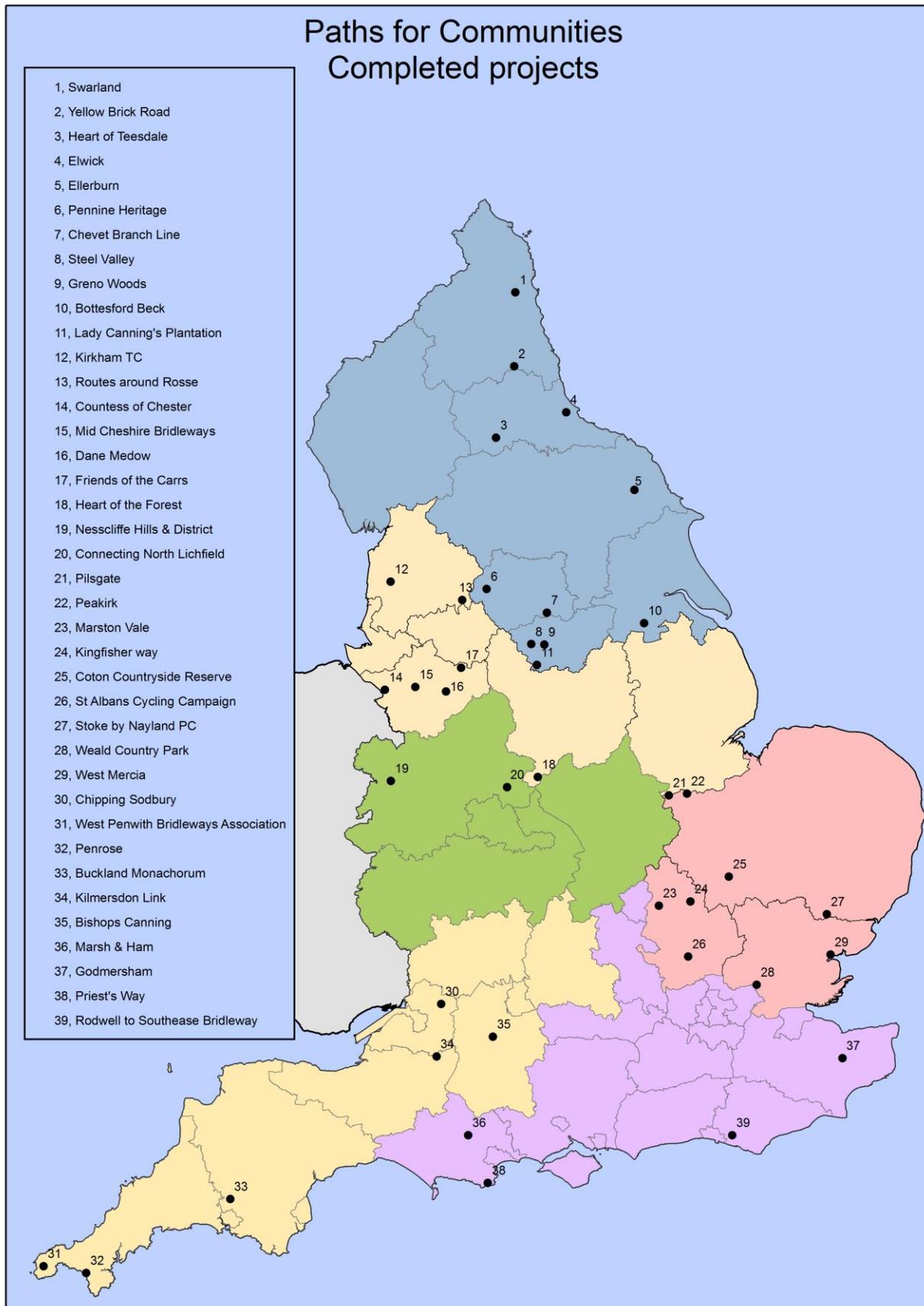
- surface works
- fencing
- gates, horse stiles and chicanes
- infrastructure such as bridges, boardwalks, raised platforms, seats and bins
- drainage and earthworks
- interpretation panels, signposting, way marker posts
- promotion of the route (e.g. events, guide books, leaflets, web pages, geocache trails and listening posts).

6.3 Only three payments (totalling £6,700) were made to landowners to facilitate permanent public access.

6.4 A range of elements were funded through P4C grants, and these are summarised in figure 7. With all costs included, the average cost per metre of PROW created is £46.05. This is a one off cost, with most items expected to have a lifespan of 20 years. The cost of the surface works alone for new rights of way created comes to £20.17 per metre.

⁵ All projects had to contain elements of new PROW creation. In some projects improvements to existing PROW were also funded.

Figure 6: P4C projects completed



NB The map lists 39 projects rather than the 43 offered. Greno Woods, Mid Cheshire and Wakefield were all in receipt of more than one offer.

