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Transforming the Trent Headwaters Community Engagement Analysis April 2025

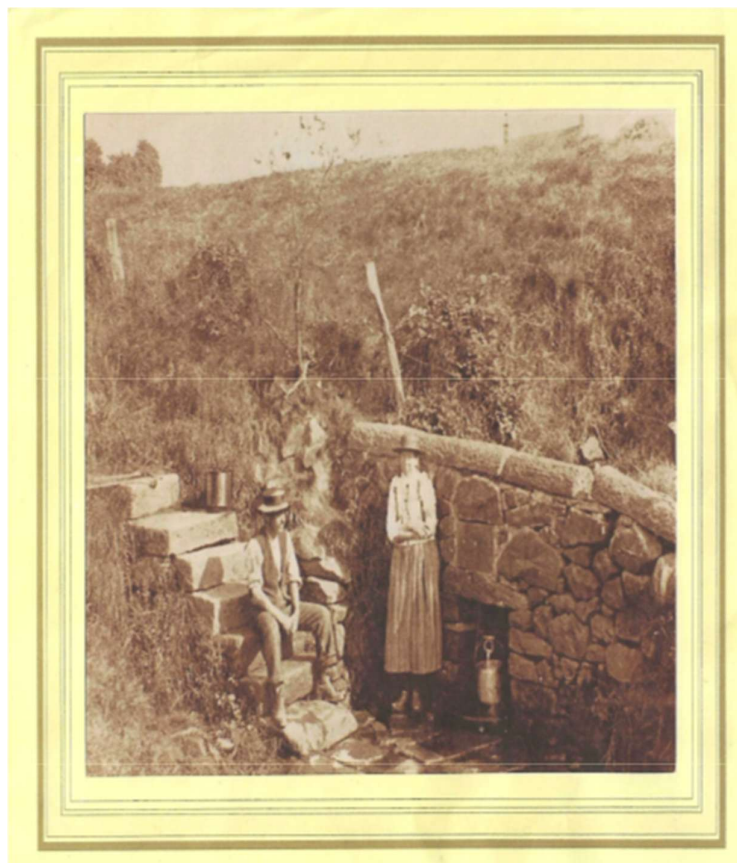


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Executive summary

The community engagement work for the Trent Headwaters feasibility phase of the project was led by Support Staffordshire, the VCSE infrastructure organisation for Staffordshire who focussed on the Newcastle under Lyme, Trentham and Biddulph including Biddulph Moor geographical areas for their activities. Stoke on Trent community engagement was undertaken by VAST, the VCSE infrastructure organisation for Stoke on Trent.

The project was conducted in several stages:

- Desk Based Research
- Workshops with community organisations from Stoke on Trent, Newcastle under Lyme, Biddulph, Biddulph Moor
- Engagement with individual community organisations from Stoke on Trent, Newcastle, Biddulph, Biddulph Moor
- Phone calls with community organisations with particular demographics identified by the wider project team

A number of projects and themes emerged. A summary of project results are detailed below:

1. Trent Headwaters Well Dressing Revitalisation

Biddulph Moor Community Association is keen to enhance the annual well dressing event by restoring the Trent Head well, which is currently deteriorating and inaccessible. This event is a point of local pride, and the community has expressed strong support for a project that would restore the well and better integrate it into community life.

2. Improving Physical Accessibility

Significant concerns were raised about poor maintenance of footpaths and physical barriers (e.g., broken stiles, barbed wire, muddy paths), particularly affecting elderly residents and those with disabilities. New or improved access points and safer crossing areas, especially near local housing, were suggested.

3. Addressing Safety and Infrastructure Gaps

Multiple areas across Biddulph and Knypersley suffer from unsafe footpaths, excessive litter, and inadequate signage. Broken infrastructure like Knypersley Bridge and a lack of crossing points on busy roads highlight the need for targeted interventions.

