

Creative consultation report

Skylarks Nature Reserve



When in nature allow
Nature cures.
Face close to
e is



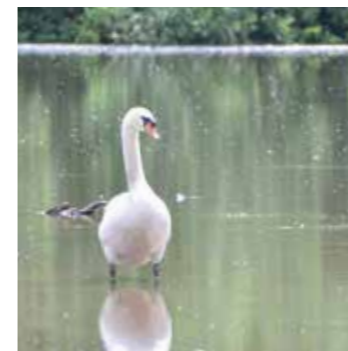
INSTAR



“Skylarks is a place close to my heart”

Contents

1	About Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust	p4
2.	About Skylarks Nature Reserve	p5
3.	About this creative consultation and INSTAR	p7
4.	Project time-line	p8
5.	Qualitative focus group consultation	p9
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making it happen and partnerships The team and management Project delivery Volunteering Public relations Sustainability and future ambition 	
6.	Public Consultation	p22
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative consultation Gate Screen interpretation Quantitative (visitor questionnaire) Qualitative (kids questionnaire) New path (visitor questionnaire) 	



About Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT) is the leading wildlife conservation charity working to protect and enhance the wildlife and habitats of Nottinghamshire.

The charity cares for multiple reserves across the county, engaging local communities through events, education and volunteering opportunities and seeks to ensure the county is a healthy and wildlife rich place to live.

NWT is a leading voice in standing up for wildlife and the environment. Particular attention is given to positively influencing the planning process at district, county and regional levels. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust also works nationally in partnership with sister Wildlife Trusts.

Not only does NWT manage their own nature reserves, they also advise other landowners how to manage their land to benefit wildlife, and are always looking for new ways to secure a future for the county's natural world and are currently developing a range of projects that link habitats and landowners over large areas of land and seek to influence the management of whole landscapes, placing wildlife conservation at the heart of decision-making.

NWT also works in partnership with the largest voluntary organisation in the UK concerned with all aspects of wildlife conservation, the Wildlife Trusts. This partnership of 47 individual Trusts manages more than 2,200 nature reserves and has more than 790,000 members.

NWT has four headline strategic objectives:



Campaigning for Wildlife
Working with partners to restore biodiversity
Managing and enhancing our estate
Inspiring people to take action



About Skylarks Nature Reserve

Skylarks Nature Reserve is now the largest Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust reserve in Rushcliffe, covering approximately 46ha. The reserve comprises of 2 main bodies of water, wet grassland, reed bed, shingle islands, woodland and grassland.

The original smaller area of the reserve covers around 10ha and has been a nature reserve since 1982. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has been involved in its management (habitat) since it became this first specially designed accessible nature reserve in the UK, allowing those with limited mobility improved access and better opportunities to experience wildlife and get closer to nature. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust was able to purchase this site, and in 2012, as part of this project an additional 36ha of land.

All of the reserve has been created through the restoration of former 'Tarmac' gravel pits, Skylarks fits within the wider Holme Pierrepont network of ponds and wetland, recognized a very important site for wildlife with the Trent flood plain.

The reserve has benefited from an Environment Agency grant, DET Grant, two legacies and a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, allowing a considerable amount of habitat enhancement work to take place. The majority of which was completed in March 2015. A further grant as part of a wider Wetlands for All project provided additional features on-site to improve access and learning opportunities.

Now owned by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, this new larger site, with careful planning, management and a dedicated team of volunteers, has benefited from habitat restoration including brand new wetland habitat creation, resulting in the reserve now being recognised as one of the most important wildlife sites in the Trent valley.

Skylarks Nature Reserve has routes and walks for all, including a 2 mile footpath linking viewing screens and board-walks, situated at prime locations around the site, allowing fantastic views and access to lakes, woodlands, ponds, reed beds, meadows, scrapes and islands.





“Skylarks did not happen by chance, it was a project waiting to happen”

About this evaluation and INSTAR

This evaluation report has been produced by INSTAR, a creative arts partnership (Trish Evans and Nick Humphreys) bringing together the natural sciences, engagement and contemporary art. INSTAR work across a range of sectors including arts, natural sciences, museums and learning.

A range of methods and tools have been used to capture the journey of this funded project over a period of two years. Findings have been presented as a collective of 3 creative outcomes:

1. Creative interpretation public art work

Gate Screen, Skylarks Nature Reserve

2. Skylarks film

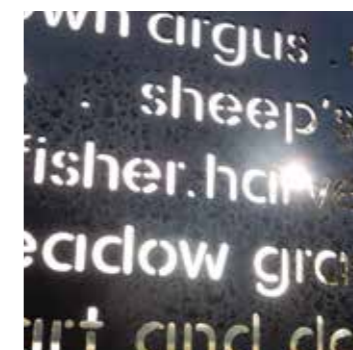
Contemporary moving image, documenting wildlife and 6 x oral histories

3. Creative Consultation Report

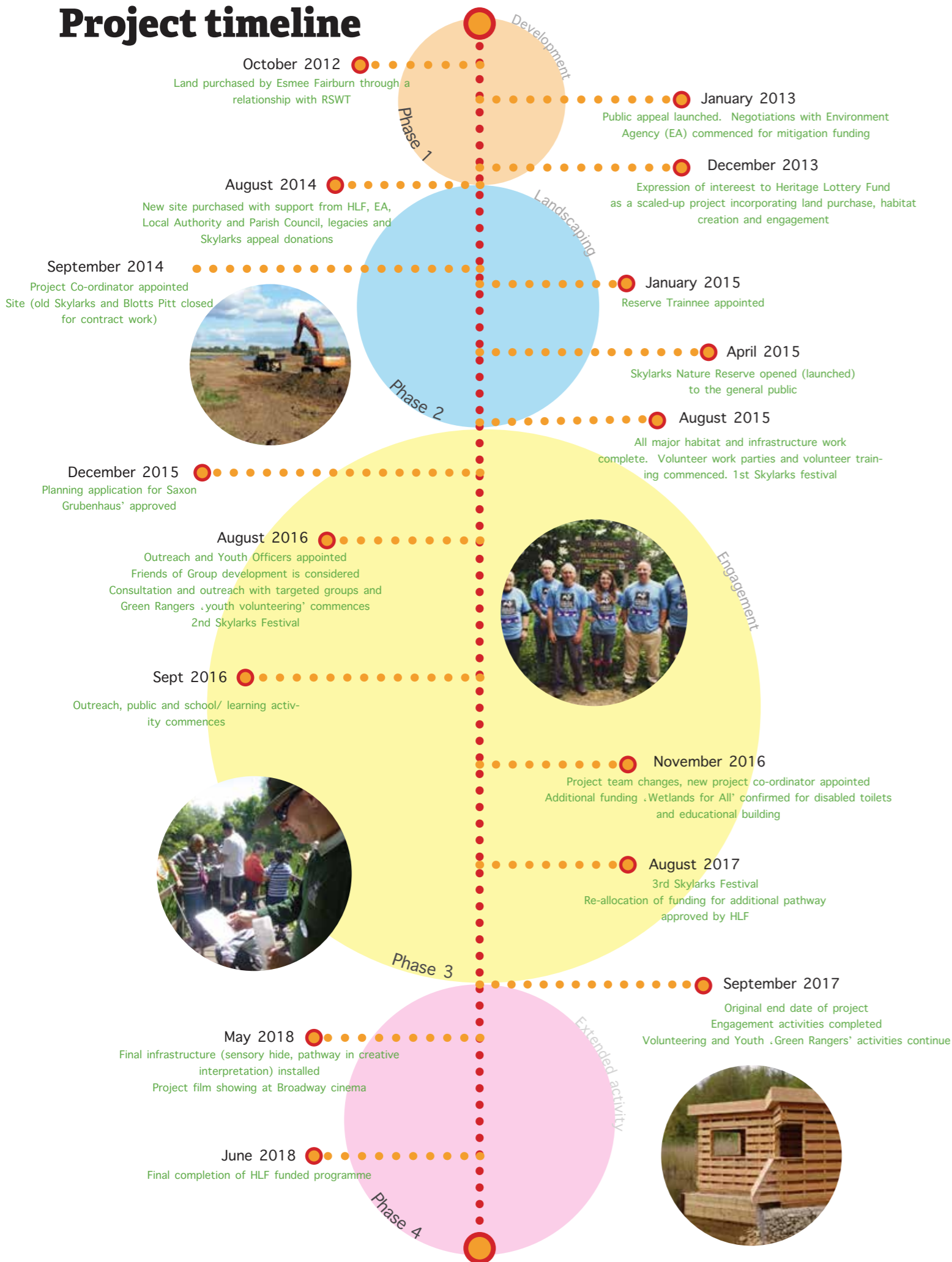
*Focus group sessions, interactive public engagement (Qualitative)
Visitor consultation (Quantitative)*

The following events and tools have been used to capture findings which inform this report.