Figure 7 – Breakdown of project costs

	Task	No of projects (units recorded where known)	Cost to P4C
Surface Works	Surfacing	38	£1,506,750
	Culverts/Drainage	13	
	Forestry Works/habitat enhancement	17	
Infrastructure	Fencing	14 (> 4054 metres)	£373,104
	Dry stone walling	1	
	Gates	14 (> 58 gates)	
	Horse stiles/hitching rails	2	
	Chicanes/barriers	6 (> 21 items)	
	Bridges	7 (8 bridges)	
	Steps/ramps	6	
	Board walks/platforms	5	
	Benches	7 (> 66 benches)	
	Bins	3	
Signage, promotion and interpretation	Interpretation panels	8 (> 16 panels)	£88,848
	Website upgrade	3	
	Publications/leaflet	7	
	Signage	22	
	Waymarking discs	4 (>1112 discs)	
	Waymarking finger posts	7 (>104 posts)	

Creating new Public Rights of Way

6.5 The mechanisms used for creating new PROW were:

- local authority Creation Agreements with land owners under Highways Act, 1980 section 25 in 25 cases (58%);
- Express Dedication at Common Law was used in 9 cases (21%);

- Dedication by parish council in 5 cases under Highways Act, section 30 (12%);
- local authorities used compulsory powers under section 26 of the Highways Act in 3 cases (7%);
- adoption by the local authority under Highways Act, section 38 in 1 case (2%).

6.6 In addition Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act was used to dedicate cycling rights on footpaths in 5 projects.

Express Dedication at Common Law (EDCL)

6.7 P4C has provided a focus to test in practice the ability to create new PROW through the mechanism of EDCL. This enables a landowner to dedicate a new or upgraded PROW unilaterally, as a common law alternative to signing a statutory public path creation agreement:

- with a local authority, under section 25 of the Highways Act 1980, or
- with the parish council, under section 30 of the same Act.

6.8 In November 2012 Defra wrote a letter to Natural England offering helpful guidance on the role and application of EDCL, based on their view of the current legislation. A copy of the letter can be found in Annex 4.

Case story: Changing minds on Express Dedication by Common Law

Two excellent P4C schemes were proposed in Cornwall, Penrose, by the National Trust and the West Penwith Bridleways Association both of which involved EDCL as the 'creation' mechanism. Initially there were concerns about using the relatively untried EDCL as a legal mechanism for path creation. However, the LAF gave strong support to both schemes and with wide community support and the enthusiasm of the National Trust, Cornwall County Council agreed to support both projects along with EDCL as the legal mechanism to dedicate the paths. In June 2014 Cornwall Council wrote to Natural England confirming that the EDCL Statements of Dedication provided by landowners will be added to the legal events database in readiness for the next publication of the definitive map.

Improvements to the PROW network

6.9 The P4C scheme has had a direct impact on 183.24 km of PROW (76.3 km of new routes; 106.94 km of improved routes). Anecdotal evidence suggests impacts on a much greater length of the PROW network by P4C projects improving and adding key links.

Case story: Wider links

Marston Vale - For many projects, the P4C grant unlocked more than just a discrete length of Public Right of Way. The addition of a new route often opened up access to many more kilometres of the access network. For example, whilst the scheme funded over 2.8 km of new bridleway through the Forest of Marston Vale's Millennium Country Park, these new routes also provided users with access to the wider network of rights of way and permissive routes for 7km south and 3.5km north of the project site.

Weald Country Park - Over 6.2 km of new bridleway were also created through the Weald Country Park in Essex. With links to other PROWs, permissive routes and small sections of country lane, over 14 km of peaceful Essex countryside can now be enjoyed on horseback. Perfect for around 28 livery stables, riding schools and equestrian centres that thrive within 16 km of the park.

Access for all

6.10 Most of the new routes created are bridleways (71%), providing access for walking, horse-riding and cycling. Many of the projects funded also provide specific improvements for a range of users with limited mobility (including wheelchair users and those with young children in pushchairs).

Case story: Access for all

Dane Meadow – The main aim of the project was to open up an underused greenspace for community use. The new bridleway provides easy access to all, including wheelchair users and people who are less able, who couldn't previously access the site due to steep inclines and no footpaths. Appropriate seating has also been provided.

Ellerburn – The project created 1.6km of new path fully compliant with the Equalities Act giving an opportunity for people with additional mobility requirements to enjoy the forest. As a direct result of the new access, a local cycle hire business has expanded its fleet of bicycles to include several types of specialist bikes for people who are less able, There are also plans to work with local manufactures to design better adapted bicycles that are lighter and easier and more efficient to pedal.

Determining the resilience of the path surface and infrastructure

6.11 P4C sought to maximise value for money by ensuring that the projects funded included the appropriate level of work to the path surface. The expectation was that P4C investment created paths that would be resilient for 20 years. As there is no precise formula to achieve this, LGOs and the P4C Grants Panel relied on technical advice from path construction specialists and landscape architects, particularly from within local authorities.

6.12 All of the projects funded involved some surface work to ensure that the paths were resilient to erosion, by people or weather, and to engineer the terrain to make it as accessible as possible. The aim was to make the paths suitable for people on foot, cycle or horseback and to make as many routes as possible suitable for wheelchairs, and people with additional mobility requirements, as well as those with young children in pushchairs. This meant that the routes funded often required a high specification for construction compared to many PROW and wherever possible 3 metre wide paths were created, which is wider than the average local authority specification.

6.13 Some projects had specific issues that needed to be overcome such as poor drainage and regular flooding. Engineering solutions, (run-off drains, culverts, matting to hold banks in place and hard core beneath the surface) were planned into some projects from the outset but were not foreseen in several projects. Due to the wettest winter on record taking place during 2013-14, two projects requested further funding to increase the specification on their projects due to unforeseen site conditions.

6.14 Another unexpected problem experienced by one project was vandalism. Whilst it may be difficult to predict, areas prone to vandalism will be known and future funding schemes could encourage applicants to consider this in the project planning stage. However in practice only one project suffered this issue out of the 43 projects completed under P4C.