4. Signposting and Wayfinding

Clear and accessible signage is needed for local paths, green spaces, and amenities. There is also an opportunity to develop digital and physical tools (e.g., maps, apps) to help visitors and locals—including those with disabilities—navigate and enjoy the area safely.

5. Celebrating Culture and History

Preserving and promoting local history, including the origins of the River Trent, was frequently cited as a community priority. There is interest in making Biddulph Moor and Stoke-on-Trent cultural destinations, using storytelling, signage, and digital content to share the area's rich heritage.

6. Building on Unsuccessful Bids

Previous funding applications, such as a participatory arts and nature trail project near Stoke Minster, were identified as learning opportunities. Community engagement and alignment with funder priorities were cited as key areas for improvement in future bids.

7. Access Rights and Land Ownership

The complex issue of rights of way and land ownership near the Trent Headwaters could limit access. Exploring legal rights and the potential for community land acquisition may provide long-term solutions for improved access.

8. Infrastructure Limitations

Limited car parking and public amenities present challenges for increasing visitor numbers. Strategic infrastructure planning is needed to balance community needs with tourism ambitions.

9. Urban Wilderness CIC Art & Nature Engagement Project

Urban Wilderness CIC proposes a creative initiative combining public art and environmental engagement along the rivers and surrounding green spaces. This project aims to change how the community interacts by introducing an art trail that enhances public enjoyment and safety but also serves as an opportunity to educate in biodiversity and wildlife conservation.

Some Key Objectives:

- **Public Art Trail:** Commission new artworks for a trail that will draw attention to underused or overlooked natural spaces, encouraging more frequent and positive public use.
- **Youth Engagement:** Involve young people in the creation and curation process, fostering creative and environmental skills development.
- **Community Biodiversity Education:** Promote understanding and protection of local ecosystems through engaging storytelling and the reintroduction of species (e.g. beavers) to spark community interest.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Use the emotional appeal of “attractive” wildlife to increase awareness of broader ecological principles, such as habitats and food chains.

Collaboration & Funding:

Urban Wilderness CIC seeks to be actively included in relevant funding bids, especially those involving art commissioning and youth engagement. All contributions and ideas originating from Urban Wilderness must be fully credited to Urban Wilderness CIC.

10. Groundwork West Midlands Weir Hydro Project

Groundwork West Midlands would like to explore the opportunity to develop a community-led, hydroelectric power project utilizing an existing weir at Spode in Stoke-on-Trent. This initiative builds on the successful model of the Congleton Hydro Community Energy Power scheme on the River Dane, which now supplies renewable energy to the Siemens factory in Congleton.

Some Key Objectives:

- **Renewable Energy Generation:** Establish a hydroelectric system at the Spode weir to generate clean, sustainable electricity for local use.
- **Community Ownership and Engagement:** Operate as a community energy project, allowing local residents to participate in and benefit from renewable energy production.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Utilise the insights and best practices from the Congleton Hydro project to guide planning, implementation, and long-term operation.
- **Local Impact:** Reduce carbon emissions, support energy resilience, and stimulate local economic opportunities through green infrastructure investment.

Groundwork West Midlands seeks collaboration with technical experts, local authorities, and funding partners to assess feasibility, secure permissions, and develop a robust community engagement plan. The project aspires to serve as a scalable model for sustainable energy in urban and semi-urban river settings.

11. Reopen Sprink Tunnel (Biddulph to Biddulph Moor)

This project proposes the reopening of the historic Sprink Tunnel, located in Biddulph Country Park and formerly part of a public footpath connecting Biddulph to Biddulph Moor. The tunnel, which has collapsed and is currently sealed at both ends by the council, was once a functional and scenic passage beneath the landscape, featuring a distinctive stone archway. The name “Sprink” refers to a folkloric hobgoblin or sprite, adding cultural and historical intrigue to the site.