- 3 x mid point focus groups (senior team, project team, volunteers)
- 3 x end point focus group sessions (senior team, project team, volunteers)
- 1 x staff and volunteer questionnaire (future visioning and recommendations)
- 2 x public event creative consultations (binocular trail, wild kids questions)
- 2 x visitor questionnaires (adults, children)
- 1 x visitor questionnaire (improved access)



Project timeline



Qualitative focus group consultation

A total of 3 participating groups took part in focus group sessions; senior team, project team and a group of volunteers selected by NWT. Each group had 2 sessions each one at mid-point and one session at the end.

Senior team: CEO, Head of Conservation, Head of Communications and Marketing, Head of Operations, Education and Community Manager

Project team: Project Officer, Community & Outreach Officer, Youth & Education Officer, Trainee Reserve Officer, Archaeology Officer (Nottinghamshire County Council)

Volunteers: Wardens, wildlife recorders and work party volunteers (a total of 6)

Responses and learning outcomes gathered for this section of the report are collated into themes and are not indicative of level of involvement with the project, unless detailed.



"We're like a family at Skylarks, being part of this project is being part of a community"

Making it happen and partnerships

'Not a Blott on the landscape' (referred to as Skylarks throughout this report) was a unique project for Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT) due to an unexpected opportunity to purchase a strategically important area of land for wildlife and people. An accelerated process to pull together this strategic project with multiple partnerships and funders in a significantly short period of time was comparative to the Trusts 'usual' staged approach to project development.

Key learning outcomes / findings

Whilst the scale of this project was unexpected, strong long-term strategic partnerships including Nottinghamshire County Council, Rushcliffe Borough Council and Environment Agency were in place. These partnerships, together as being key players in the development of the Nottinghamshire Conservation Strategy, written 10 years ago, enabled NWT to hit the ground running, with confidence and ambition.

NWT identified this project as an example of their ability to pull together significant support and partnerships quickly, results which can only be achieved through strong leadership and positive involvement at a local level with a track record of achievement.

NWT negotiated mitigation funding from Environment Agency as match funding. This opportunistic funding came with a deadline to allocate spend; giving focus and an accelerated drive to the project. Without this non-negotiable deadline, NWT may have made different, perhaps more slower-paced, choices to develop the project. With these constraints they took direct action and negotiated a range of solutions with partners and funders to seize the opportunity.

Unconventional partners, particularly the National Watersports Centre, were critical in enabling NWT to submit a bid with less major infrastructure and facilities. Sharing resources such as parking and toilets made the project more feasible financially within the time-frame.

Sharing resources and keeping large scale infrastructure to a minimum was seen as a positive outcome by both staff and volunteers, recognizing that the site remained more natural and beneficial to wildlife as a result as a result, enabling more direct connections to nature with less distraction.



The location of land to purchase set within the Trent valley, together with its close proximity to Nottingham City was strategically valuable in terms of opportunities for wildlife and importantly also for people. These factors were key drivers in making the project a success.

The connectivity with inner-city groups and communities was recognised as being a big challenge, but an important one. Relationships with inner-city partners for engagement, particularly schools and community groups was not as established as in the immediate Rushcliffe area, however previous NWT projects like Wildlife in the City (WINC) provided a good foundation to reach more disengaged groups, which fulfilled NWT aspiration to improve access to nature for everyone.

NWT, although challenged significantly with capacity, having to "drop everything" to develop the bid and make it happen, found this fast-paced project development refreshing and invigorating and when compared to previous large-scale projects, having a distinctive positive energy. The senior team recognised the value of this energy and welcomed the opportunity to adopt this fast-paced approach in the future but recognised that this did have a short-term impact on wider project delivery.

Sustainability for NWT is critical, and with a new project management system now in place, remain confident to take forward ambitious opportunities in the future. This was important, even in the current financial climate, but it was important to ensure the right alignment of opportunities were in place.

NWT's unique partnership with Community Archaeology (Nottinghamshire County Council), inspired new and unique opportunities which elevated their existing surveying relationship. This natural partnership resulted new disciplines being learnt with teams sharing different perspectives of land, heritage and planning activities collaboratively. This has fostered long-term relationships and broadened future strategic opportunities for each partner.



"The partnership with the archeology team was a natural one"

The team and management

A real sense of collaboration across teams within the 'Skylarks community', where tasks are shared and an equality of involvement between staff and volunteers is respectfully shared.

Key learning outcomes / findings

The management structure for this project had no external governance (steering group) and was managed internally with one reporting Project Officer. Lines of communication were not impacted upon between NWT to wider stakeholders, as regular routes of communication were in place. This lighter governance was liberating and reduced lines of authority, demonstrative of a strong sense of trust between partners and teams.

NWT contracted existing project staff, with no external appointments. The team knew each other well, were connected and a strong foundation was set from the beginning. Importantly all staff maintained wider NWT responsibilities and the overlap of these roles meant their learning from each comparative project/work had a far wider reach and impact. Importantly the long term impact of previously funded projects continues to be extended, as the learning, skills and methodology carried by staff naturally transferred.

The phased delivery of this project, whereby the site was closed for contract works and habitat creation for the first stage, provided a very beneficial induction period for the project team, a chance to learn and become familiar with the site before it opened. As a new site, this project framework was recognised as invaluable, ensuring the project team did not need to hit the ground running as they had time to develop and learn themselves.

To be involved in the development of a new nature reserve was "a real carrot" for the project team. In their own words "Opportunities like this don't come along very often" and all of the project team felt honoured and liberated to be part of something new (a blank canvas), helping shape new plans and test their own ideas. This had a significant impact on their sense of achievement through tangible outcomes and their continued professional development (CPD).

The project team identified themselves as a young team, and this transferred to their the style of delivery, "open minded" and more used to working unconventionally and with an adaptability to change. Whilst some of the team may not have as much experience as others, this "youthfulness" had an energy, and benefited the project with their pragmatic and new ways of working, their confidence to challenge each other and to even take risks (learning through mistakes). The team shared the respectful trust between each other and a strong support network.

A reshuffle of staff occurred two thirds of the way through the project delivery, leaving a vacancy for the Project Officer. Whilst this was an unexpected challenge, it opened up the opportunity for the project team to take on greater responsibility and increase their decision-making, across all levels. This unforeseen outcome resulted in 3 staff members taking on bigger responsibilities and new higher-level positions during the period of delivery, these career opportunities were supported by NWT.

Without a go-to person for reassurance individuals had to have trust and confidence in their own abilities and skills. Additionally this re-shuffle meant greater support was sought from staff not involved in project, increasing cross-departmental work.

The project team began to interweave their responsibilities throughout this project and an example of this is the 'Green Rangers' youth volunteering programme, whereby the Youth Officer conducted reserve management work for the first time. Additionally the Trainee Reserve Officer engaged dementia participants as part of the project and shared the significant experiential value when engaging new groups and learning new disciplines, broadening their outlook and developing their transferable skills.

The senior team indicated the value in programming in 6 monthly 'strategic visioning' sessions throughout project plans going forward. This would importantly enable senior teams, with wider stakeholders, to step away from focusing on target driven outcomes and explore future strategic opportunities as the project progresses.