Case story: Path and infrastructure resilience

Penrose - The extreme weather and flooding at the beginning of 2014 made the delivery of the original scheme much more challenging than anticipated. Where a proposed section was becoming narrower, due to natural erosion, it was replaced in the final project with a short new bridleway parallel to the route originally planned. The new bridleway requires less maintenance and will be a better and safer experience for users. The project team also took the opportunity to upgrade surfacing on another part of the coast from new High Burrow to the Coast Path providing an all-weather resilient surface giving users access to the coast path from Porthleven all year round.

Steel Valley – The project was awarded an extra £10,040 to cover the unforeseen costs of increasing the depth of surfacing on some parts of the route from 400mm to 1000mm. This increased specification will give an assurance of longevity to the work and offer a robustness that will combat future flooding conditions.

Routes around Rossendale – The project was awarded an extra £19,102 to combat the unparalleled conditions they found during the wet weather. Four new springs emerged on a hillside destabilising the bank and threatening the route below. Corrective action required extra drainage, larger culverts and the whole hillside needed coir matting to hold it in place until vegetation had a chance to develop.

Yellow Brick Road - The project created over two kilometres of new bridleway led by a local community group of horse riders working with the local PROW officer. The aim was to improve the surface and install a small wooden bridge. The work had only been completed for a few days when the bridge was vandalised by fire. Although it was not destroyed, it was clear that a wooden bridge would not be suitable for the location. The solution was to replace the exposed wooden elements of the bridge with metal parts and the bridge has not been vandalised since.

7.0 Benefits to rural communities

7.1 A key aspect of P4C was to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits to rural communities. The information collected for this report is based on information provided by applicants about the short term benefits observed and anticipated. The grants panel paid close attention to this aspect of the scheme and looked carefully at each application to assess the benefits that were likely to accrue.

7.2 Awarded projects were invited to produce 'case stories', and were provided with a template to make the task easier. 12 were received and the information provided has helped to form this report. An example is shown in Annex 5.

7.3 In addition to this report, Defra have commissioned an independent evaluation of the scheme funded by RDPE Technical Assistance and Defra. This evaluation, which aims to assess the socio-economic outcomes for local communities gained through improvements to the access network, began in October 2013 and is due to report in March 2015. We also have anecdotal evidence from the projects about how the new paths are being used and the enduring benefit they provide

Case story: Increased use of paths

Bottesford beck - "It was a weekday and there were runners, cyclists, families, etc - a real selection of the community".

Steel Valley - "I've been raving about this to my friends, walkers and riders, they all think it's brilliant". As the opening event completed, more walkers, horse and bicycle riders used the route as word of mouth spread. A wheel chair user said, "I can get up to the ponds and sit and watch nature now".

Pilsgate – "We have had enthusiastic praise for the new route from local people and the Ramblers Association. At least one local resident now walks the path every few days with a trolley and continues on from Burghley Park to Stamford to do his household shopping".

Dane meadow – "It is estimated that 40 people per day use the site (using data from the contractor) and we are planning to undertake random samples of use over the summer months. It is predicted that an average of 60 people per day will visit the site by the end of Summer 2014".

Chevet Branch Line – "The bridleway is now one of the most popular cycle paths in Wakefield District".

Economic benefits

7.4 The economic benefits were expected to be in the form of increased footfall to local businesses such as pubs, cafes, village shops, and businesses dependent on outdoor recreation such as equestrian centres and cycle hire establishments. As an

indication of economic impact Natural England collated case stories from local communities and recorded the number of letters of support received from local rural businesses. At the close of the project 112 letters of support had been received and in addition a further 134 named businesses were anticipated by the applicants to benefit from the PROW improvements.

Case story: Attracting tourists

Elwick – The P4C route will contribute to the newly created Heritage Trail which aims to attract visitors to the area and contribute to the tourism economy. This will complement the Limestone Landscape Partnership which is running a “Village Atlas” project with local people investigating the historical and environmental history of the village.

West Penwith - The new P4C route is in the vicinity of two ancient 15th century wells. The Cornwall Council Archaeologist supported the P4C scheme because the area around the two wells had suffered from waterlogging, impeded access to the site and obscured the historical features. The P4C project delivered two significant benefits to the historic features:

- Access improvements to this much visited site which holds sacred meaning to many people;
- Enhancement of the historic setting of the wells, removing the requirement for ad hoc 20th century water management.

Case story: Benefit to local businesses

Ellerburn Trail - The Forestry Commission at Dalby in the North York Moors are focusing on delivering a better experience for less able people with investment in specially designed play equipment and plans for a maze built from dry stone walls. P4C was approached to fund a multi-user trail which could be used by disabled visitors along with their friends and family. This is expected to deliver benefits to two businesses in the village of Ellerburn. One is a café where the owners have expressed keen support for any improvement to the ‘visitor offer’ in the Dalby forest. The other is a bike hire business which has expanded its fleet of bicycles to include several types of specialist bikes for less able users, as a direct result of the new Ellerburn Trail created by P4C. There are also plans to work with local manufactures to design better adapted bicycles that are lighter and easier and more efficient to pedal.

Penrose - The Helston Business Improvement Partnership and Porthleven cycle hire were important stakeholders in the design of the National Trust’s scheme for creating 15 km of new trails at Penrose in Cornwall. The P4C funded well-surfaced, multi-user trail has already brought increased business to Porthleven cycle hire as a result of the new cycling opportunities through parkland, lakeside wooded trails and stunning coast. The cafés in Porthleven are reporting an upsurge in business

as a result of the new paths and the National Trust is considering extending the hours of opening at its own café at Penrose.

Godmersham - There are just over 20 businesses and services in the villages of Chartham, Chilham and Wye that will benefit from a safe route for walking, cycling and riding, avoiding the busy A28. The businesses range from local food stores, train stations, pubs, B&B's and hotels.

Social benefits

7.5 The social benefits expected to be delivered by the scheme include opportunities for healthy activity, active travel, educational activities and general community cohesiveness. Although it is never straight forward to assess whether individual projects bring direct social benefits to a community, the P4C case stories prepared by the grant recipients include a number of good examples of social benefits.

Case story: Health benefits

Countess of Cheshire - P4C funded the creation of new paths and cycle ways within a Country Park to provide routes for outpatients, visitors and staff of the adjoining Countess of Chester hospital. The routes also provide local employees and students with sustainable travel options to their place of work or study.

Access has been made inclusive with suitable surfacing for all year round use and no steps or other obstacles for wheelchairs, cycles, buggies or mobility scooters. Information and way marking encourage new visitors to explore the new routes and seating and picnic facilities have been included for rest and convenience. P4C also funded a footbridge allowing the new route to connect to the Shropshire Union Canal towpath, providing a large loop for visitors to explore, with the added value of a water-side environment.

This project is now part of a wider health project involving the Public Health Authority, the West Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group, outpatient services such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy and health promotion (Cheshire & Wirral NHS Partnership), visitors and staff of The Countess of Chester Hospital and Sport Cheshire.

Routes around Rossendale - This P4C funded project has created 1km of new PROW and improved 26 km of existing PROW. The Forest of Rossendale Bridleways Association and Stacksteads Countryside Park Group worked in partnership with local business PROFITTS to improve routes in the area for all users with an objective to improve health of local people and encourage them to explore the local countryside. The work involved excavations, surfacing and significant drainage. In addition there was significant installation of signage, waymarkers, fencing and planting.

The local health statistics for Stacksteads and Bacup area show a high level of poor health and inactivity. Therefore along with the actual path creation, the

project provided training opportunities for local people to encourage them to remain active in the project and local countryside. This included cycle skills training, outdoor first aid and AQA awards in countryside skills. The project team have also provided guided walks to encourage people to use the new routes.

Now that the new route is open for use, the project team are gathering information about how well it is used by local residents for dog walking and recreation as well as by school children as a safer route to schools.

Case story: Educational benefits

Connecting North Lichfield is providing educational opportunities for people with mental health conditions to attend the Grow Well – Common Care project. Individuals are being given the opportunity to learn new skills such as how to make bat and bird boxes. During the creation of the new P4C trail the group, as volunteers, carried out conservation work under supervision and helped site the boxes they had made. The volunteers have been able to see that their work is of value to the communities around the work sites which has helped to increase self-worth and to give a real sense of contributing to community life.

Dane Meadow will be used by local schools as an “open air classroom” mainly for environmental education, only made possible by the P4C funded access to the site.

Case story: Active travel

Chevet Branch Line - One of the aims of the P4C scheme was to create strategic links and extend the existing ROW network. A good example of this was the creation of the Chevet Branch Linewhich created 5 km of new bridleway on a disused railway line. This new bridleway was a ‘missing link’ in the local network of off road cycle and walking routes around Wakefield. The route has created many more opportunities for active travel:

- linking the popular Newmiller Dam Country Park to the Trans Pennine Trail.
- Completing a circular cycle route around Wakefield, the Wakefield Wheel which is actively promoted by the local cycle club and Wakefield City Council.
- Completing off road links to other Country Parks and attractions in the region, Nostell Priory, Anglers Country Park and Pugneys Country Park.

Godmersham - As a link between villages in Kent this new route will be used for commuting and for accessing shops and services from outlying hamlets. Walking, cycling and riding options between the communities have been very limited in the area, with residents and recreational visitors forced to use the

busy and dangerous A28. The new P4C funded route has provided a safer and equally convenient link to train stations, villages and towns which will help to support local businesses and provide a sustainable means of travelling to work in Ashford and Canterbury. A local resident wrote to say:
“I just wanted to let you know that the new path to Godmersham is fabulous! My partner is able to cycle to Ashford safely and legally i.e. not using either the A28 or a footpath. I can take the 3 children on it with their bikes – even with training wheels - and I will be able to follow soon with a pushchair (4th baby imminent!). I have noticed lots of other people using it as well”.

Environmental benefits

7.6 In the case of P4C, environmental benefit was defined as an element of the project specifically targeted to deliver habitat improvement to flora and fauna. Wider benefits were also likely to be delivered but these were not specifically recorded.

Case story: Environmental benefits

Ellerburn – the project in North Yorkshire has delivered some interesting environmental benefits. The ‘Eller’ burn is situated in a (river) catchment sensitive area, meaning that anything that can be done to reduce harmful runoff into the rivers, streams and ‘burns’ in the area is positively encouraged. The P4C project created a wide corridor along the burn, taking this strip of land out of agricultural use and planting it with shrubs and a hedgerow. This was done to help blend the new access into the landscape and to create a much more pleasant ‘open’ experience for the users of the access. It has also created a buffer to the agricultural and forestry affected runoff going into the burn and contributed to improved water quality. The Environmental Agency has been very supportive of the new access due to this ‘side effect’.