"The impact of acquiring a small area of additional land and it becoming one of our most important sites was not factored in. Skylarks has been much better than what was ever anticipated or hoped for"



Project delivery

The first phase of this project was dedicated to major habitat creation and infrastructure, with the temporary public closure of the reserve. This gave the project team time to ease into roles and staff and volunteers space to grow alongside the growth of the new landscape. With an eye on team capacity and the scale of the project, this incremental approach ensured high quality outcomes.

Key learning outcomes / findings

This project was less about number crunching and statistics and more about relationship building, and the project team felt this was refreshing and enabled them to shape and develop ideas without pressure. They all confirmed they exceeded the project outputs (“smashed the stats”) and this fuelled their sense of achievement.

The consultation with groups with access needs provided huge gratification, as listening and then acting upon suggestions resulted in the design and creation of accessible features including a board-walk and sensory hide.

The activity plan determined all engagement programmes to commence in the autumn season, which was not ideal due to weather conditions, particularly when trying to provide hard-to-reach groups with access to the site, but in general, but this was a problem for all participatory users. Whilst the team responded creatively with an outreach (off site) programme, which had its benefits, launching activities earlier in the year (spring or summer) would have worked far better.

The community archaeology team delivered a public programme of workshops which were very well attended. The popularity of this programme shows how archaeology can draw new audiences to the reserve and broader NWT work and opportunities to gain greater community and partner links.

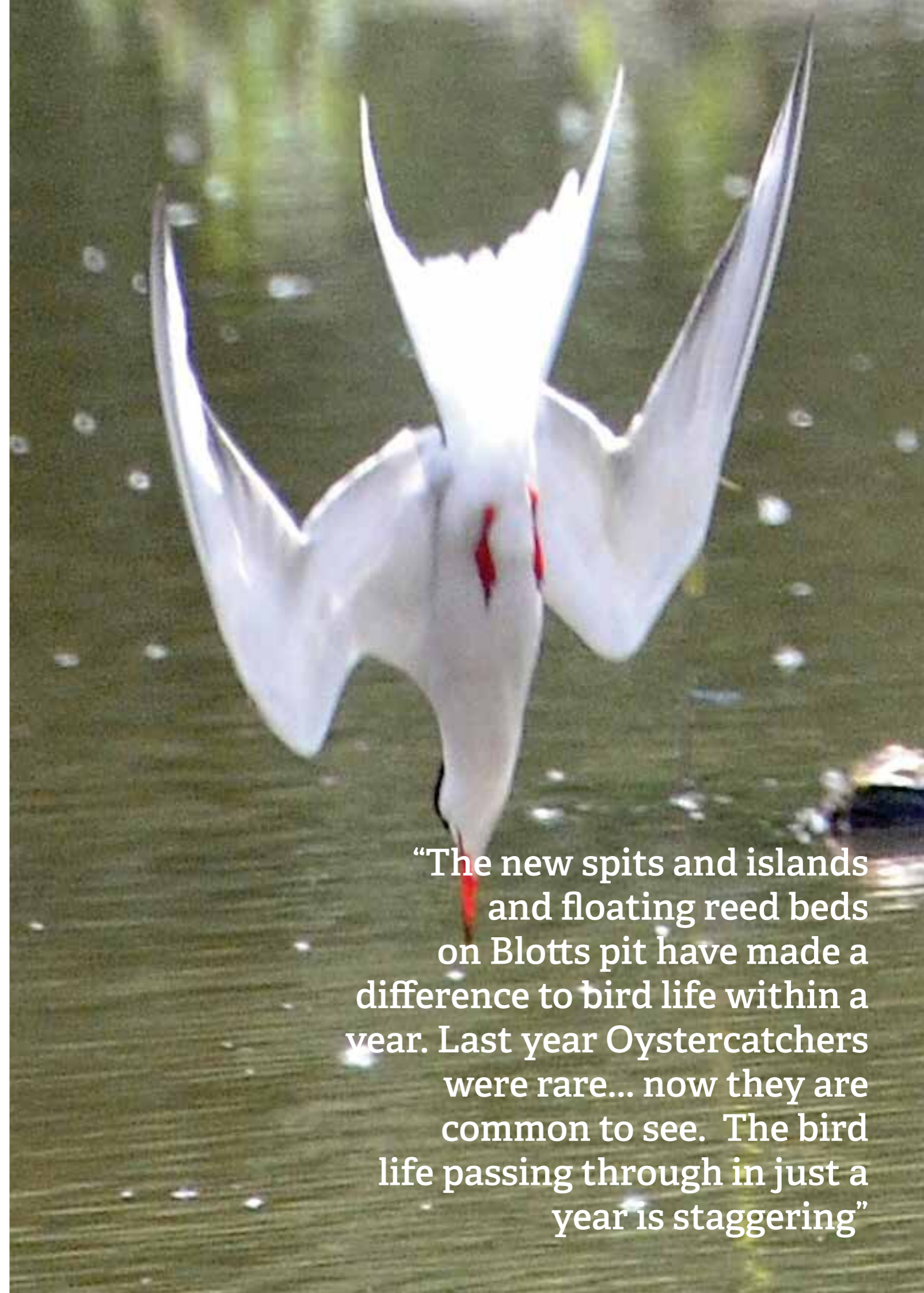
The experimental archaeology (volunteer programme) took far longer to develop than expected and it needed more focus at the beginning as it was a very unique and ‘open to ideas’ plan, however by the end of the project a core group of volunteers regularly met at the site, having built 2 Grubenhau’s within an allocated area of the reserve.

Delivering educational activity on a site with no facilities was challenging for the team initially, but through time activities were tailored to the sites characteristics and by the end of the project practical solutions were found and creative ideas for engagement developed as a result. The desire for an activity centre became less of a need and was seen as more of a distraction and even as a restriction by the end of the project, with more of a desire to engage groups in a more natural environment.

Independent self-led visits by schools and community groups have started to take place, and infrastructure, including the Grubenhau, sensory hide and education spaces (all providing cover) are recognised as encouraging for independent groups. Infrastructure on site provides a good range of resources for NWT and volunteers to use for future support led and self-led programmes.

Through challenges, such as the devastating arson attack of the archaeology site, there were positive outcomes. The team and volunteers bonded and recognised the strength of relationships and their shared connection to Skylarks. They pulled together and helped each other out, giving each other support and encouragement to continue.

Skylarks has become a flagship nature reserve for NWT which is an unexpected outcome. This has naturally raised expectation and grown ambition for the future for staff and volunteers. It is important at this point of change not to be too self-critical but to be proud of such significant achievements.



“The new spits and islands and floating reed beds on Blotts pit have made a difference to bird life within a year. Last year Oystercatchers were rare... now they are common to see. The bird life passing through in just a year is staggering”

Volunteering

Skylarks has grown into a NWT flagship reserve, and even without a centre or daily staff presence, **volunteering has thrived**, with a team of wardens as well as regular conservation work taking place. A strong sense of ownership has been established from the offset and volunteers are trusted as key members of the Skylarks team.

Key learning outcomes / findings

There is a distinctive 'community' dynamic at Skylarks, and NWT volunteers are proud of their welcoming and joining-in attitude, and more opportunities to facilitate and encourage this, they believe, is invaluable. This would particularly help to unify thriving volunteer groups (archaeology and NWT) who can often work independently and less collaboratively based on their interests and volunteer activity on site.

Volunteers regularly volunteered outside of their designated work party sessions, often helping out in emergencies or readily completing tasks when they have spare time, and many more volunteer overtime hours have greatly contributed to the project.

Wardens particularly do not see themselves as traditional wardens (care takers) as such but much more as trusted advisors (to visitors and NWT), this has significantly inspired ideas to develop a Friends of Group (FOG). Similarly for the project team, volunteers did not stick rigidly to defined roles, a willingness to support broader activities is part of the Skylarks 'community' ethic which they describe.

Volunteers reflected on how rewarding it is to hear positive feedback from the public. The family festival particularly has played an important role in celebrating achievement and engaging the general public, it also is very rewarding for volunteers, growing a sense of pride and unity across the team.