Steel Valley - An integral part of the project was the creation of a wetland and pond area. The bridleway route ran through a steep wooded hillside and the topography lent itself to the creation of a series of interconnected ponds on the hillside to manage drainage and to create a wildlife habitat for insects and vertebrates. An ecology report was conducted by the local authority and the contractor constructed the appropriate ponds and wildlife area. This feature will help sustain wildlife diversity within the woodland and also offer a varied experience for users of the bridleway in area.

8.0 Volunteer activity

8.1 All of the P4C funded projects depended on voluntary activity. This came in many forms including:

- developing the partnerships necessary to support a project;
- completing the application form;
- providing direct help in creating the route, eg clearing scrub, fixing gates, putting up waymarks;
- promotional activity once the route was created.

8.2 The amount of voluntary work recorded as part of the P4C projects amounted to 11,786.25 hours, the equivalent of 1,571.5 days. For 21 of the projects this volunteer time was accounted as match funding and accorded a value of £140,004. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the actual volunteer contribution was higher than recorded. Many projects didn't claim for any volunteer time but significant volunteer input was still contributed, particularly the time taken to develop partnerships to ensure that projects proceeded.

8.3 Local Access Forums (LAFs), which are made up of volunteer members, played a significant role in the promotion and development of the P4C project. All 43 P4C projects involved their LAF, demonstrating their ability to take action at the local level to promote and improve their rights of way network.

Case story: Volunteer led projects

Nesscliffe is truly a volunteer led project. The suggestion for the new bridleway was from a keen equestrian and LAF member who had surveyed this and the wider route prior to the application being written. The information provided using local knowledge proved invaluable as evidence for the application. Other volunteers provided labour to clear the site, local information for inclusion on the website, text for a guidebook and distribution of the guidebook to local businesses and tourism offices.

The Marsh and Ham Disability Ramp was led by the Blandford Rotary Club, in itself representative of volunteers from the local community. Several organisations, with a particular emphasis on youth and disabled users, were involved in the project from the start both in project planning and physical work. They included: Blandford School, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Youth Aid Dorset, DT11 Community Partnership, Disability Action Group and Dorset Countryside Rangers.

Swarland Village Action Group (SVA) is entirely made up of volunteers who had some success before P4C in improving the village playground and other village facilities. P4C created difficulties to the group as they had no match funding. To get around this they carried out a great deal of volunteer work; 593 hours are recorded in the final claim as match funding, but many more were contributed. This included extensive clearing of vegetation for the surfaced bridleway to pass through. It also included researching local history and creating and installing two interpretation panels. The group are now looking for funding to restore some of the features of the old Swarland Hall grounds such as the pond and very distinctive cattle shelters. If successful restored these features will add to the visitors experience in Swarland.

9.0 Scheme effectiveness and efficiency

How was effectiveness and efficiency assessed?

9.1 With no budget for scheme evaluation, and limited staff time, Natural England set out how the P4C scheme would be assessed in a 'Monitoring and Evaluation framework' (Annex 6) which was approved by the Project Board in November 2012. Many of the indicators of success set in the framework have been considered in previous sections of this report and so this section draws together some of the conclusions and considers lessons learned that would influence any future similar scheme.

Procedures

9.2 The scheme procedures were developed drawing heavily on the experience of other grant schemes, particularly Access to Nature Programme (A2N) which was also a community focused project. The Project Manager had personal experience of A2N but this was reinforced by hosting a meeting of A2N Grant Officers during the P4C planning period. This was particularly helpful in suggesting that the scheme used an independent grants panel; kept the application process as straight forward as possible; and made full use of dedicated local grant officers to support and encourage applicants.

9.3 The Project Manager also worked closely with colleagues involved in other RDPE schemes, particularly in sourcing wording for the scheme documentation. Early meetings were held with the RPA who explained the regulations surrounding spend of RDPE money and clarified the delivery mechanisms available to Natural England.

Was the right level of information collected from applicants?

9.4 In setting up the P4C scheme a lot of thought went into designing a process that only sought the information that was required to support the application and provide the Grants Panel with sufficient information to select projects. Inevitably, when dealing with legal issues surrounding land ownership and public highways, there were requirements to provide documentation to ensure that the routes funded could be created. But the aim was to minimise the burden on the local communities and to keep requests for information proportionate to the scale of the grant.

9.5 The Natural England LGOs reported that most applicants found the process clear and easy to follow. In addition Grants Panel members with experience of applying for other grants to improve PROW commented that by comparison P4C was straight forward. However some applicants found the amount and type of information required difficult to provide and some commented to the LGOs that they found the scheme procedures complex and bureaucratic.

9.6 The information collected was also intended to help bench-mark between projects. A scoring system was devised and weighted so that a fair, transparent and quantitative assessment could be made for each project (see Chapter 3, Delivery mechanism). However, this scoring system became used mostly to assess whether projects had provided sufficient information rather than to compare the projects and

final decisions about which projects to fund were made by the Grants Panel on the assessment of the costs against the benefits.

9.7 The external Grants Panel brought expertise and independence to the decision making. The organisation of the information presented to the Grants Panel improved as the scheme developed in response to questions and information required by the Panel for them to feel equipped to make decisions. One of the issues that was never completely resolved was the provision of adequate maps to allow the Grants Panel to quickly understand the project proposal. A recommendation for any future scheme is that a standardised format is adopted and that officers provide the maps for the communities.

Were processes clear and easy to follow?

9.8 As well as considering the type of information collected from applicants, the P4C team aimed to provide clear guidance to applicants (see Chapter 3, Delivery mechanism).

9.9 Potential applicants were given a lot of detailed guidance about the scheme (Applicant Handbook; Frequently Asked Questions; Promotional Leaflet; Six Steps to P4C; Assessment Form – see [archive of www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c](http://archive.of.www.naturalengland.org.uk/p4c)). Particular care was taken to explain the eligibility rules for the scheme (e.g. the need for a rural element and the creation of some new Public Right of Way). In addition, a significant amount of LGO time was provided help applicants understand the rules and requirements and to develop quality applications.

9.10 Ideally, a six month pilot of the process and guidance would have allowed refinement of the written information and time to address questions that hadn't been anticipated, but with the time frame available this had to be dealt with as the scheme ran. It resulted in some re-drafting of guidance and forms in the early stages which impacted on some of the early applicants. For example this applied to understanding the definition of rural, the exclusions from match-funding and also to understanding state-aid rules and how these applied to the P4C projects. The role of the LGOs in helping applicants to understand the refinements to advice and retain confidence in the scheme was essential.

Did projects have access to the right support at the right time?

9.11 The scheme was designed to have Natural England staff on hand to advise and support projects from inception to launch. This was a significant commitment but was considered necessary due to the aim to work with grass roots communities, the complexity of PROW creation, and the newness of the scheme. Not all schemes required the same level of support, but for most it did ensure that the momentum of delivery was maintained so that the budget allocated could be spent by the deadline of March 31st 2014.

9.12 Both new and established partnerships were supported by P4C and the presence of grant officers, able and willing to invest time, effort and expertise in working with local partners was a deciding factor in enabling many projects to deliver. This was particularly the case for new community partnerships.

The project case stories demonstrate an appreciation of this support from the applicants.

Case story: Natural England Local Grant Officer making a difference

Natural England's Local Grants Officers were frequently singled out for praise:

"understanding Natural England came directly from Phil Robinson who has been a real gem in supporting the FOB and, in particular, myself as the FOB Secretary. This was a totally new experience for me - I have to admit to needing considerable guidance and support. It was unfailing." *Bottesford Beck project*

"She provided vital support and advice at a crucial stage in the process and gave me the confidence to proceed in hope." *Pilsgate project*

"There was a period of negotiation with Natural England ensure the project met their funding requirements, was value for money and met identified needs. This was very helpful in ensuring a bid that was realistic and fit for purpose. Advice from Natural England was prompt, clear and developmental." *Connecting North Lichfield*

"Many thanks to Fiona Taylor who helped navigate so many unexpected circumstances - especially in relation to planning." *Stoke by Nayland*

9.13 With a grant scheme over a longer period it would be useful to explore whether the amount of LGO time could be reduced making an overall saving to the cost of running the scheme.

Was process of selecting projects efficient?

9.14 There was a three tier process to selecting projects:

1. LGO assessed if projects were eligible before application form provided;
2. LGO/Project Manager panel assessed whether projects had provided sufficient information to go to the Grants Panel;
3. Grants Panel selected the projects to fund.

9.15 This process was designed to avoid wasting time and effort of the applicants. The scheme adopted an early sift by the LGO to quickly reject expressions of interest that could not progress to full application for a variety of reasons (see paragraph 4.3). The Local Grants Officers quickly became experienced at assessing whether a project had potential to fit the scheme criteria which was effective in filtering out projects that would not be eligible at an early stage before the community had invested time in gathering information. The officer panel then ensured projects had provided sufficient information for the Grants Panel to select successful projects.

9.16 It was anticipated in the P4C business case that the scheme budget would provide for around 40-50 projects over two years. The final outturn of 43 live projects (against receipt of 270 Expressions of Interest) lived up to these expectations.

9.17 Once potential applicants had received an application form they were contacted regularly to check on progress and the LGOs became experienced at assessing which projects were likely to be able to deliver within the time scale. Regular calls from the business support team ensured that the assessment of whether a project was making progress was undertaken regularly. This was an important factor in keeping projects focused. Without this support it is likely that many more projects would have failed to keep the momentum going to complete an application in time to deliver the work on the ground before the scheme ended. The small window of opportunity to apply for P4C funding necessitated this approach but the weakness was that potentially good projects never reached the full application stage.

Did the scheme secure a variety of projects and a good geographic spread?

9.18 The individual projects ranged in size and complexity. The smallest grant awarded was for £2,052 and the largest £148,896.

9.19 There was a good geographic spread of both Expressions of Interest and final projects awarded.

Was promotion effective?

9.20 Scheme promotion and communication are described in [Chapter 3](#) (Delivery mechanism). A communications plan was agreed with the Project Board and kept under review so that promotion evolved to reflect the scheme requirements at different stages. Promotion through a wide network of partners and stakeholder ensured sufficient interest in the scheme and more than could have been met by the scheme budget.

9.21 If the scheme had been extended over a longer period a further review of promotion would have been required. However the project team consider that sufficient latent demand had been tapped to run the scheme for at least a further 2 years.

Was project management and steering effective and efficient?