Wardens are pleased with the growing popularity of Skylarks, but did share their reservations about the impact this may have on wildlife and they recommend the opportunity to partake in management plan reviews and managing wildlife-sensitive areas and public access.

Young Rangers (youth volunteering) is regular and has now become a strategic priority for NWT. There has been a shift in the demographic within volunteer work parties (adult), with more younger volunteers (working age) signing up, and the team now believe their task driven approach of sessions, with lots of energy and a sense of accomplishment is what has enabled this intergenerational outcome.

There is recognition of intergenerational learning taking place between volunteers and this is recognised as hugely valuable in sharing knowledge, experience and different perspectives (less traditional) of conservation work. Volunteers have also welcomed the opportunity to support Young Rangers sessions.

Volunteers have different motivations as to why they volunteer, their current involvement, they describe as relaxed, friendly, fun and positive. They are keen to retain these experiential values when developing a constituted group (FOG) which requires formality. They are conscious of a shift when given responsibility and the impact this may have on their volunteering and support from NWT is welcomed.

A significant outcome of this project is the proposed development of NWT's first ever volunteer FOG. This is inspired by the success of volunteering, however getting this right is taking longer than expected, due to writing a constitution which successfully defines shared responsibilities and logistical/legal matters. NWT are committed to ensuring the formation of a successful and supported FOG which is a learning process for NWT as well as volunteers.

Learning is important for volunteers and they demonstrate an eagerness and enthusiasm for future opportunities to share their knowledge, hands on work and observational understanding of Skylarks to inspire future management plan reviews, habitat creation and site development.

Sometimes volunteers felt communication could have been better between NWT and themselves, and mechanisms for regular two-way sharing with regular updates/plans on a monthly basis and the appointment of a rotational volunteer leader would be valuable.

Technology has helped connect volunteer teams together and support internal communications by using apps such as WhatsApp and a closed (not public) Facebook page. These may not have happened with a differently appointed team. These technologies have also enabled volunteers to feel more connected to NWT when they are working remotely, particularly for wardens.

The impact of participating in outdoor activity on mental health and well-being has been positively shared, with volunteers eager to find new ways to encourage others to tap into the benefit of volunteering as it is so important. The sense of achievement together with the seasonal changes and annual recurrence they described as particularly wonderful.



Public relations

The pace of this project was very positive for public relations, with visible and tangible changes witnessed quickly by partners, wider stakeholders and local people. Appeals resulted in direct changes, nothing felt stagnant. Reporting on project activity was current and progressive. For many projects this is not possible and momentum can be lost in terms of support and interest. This also impacted on the success of volunteer and public engagement.

Fears (from all levels of staff) about public expectations and negative responses to change have been far greater than anticipated and NWT's partnership and community appeals from the offset helped with this. Additionally less infrastructure such as a visitor centre helped NWT manage expectations of local people, as there were concerns that too much development would be challenged.

Within the project time-frame, people and communities have adjusted and seen the landscape readjust and take on a new identity. Volunteers report that public opinion is very positive now and the habitat management work is generally very well received.

Wardens regularly communicated with visitors on site with greater regularity than staff and they reassured the general public about new layouts and their concerns about changes regularly, this softened with time and as Skylarks matured, the volunteers relationship with the site grew (comfortably referring to it as "their site").

The wardens for Skylarks presented excellent interpersonal skills and understanding when dealing with change, and their personal connections to the reserve helped to empathise with local people whilst also representing and being ambassadors for NWT and their community. Appointing local people (existing users) as wardens has been invaluable in managing public expectations and volunteers have shared their pride in taking on this role, although they recommend more information on site (in the form of notices), to help communications when changes are taking place.

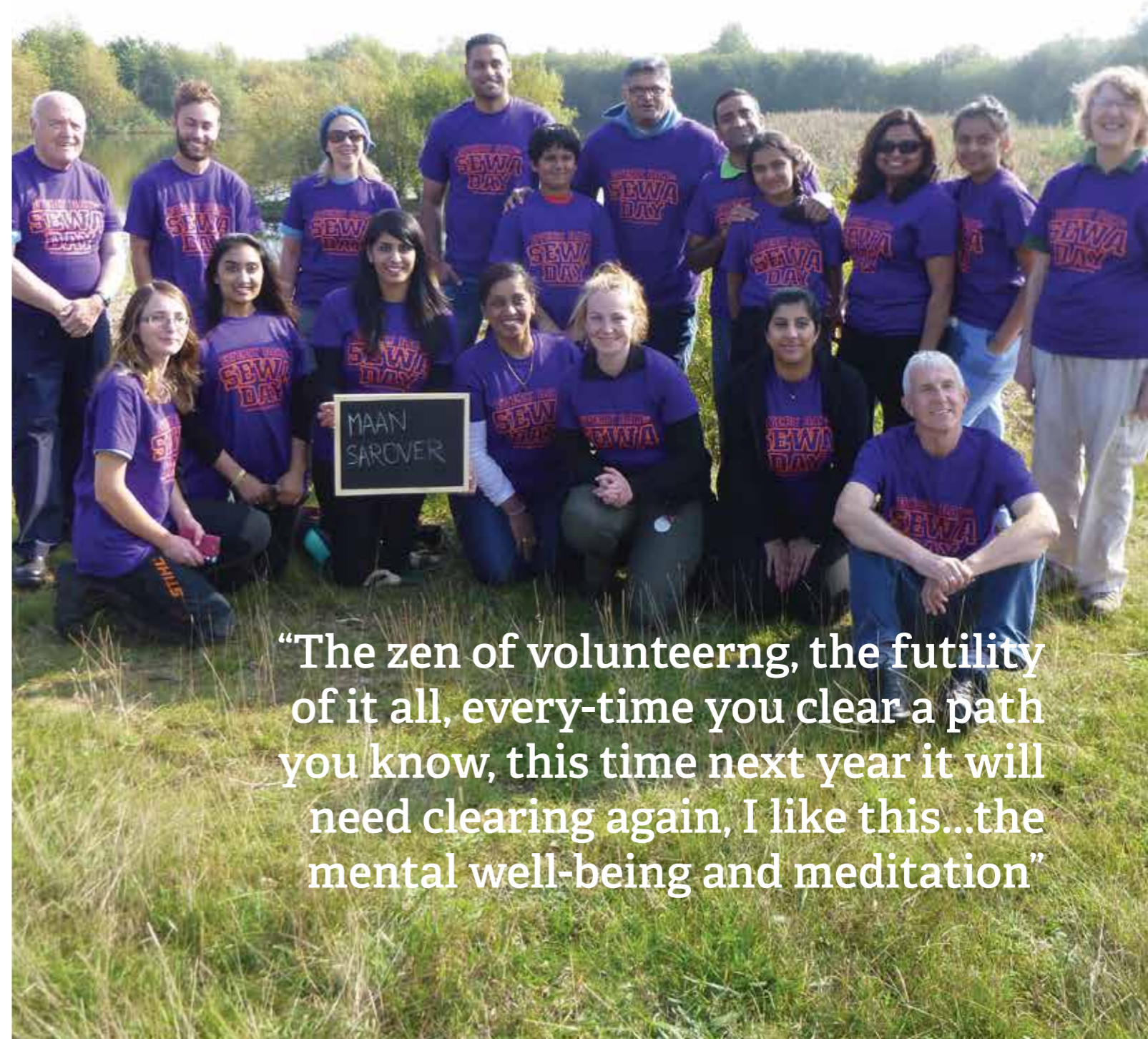
Expectations from the public have changed. Volunteers express, for example, that visitors are recognising and pointing out when a pathway needs some clearing or a certain task needs completing. This demonstrates how visitors have become observers of the journey also and their interest and connection to the site has grown. Volunteers recognise the opportunity to harness this interest with more information about the need for more volunteers, and value of volunteering at Skylarks.



Social media has particularly been strong, and the project team regularly used social media to share progress and current activity, with information naturally reaching wider audiences via Instagram and across other platforms.