9.22 From the outset P4C was treated as a live pilot and the scheme was kept under continual review. Regular project team calls ensured that the Project Manager was kept informed with challenges and opportunities and, in discussion with Natural England senior staff and the Project Board, process and policy issues were reviewed and amended where necessary. The project risk register was considered by the Project Board monthly.

9.23 One example of an issue raised by project applicants was the creation of new PROW by Express Dedication by Common Law (EDCL). This was a process advocated in P4C scheme guidance but was challenged by local highway authorities when applicants sought to use it. By referring this through the LGOs to senior Natural England staff and the Project Board, Defra held discussions with partners and issued advice to all highway authorities to clarify how EDCL could be used.

9.24 Another issue related to the lack of any full applications received during the first 6 months of the scheme running. The Project Board raised concerns about the risk of failing to attract applications that would spend within the P4C time frame and

considered amending the scheme policy to remove the requirement to create new PROW. This issue was resolved without changing scheme policy but by prioritising support towards projects that could deliver. This not only secured the confidence of the Project Board but also provided stories to share with potential applicants in the first P4C Newsletter to demonstrate what could be achieved.

Budget outturn

9.25 One of Natural England's key measures for the success of P4C was the outturn of the £2 million budget. The actual spend was £1,970,375 or 98.5% of budget. The fact that P4C was only operating over 2 years, and from a standing start, did present challenges to spending the full budget. The summary of spend in Chapter 4 gives a review of the figures.

Scheme administration costs

9.26 Natural England contributed 6 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) per year to setting up and administering the project. This work was shared around 12 to 15 existing staff at different times of the scheme cycle. All staff integrated this work with other Natural England work and the scheme helped to deliver parts of Natural England's general purpose. Natural England also absorbed the small scale overheads associated with running the scheme e.g. the external grants panel expenses, provision of meeting rooms, production of scheme literature etc.

9.27 Contributions to running the scheme beyond Natural England have come from Defra (policy advice, Project Board and Grants Panel member), RPA (policy and delivery advice, Project Board member) and the external Grants Panel members.

9.28 Defra commissioned the consultants URS to assess the P4C delivery mechanism by analysing the mechanics of P4C undertaken by Natural England and comparing this with the LEADER approach. The full report will be published on GOV.UK in due course, but its overall conclusion was the Natural England approach was a practical response to the parameters of the programme set at the time, with the result being the delivery of 43 projects and the allocation of 98.5% of the £2 million budgeted funds.

9.29 The scheme contributed to delivering one of Natural England general purposes relating to improving opportunities for people to access and enjoy the natural environment. As well as the direct delivery of improvements to the public rights of way network (see chapter 6) the scheme has supported a range of social and economic benefits to rural communities (Chapter 7) and has levered volunteer and cash contributions (see paragraph 8.2).

9.30 One of the main lessons from running P4C is that economy of scale means that the start up and running costs for a small £2 million scheme results in disproportionate overheads compared to a scheme such as LEADER with a budget of over £100 million.

9.31 P4C provided Natural England with a valuable staff development opportunity. All of the team brought skills to the project, but each of them added to and broadened

this skill set in areas of grant programme management and community engagement and empowerment, based on practical, grass roots experience.

Compliance with RDPE rules

9.32 From the outset, detailed and on-going discussions have been held between Defra, RPA and Natural England to ensure that the scheme complied with RDPE rules and regulations. Particular care was taken in producing the Applicant Handbook, Application Form, Claim Form, Officer Check Lists and Desk Instructions.

9.33 The scheme has inbuilt processes to ensure appropriate separation of duties and that public money is disbursed in an appropriate manner. The project received a significant endorsement in October 2013 when the audit of P4C, undertaken as part of the approved internal audit periodic plan for 2013/14 gave a “Substantial Assurance that there is a robust framework, with minimal risk to the achievement of the objectives of the auditable area”; the highest level of assurance.

9.34 However, detailed additional tests have been carried out which have placed a significant burden on a small scheme such as P4C. By September 2015 we will have undertaken:

- **4 compliance monitoring visits** (9% of grant case work; 12% of the P4C budget)
This involves producing a detailed dossier of information to enable an independent inspector to review a project from start to finish, including visits to the applicant and a thorough inspection of the applicant’s books and the work on site.
- **14 transaction tests** (30% of grant cases; 39.6% of budget)
This involves providing RPA colleagues with a complete set of grant information, from initial enquiry through to final payment.

9.35 This activity collectively placed a lot of pressure on a small delivery team and it could be argued that the testing is disproportionate to the risk involved.

10.0 Conclusions and lessons learnt

10.1 The two year P4C scheme delivered 43 projects, spent 98.5% of budget on time and created 76.29 km of new PROW and a further 106.94 km of improved routes. The PROW created and improved have provided links to the wider network of PROW with a range of social, economic and environmental benefits are anticipated. The projects have also attracted over 11,786 hours of voluntary activity demonstrated good levels of community activity.

10.2 This report provides anecdotal evidence of the benefits delivered by the scheme based on case stories provided by the applicants. A fuller evaluation of these benefits will be provided by the Evaluation being undertaken by independent consultants, URS, funded by Defra and RDPE Technical Assistance.

10.3 The scheme was set up at short notice. It succeeded by bringing together the experience within Natural England to understand the objectives, the technicalities of PROW creation and the art of community engagement along with the appetite of local communities to input and engage with PROW improvement. Nevertheless, the scheme has been treated as a pilot and flexibility was needed to evolve processes in response to practical issues arising.