The pride shared by all staff and volunteers for Skylarks is clear, with suggestions confidently shared about the site as a future destination equal to Sherwood Forest and Attenborough Nature Reserve, yet is unique and has its own character, different to other NWT reserves as it still has a strong sense of being a 'nature' reserve and "not tourist attraction".

Recognising that there is no 'end point'. A new short description to convey the natural character, unique qualities on offer to people and wildlife is planned for Skylarks, freshly launching and



“The zen of volunteering, the futility of it all, every-time you clear a path you know, this time next year it will need clearing again, I like this...the mental well-being and meditation”

Future ambitions and recommendations


Staff and volunteers completed a short questionnaire about their long-term ambition and recommendations for Skylarks and here is a sample...

Future ambitions...


- That it is talked about as a recognised and well known site for the local community to use.
- **A wild space with managed and unmanaged areas.**
- To develop and sustain habitats of exceptional importance for wildlife in the Trent Valley.
- **There are more visitors enjoying exploring the sites.**
- It retains its 'under-developed' nature.
- Genuine inaccessible areas of size created for more sensitive species.
- **To be species rich.**
- To have a flourishing friends of group at its centre.
- **To provide an exciting landscape for people through environmental education and informal recreation.**
- To have a small visitor hub/training centre.
- **The site continues to deliver engagement activities for people of all ages and backgrounds.**
- Dog walkers controlled to definite routes - not where they fancy.
- **A place suitable to "escape" without necessarily being keen on nature.**
- To lie at the heart of a vast wetland complex of high value habitats for floodplain wildlife.
- **To provide a unique window into the cultural history of the area through the continued use of the site for experimental archaeology.**
- For Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust to still own and manage Skylarks.
- **To have bold planting and habitat creation to promote additional biodiversity.**
- To be a popular and well-loved reserve at the heart of the local community.

Recommendations

- **Keep engaging volunteers!**
- Use it for non-mainstream activities, e.g. SEN schools, forest schools, youth sessions, hard to reach groups only.
- **For our existing Trust Officer to still have regular input to inspire us.**
- Purchase a secure shed/storage, display space.
- **A very active "Friends of" group. Skylarks could be a fantastic place for students to study and we have some volunteers that have the ability help facilitate this.**
- Further funding to ensure that the habitats can continue to be developed and maintained and for engagement with people should be sought.
- **Raise the funds to buy more land in the area.**
- Opportunities to liaise, communicate and have site visits to similar local reserves/habitats.
- **Raise greater awareness of the local population.**
- Development of an annual festival that is vibrant and inspiring but creative that will engage local people as well as generating money.
- **Investment in the wardens, other volunteers. It is critical to ensure the longevity of the features of the Reserve.**
- Develop relationship further with The Watersports Centre if this hasn't happened yet.
- **Continuing monitoring/recording of wildlife diversity on site.**
- Further encourage mental health services to use the site.
- **Gradual replacement of non indigenous trees in Old Skylarks.**
- Friends of Group that is a model for future sites and has shown initiative in not only site management but public engagement and accessing funding sources.
- **It is important not to lose momentum at this stage.**
- More liaison between site and "office".
- **This is a site that has potential for income generation for the Trust, through forest school programs, holiday clubs and training courses just like our other flagship sites.**
- Develop more programs like the sensory walks for those with dementia...



"A site for key species introductions and to be nationally renowned for its fantastic habitats..."



"Maximise the USP of Skylarks ...that it's 'back to nature' and what impact this can have on health and well-being..."

Public consultation

Our public consultation was designed creatively and involved participatory elements and a questionnaire. Our inspiration was to enable visitors to reflect upon the reserve and be invited to give thoughtful responses and share emotional connections, together with quantitative data.

As artists we interpreted these responses and designed the 'gate screen', featuring quotes gathered from this consultation, which is permanently on public display in the reserve. We feel there are further opportunities to utilise these responses in a public way through art and at future events...

Binocular trail / heritage festival

Displayed within a range of habitats including silver birch woodland and shingle, 5 x open ended sentences were installed across the reserve. These 'poetic' words could be discovered and read using binoculars, inviting visitors to look deeper into nature to reflect and respond with emotion and thought provoking perspective.

This first interactive consultation took place in August 2016 as part of the Skylarks heritage festival.



“It’s calm, tranquil, peaceful, a light wind rustling the leaves”

I am drawn here today...

At this moment I experience...

Impressions I will take...

This space gives...

These things I love...

...**beautiful trees**...peace and quiet... a nice day out...a connection with nature...I should do this more...a calm connection with nature... a hands on utilisation of natural resources...den making is fun...it feel miles away from the city... it makes me feel at peace and free...a calmness all around...I love this place...den building, it makes me feel happy...I like the trees best... this place brings calm and stillness in the midst of the city... It creates an environment that allows the mind to wander... a dragonfly on my shoulder, WOW wonderful... very peaceful... lovely birdsong... great to be next to water, lovely plant life ... I am relaxed...calm, I am chilled out...away from road noise, connecting with nature... how being here makes me feel peaceful... being in touch with nature... tranquil... peaceful... wide expanse, great water space so picturesque, feels peaceful, I want to see more, can forget time and place... I feel happy... like I am at the seaside... being at Skylarks makes me feel happy and interested... a great facility and space... I am calm, altogether as a family... a nice outing with children in woods amongst wildlife, froglets, butterflies, hoverflies, red dragonflies basking on the path... a fun space for children... it feels nice, calm and tranquil... it's calm, tranquil, peaceful, a light wind rustling the leaves... a great potential for children's activities... magical... calm, quiet, loads of water life and vegetation, small birds darting around, a joyful uplifting space... a calm natural space in an urban setting... sounds of birds, with sunshine on my face... it feels liberating, a tranquillity and joy... it's a lovely site, I enjoy the bird watching, huge amount of life, looking forward to seeing how it's changed... I love the wild flowers... it's a hidden gem, a lovely special place... A very new place, with fantastic potential... Blott's I have known for many years, it gives me a great feeling, it's future is fabulous... I love it here... a fantastic, wild and an unspoilt place to visit... a fabulous experience, birds, binoculars, and butterflies... having it on my door step, so close to the city... an escapism... my kids are calm, a good counterbalance to technology... I love it for my family... colours, shapes, calm, quiet, inspiration, no cars... the feeling of a peaceful escape... somewhere quiet and away from everyday bustle... a feeling of unity with nature in an area left to its natural course, a rarity... somewhere relaxing and easy on the eye... a place to love... an open quiet space surrounded by a circle of silver birch trees full of small birds... .what's around the corner?...



In less than 10 words / heritage festival

With a team of 7 children under the age of 16yrs, this consultation enabled intergenerational opportunities and sharing. Each young person wore a t-shirt with a question on the back, and navigated the crowds of visitors to ask them to respond to their particular question. Aimed at visitors feeling more comfortable in responding to younger people and opening up positive interaction and fun.

This second interactive consultation took place in August 2017 as part of the Skylarks heritage festival.

I hope it will be here for my grand-children. It is a large area of land (and water) that is dedicated primarily to protecting wildlife habitat. Skylarks lakes are brilliant for birds. A Temminck's Stint yesterday. Top quality. Skylarks is important! It provides an ideal area for wildlife and people to interact and watch each other. The wide variety of birds you can see. Lots of fun learning about wildlife. Very interesting landscape with undulating land. Love the Blackberries, I have never seen so many before. I am going to make Blackberry and apple crumble. I would like lots of visitors to come around the reserve. Skylarks is my favourite NWT reserve because of the many habitats and species. I like it because I think it's good. It's beautiful. When you are here it feels miles away from the city. Because there are so many cool things to see. Because of all the varied habitats and wonderful wildlife you can see. Skylarks is important because I feel happy when I help wildlife and help save nature. To see the wild flowers, birds and insects, enjoy the natural environment and fresh air and exercise. To see the wonderful dragonflies. To learn about all the different things. Because I like the wildlife and the activities even when the sun doesn't shine. Because it's NWT's biggest nature reserve in Rushcliffe and has a beautiful meadow with lots of fungi and insects. Because it's a wonderful piece of wetland, meadow and woodland, very accessible to the whole city. Visit because it is a great place to find out about wildlife. Visit skylarks to experience something inspiring by getting close to nature. Important because wildlife and people need great spaces to share. Because it is a wildlife oasis on my doorstep. On the edge of a busy town, there is a great area of nature for all to enjoy. Real nature on our doorstep! Green space, Green woodpecker. I have learnt all about making a place to live out of willow. Found out about daubing, didn't know that horse manure was used. Also found out about the uses of birch. Sunshine, butterflies, birds, flowers, berries. I hope it's going to grow from strength to strength and lots of different people will use it. That it helps people to appreciate the importance of wildlife. I hope that all generations will be able to enjoy it and the wildlife activities will continue...