10.4 The following section summarises reflections from officers working on the scheme.

Lessons learned

Scheme design

10.5 It is important not to underestimate the time it takes to set up a scheme from scratch, particularly where the funding stream has complex rules and regulations. From the announcement in November 2011, it was hoped to have had the scheme fully ready to launch in April 2012. When the scheme actually launched in May 2012 some of the processes and documentation were still in preparation. In many ways, the processes were tested and refined through the experience of running the scheme live. Ideally it would have been useful to have had a further 3 months to pilot the scheme application and payment process.

Scheme advice and information

10.6 From the outset the project team aimed to provide clear and comprehensive information to potential applicants backed up by the offer of contact with a local grant officer. The complexity of the funding eligibility and offer process meant that the scheme paperwork was very detailed, but the project team aimed to adopt plain English at all times. However, it became clear that the advice in the scheme documentation was not always fully read or understood. With a large, ongoing scheme, it might be appropriate to simply stick to a rigid formula to the effect of "if you don't tick the box, you don't get paid". However, many of the P4C applicants were new to this type of funding and for whatever reason, failed to understand the process that had to be undertaken. The P4C team, whilst having to operate within the scheme rules, invested a lot of time in working with applicants to ensure the projects were delivered according to plan and that the paperwork was fit for purpose.

10.7 The project team learned quickly from the early experience and were able to offer more targeted advice to applicants, particularly in terms of the information required to present a quality application. One very tangible lesson learned was that a clear map that explained what was proposed and the context of the route was essential.

10.8 With experience the project team learned to ask for better quality information from applicants, particularly in relation to maps and measurements. Sometimes the offer letter was used to seek additional detail, which would have been better provided at the application stage.

Technical expertise

10.9 The project team drew on a wide range of expertise and skills. These included:

- knowledge of EC funding rules and regulations as well as an understanding of the roles and responsibilities that others have;
- knowledge regarding the construction of PROW;
- knowledge of land ownership relating to PROW.

Project steering and decision making

10.10 The project board was set up to include representatives from the main agencies involved in setting up and delivering the scheme. It was important to include senior members of staff on the board able to take key decisions and allow the effective operation of the scheme.

Grants officers

10.11 The P4C scheme sought to connect with grass roots organisations and deliver a bottom up approach to project development. It benefitted from having grant officers able to cover a local geographic area. Whilst able to develop local connectivity, this same group of officers were able to come together as a national pool of expertise, to help shape and develop the scheme, and to provide support and guidance to colleagues as required.

Independent Grants Panel

10.12 Having an independent grants panel conferred a level of neutrality and accountability. It was important that Natural England made use of a broad range of expertise in reaching its decisions. Servicing the panel undoubtedly caused additional work for Natural England but the Panel's contribution of technical expertise and independence, added to the quality and transparency of the decision making process.

Scheme promotion

10.13 The short term nature of the scheme had a material effect on how the team went about publicising and promoting it. There was a tension between the desire to promote more widely and the concern that the scheme would attract more applicants than could have been managed leading to a large number of disappointed customers. As it turned out, with the effective out turn of the budget, the promotion of P4C was about right. However, for a scheme with a longer duration, greater promotion would

be appropriate, including examples of how P4C grants could be used and more use of 'press releases' and tweets to publicise success stories.

Scheme audit and testing

10.14 Onerous testing (30% of projects were subject to transaction testing) for a small project placed a lot of pressure on a small delivery team and in a future scheme it would be worth considering whether the level of testing was proportionate to the risk involved.

Scheme offers

10.15 Early offer letters could have provided more content. Experience showed that including greater detail in the offer letter enabled more effective monitoring of the work and easier assessment of the claim. For example all offers should contain a description of the project and a detailed breakdown of units/measures being funded.

10.16 There were various amendments to offer letters including novation (change of applicant post original offer) but there was no clear audit trail as to why offers had been amended and what review had taken place to ensure the changes did not alter the eligibility of the project.

Scheme mechanisms and policy outcomes

10.17 The P4C scheme was set up to enhance local path networks while delivering social and economic benefits. It was also stated that where possible bridleways would be created to offer opportunities to more users including horse-riders and cyclists as well as those with mobility issues. The delivery mechanism selected involved distributing grants to community groups.

10.18 Whilst it is not possible for this report to conclude whether or not this was an effective way to improve PROW, there were merits in the approach. With the community leading the application we could be sure that there was local need. There are also examples of communities coming together and convincing each other of the benefits that PROW enhancements would achieve which suggests stronger local buy-in and ownership of the project. However we discovered that a risk with the approach was that the community did not always want to create bridleway routes. The Grants Panel sought strong justification for not creating bridleways as these were considered to offer best value for money. Nevertheless, in some cases communities were clear that a bridleway was not appropriate and the Grants Panel awarded funds for footpaths where the community justified this. In each case the Panel sought to 'future-proof' and secure as much value from footpath only projects as possible, such as by adding dedication of land for cycling (using the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000, section 16), by requiring least restrictive options for path infrastructure and by securing the maximum width possible for the path.

Conclusion

10.19 P4C was an effective pilot and, with additional funding, the scheme could have been refined to run more efficiently over a longer time span. The main conclusion is that there is potential for local communities to work together to create additional PROW and that when this happens, a range of both social and economic benefits are

likely to be delivered. However without funding schemes, such as P4C, it is unlikely that this will happen.