“A nice outing with children in woods amongst wildlife, froglets, butterflies, hoverflies, red dragonflies basking on the path...”

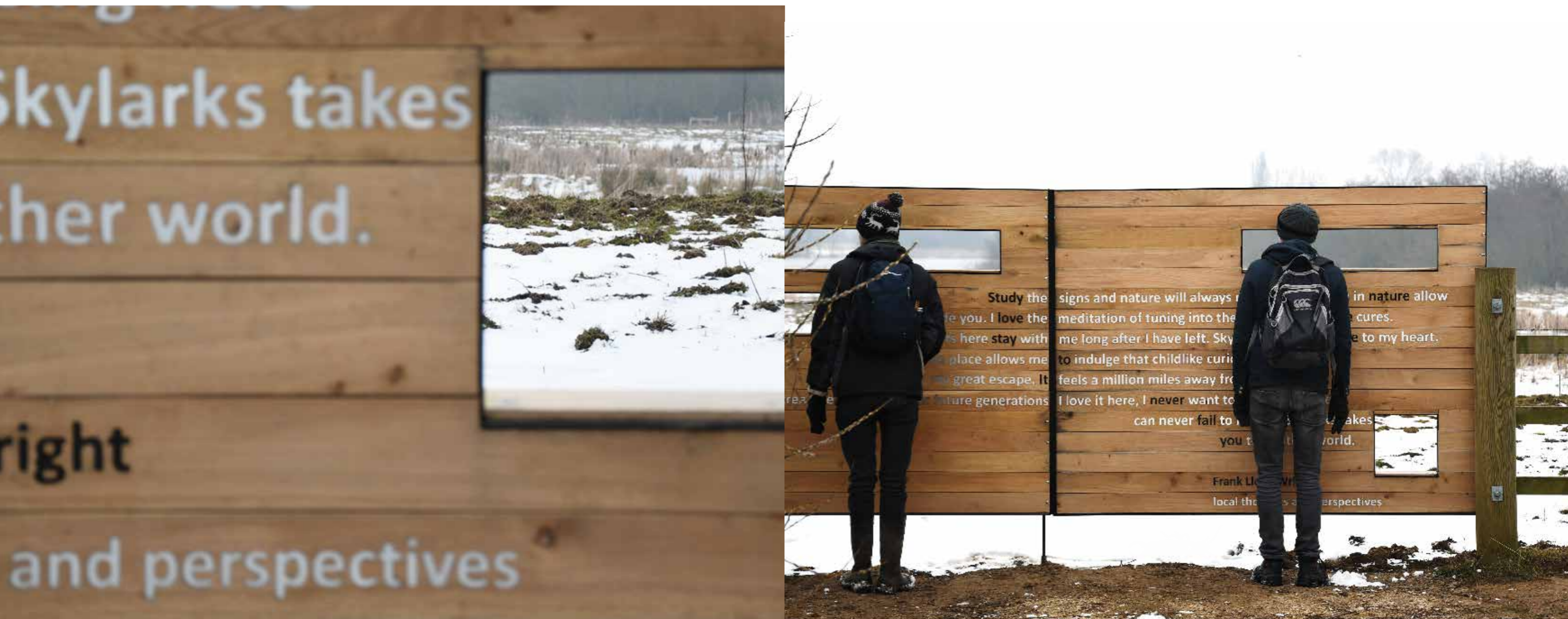
Gate Screen / creative interpretation

This commissioned work is inspired by the idea of integrating the thoughts and perspectives of local people within the existing infrastructure and 'workings' of the reserve. Our consultation, including 6 oral history interviews (as part of the film), inspired this piece, and particularly the location within the new nature reserve area, which was referred to regularly as a beautiful view point, a place to enjoy wildlife and experience a fantastic perspective of the wetland landscape.

The 'Gate Screen' is still a functional gate, an access point for volunteers and the reserves team to manage habitats. It is also access for the conservation grazing herd. It now doubles as a viewing screen, with windows which frame the landscape, at various heights.

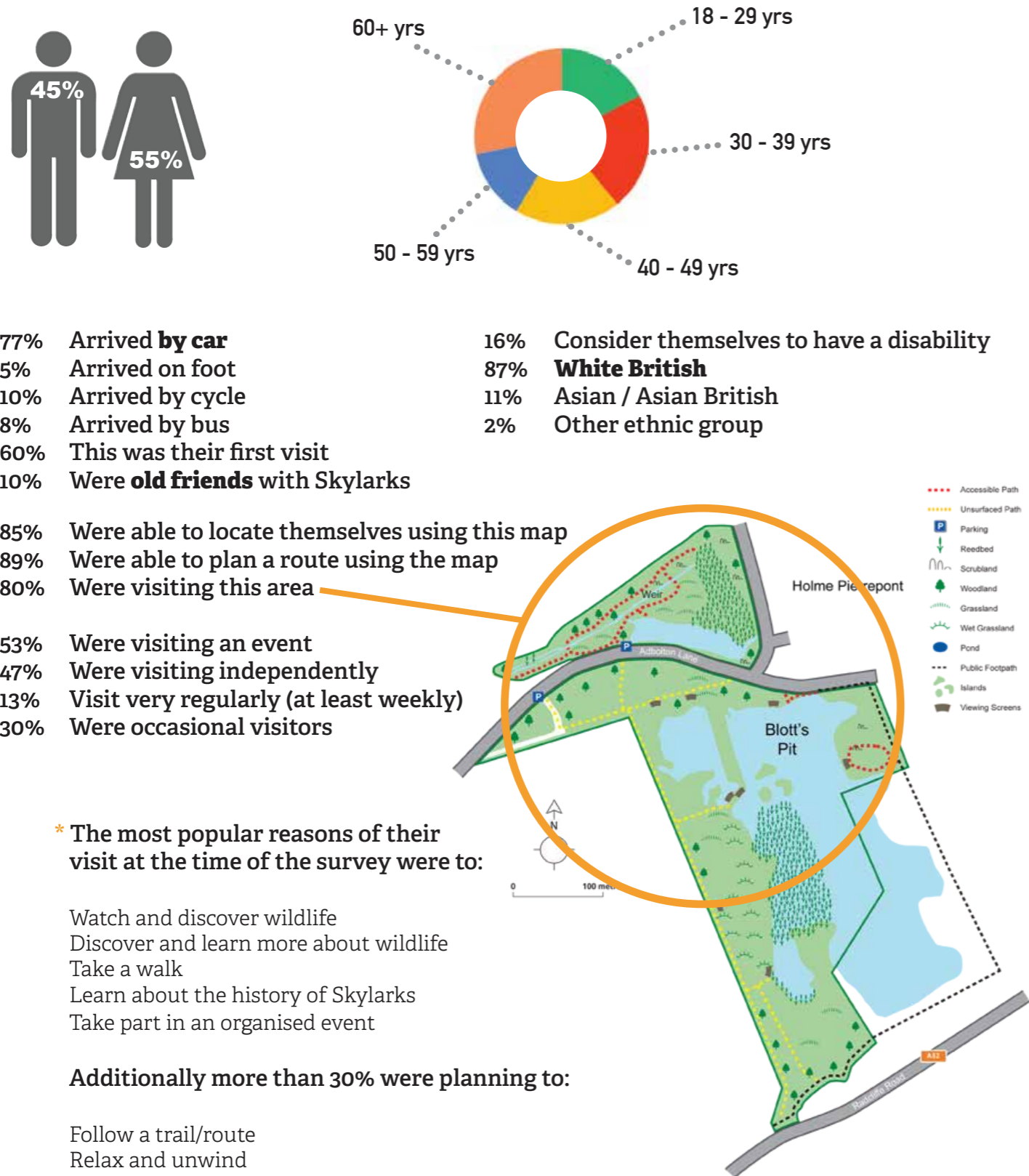
Made from oak and steel, this gate includes quotes gathered from this consultation, together with a quote by Frank Lloyd Wright, an architect who took inspiration from the natural world.

Study the signs and nature will always reward you.
When in **nature** allow it to guide you.
I **love** the mediation and tuning into the landscape.
Nature cures.
Moments here **stay** with me along after I have left.
Skylarks is a place **close** to my heart.
This place allows me **to** indulge that childlike curiosity.
Nature is my great escape.
It feels a million miles from the city.
This treasure **will** remain for future generations.
I love it here, I **never** want to leave.
Being here can never **fail** to inspire.
Skylarks takes **you** to another world.



Visitor questionnaire / quantitative

A total of 48 questionnaires were completed, these were gathered at public events and organised events. Of those we surveyed:



- 77% Arrived by car
- 5% Arrived on foot
- 10% Arrived by cycle
- 8% Arrived by bus
- 60% This was their first visit
- 10% Were old friends with Skylarks
- 16% Consider themselves to have a disability
- 87% White British
- 11% Asian / Asian British
- 2% Other ethnic group

- 85% Were able to locate themselves using this map
- 89% Were able to plan a route using the map
- 80% Were visiting this area

- 53% Were visiting an event
- 47% Were visiting independently
- 13% Visit very regularly (at least weekly)
- 30% Were occasional visitors

*** The most popular reasons of their visit at the time of the survey were to:**

- Watch and discover wildlife
- Discover and learn more about wildlife
- Take a walk
- Learn about the history of Skylarks
- Take part in an organised event

Additionally more than 30% were planning to:

- Follow a trail/route
- Relax and unwind
- Have a picnic
- Meet friends
- Enjoy family activities
- Exercise and feel healthier

* These results are indicative of the situation when data was collected, usually at organised events

The following was rated by volunteers from poor to excellent:

- 90% Rated their experience and overall opinion of Skylarks as very good to excellent
- 80% Rated their wildlife experience as very good to excellent
- 88% Rated the conservation work and habitat restoration as very good to excellent
- 92% Rated the access to the reserve (pathways, trail, facilities) as very good to excellent
- 54% Rated the information about Skylarks (online, panels) as very good to excellent
- 39% Rated the information about Skylarks as average to good, with 7% rating it poor *

* It should be noted that the only poor rating was given to public information about the reserve (pre visit and on site)

When asked what matters to them, below is a list, with the most popular being at the top:

- most popular**
- A peaceful green space to visit
 - A conservation area which protects wildlife
 - A diverse range of wildlife habitats to experience
 - Good parking facilities *
 - Opportunities to learn about conservation and wildlife
 - A site which helps improve health, wellbeing and fitness
 - Viewing screens and hides to observe wildlife
 - Good access, flat paths and clear trail information
 - A place for my family to explore and discover

- least popular**
- A trail to follow and visible site maps
 - A place to walk my dog
 - Local events and volunteering opportunities
 - Easily accessible via public transport *
 - Facilities for refreshments *

* Visitors tell us that the majority of what matters to them is being met well, with only those marked with an asterisk not meeting them currently, two of which were the least most important. Car parking facilities are very important to visitors, and this data identifies improvements are needed.

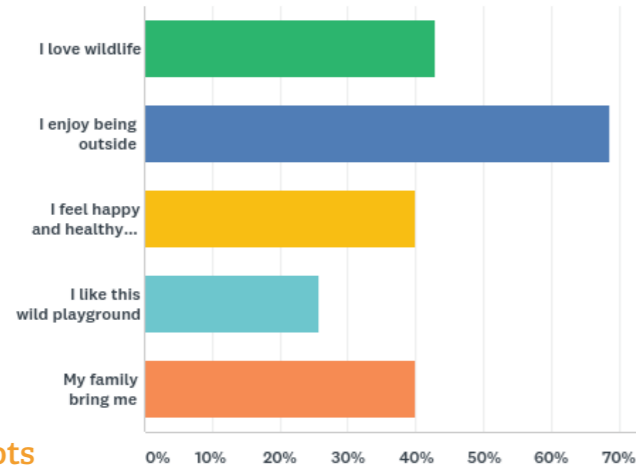


Visitor questionnaire / kids

A total of 37 children under the age of 16yrs completed a questionnaires when attending public events and organised activities. Of those we surveyed:



Why were they visiting Skylarks...



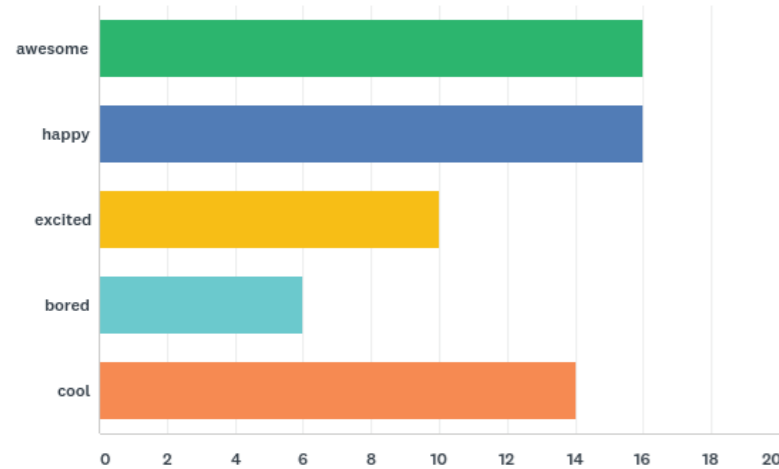
66%
This was their first visit

93%
Would like to visit again

"It's a place with lots of nature and natural free-running places"

"It's fun, natural and something different to do."

How did Skylarks make them feel?



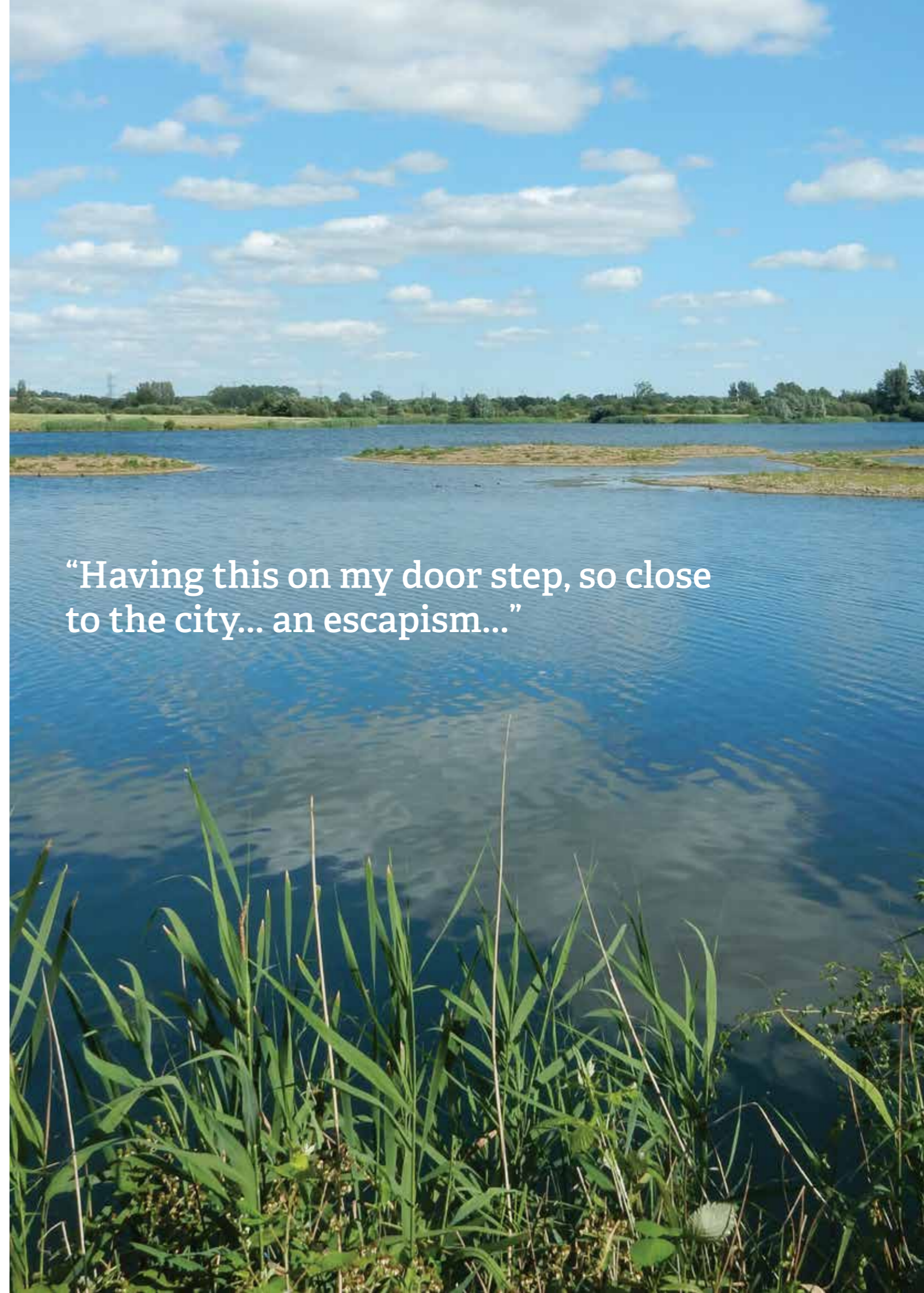
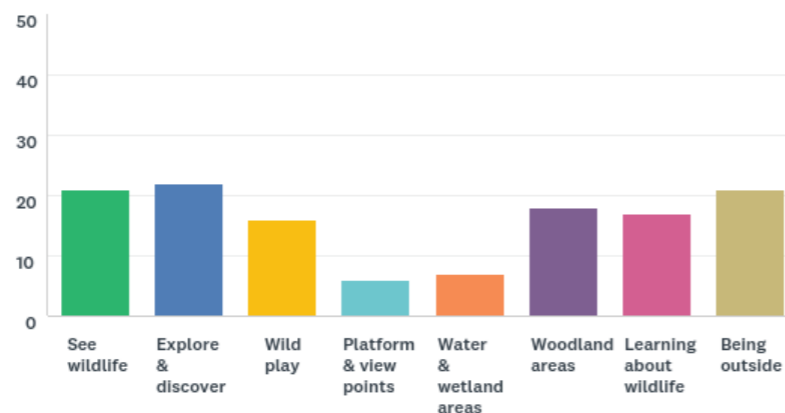
"I love it because you get to learn new things everytime you come"

"Its really fun! you can learn about wildlife and the outdoors!"

"It makes me happy!"

"It really relaxes you as the scenery is AMAZING!"

What is BEST about Skylarks?



"Having this on my door step, so close to the city... an escapism..."

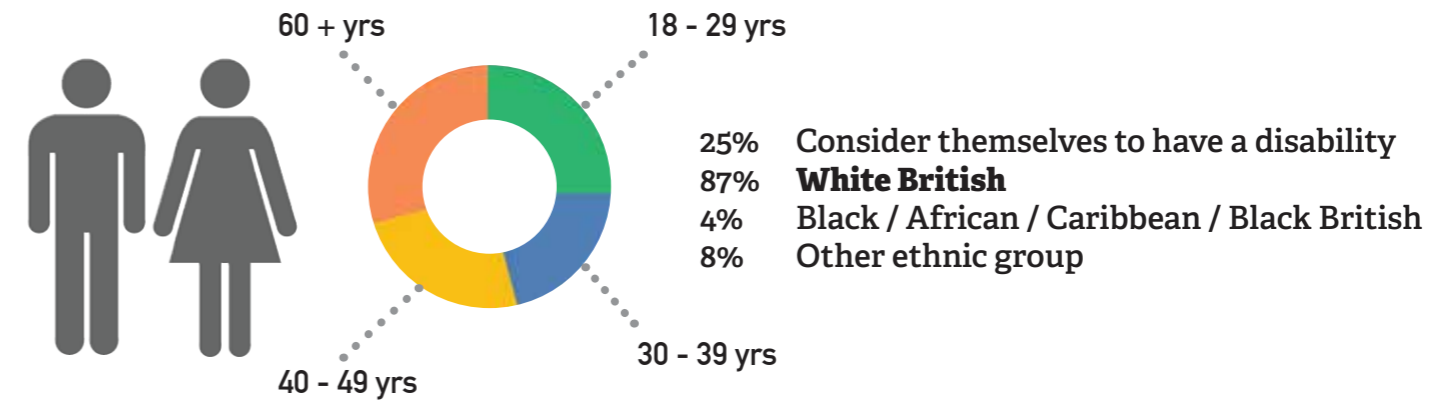


“The pathway is inviting, it makes the route more obvious, before it was confusing where to walk”

Improved access at Skylarks

Nearing the final stages of the HLF project, a new pathway was created to improve access as the area was inaccessible for many visitors, particularly in wetter seasons.

A 2 day public survey was conducted and visitors invited to feedback and provide any views about their access needs and the impact of this improvement. A total of 24 people participated and completed a short questionnaire.



- 96% Rate current access at Skylarks as very good to excellent
- 83% Gave rated the new path as very good to excellent
- 4% Gave the new path a poor rating*

* It should be noted that those who rated the pathway poor were preferring less public access to help reduce the impact on wildlife.

- 20% This was their first visit
- 80% Were **regular visitors**
- 100% Will be visiting again

Before the path was installed

- 0% Rated the access to the area as excellent
- 46% Rated the access as good
- 33% Rated it as very poor

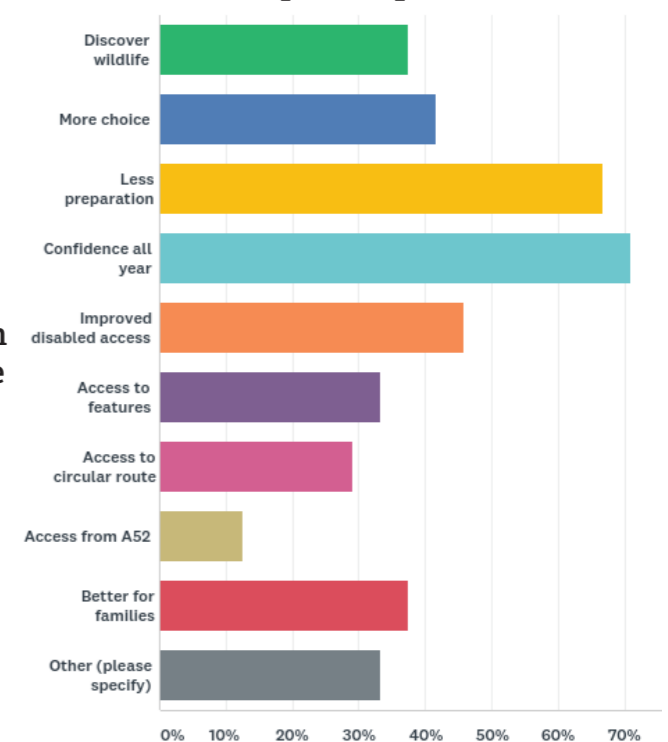
Since the path was installed

- 60% Visitors tell us they explore far greater areas of the reserve than before the path
- 83% Felt more confident to access the reserve

“Its great for pushchairs and our family, before it was far too muddy to walk”

“Its much better in winter, which is when I like to visit to bird watch”

Tell us what are the main benefits of the new pathway?







© INSTAR

www.we-are-instar.co.uk

2018