The footpath has since been rerouted around the tunnel, but there is local interest in restoring the original route for heritage, recreational, and aesthetic value. While the local history group has not formally participated in recent community engagement efforts, there is emerging interest from its members to support future initiatives. Background information and images are available via local history resources, suggesting the tunnel holds potential as a community heritage restoration project.

12. Potential Project Extensions

Additional ideas include:

- Sports and fitness programs (e.g., paddleboarding, wild swimming).
- Community clean-up and greening initiatives.
- Engaging schools and youth in environmental stewardship.
- Arts trails, forest bathing, and inclusive activities for underserved groups.

This suite of potential projects demonstrates a strong foundation of community interest and offers opportunities to invest in physical infrastructure, local heritage, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship. Future planning should focus on project prioritisation, partnership development, and phased delivery aligned with available funding.

1.Strategic background

This report is a summary of activities that have been undertaken as one part of an 18 month feasibility study funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. This element of the study was delivered in partnership with Support Staffordshire and VAST, the two infrastructure organisations for Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

The wider project aims are to:

- Develop the partnership in Stoke-on-Trent and the wider area (including Newcastle under Lyme and Biddulph).
- Engage communities and partners to better understand the needs, opportunities and priorities of the area.
- Establish the geographical and thematic focus for future projects based on the identified priorities.
- Create an outline of projects for development that respond to these priorities.

2.Research context

The community engagement for the Trent Headwaters feasibility phase was led by Support Staffordshire who focussed on the Newcastle under Lyme, Trentham and Biddulph including Biddulph Moor geographical areas. Stoke on Trent community engagement was undertaken by VAST whose focus was on Stoke on Trent. The aims of the community engagement undertaken were:

- to reach a wide range of communities within the defined scheme area
- to understand how local people view and engage with their green and watery spaces
 - what they are proud of locally
 - what they would like to see improved

The work focussed on reaching existing community and voluntary groups, with a core objective of engaging groups who are not predominantly environmentally or wildlife focussed to ensure a broader perspective of views were gained on the local environment among different communities that have not historically engaged in these types of projects. There was a focus in this phase of the engagement to gain project ideas from the community that could be taken forward in future work.

3.Methodology

Background

Support Staffordshire and VAST both have a membership base of more than 1,400 organisations and both organisations have established a depth and breadth of relationships with the VCSE groups and individuals in their respective areas. This meant

they were both able to access their database of community groups across the defined geographical area of the project.

Recommendations were also sought from colleagues working in the community for groups that they considered would be particularly receptive to the consultation. In general, there was a positive reception from most of the groups contacted and many were keen to participate.

Support Staffordshire and VAST agreed from the project outset that they would share the community engagement activities based on their respective geographical areas of responsibility. Support Staffordshire would lead and be responsible for the final report.

Support Staffordshire and VAST - Engagement Plans

From the outset, Support Staffordshire and VAST worked closely with Louise Morris Project Lead from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and Nicola Lynes Project Steer from Support Staffordshire to ensure the agreed engagement plans met project requirements.

	Activity	Who by?
1.	Desk based research	Support Staffordshire
2.	Engagement preparations	Support Staffordshire & VAST
3.	Engagement plan - 2 Large Events	Support Staffordshire & VAST
4.	Engagement plan - 1 World Café	VAST
5.	Meeting with VCSE groups – 10	Shared between Support Staffordshire and VAST
6.	Phone calls with VCSE individuals – 5	Support Staffordshire
	Phone calls with VCSE individuals – 5	VAST

4. Results and Project Recommendations

# Engaged		256
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Name of Group	Location	Group Type	Number Engaged
Small Meetings			
Blaze Trails	Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent	Parent and baby walking group	18
Father Hudson's Young at Heart Group	Newcastle	Over 50's group	14
Youth & Community Zone	Biddulph	Warm Space	20
Biddulph Guides	Biddulph and Biddulph Moor	10-14 year olds 3 adults	22
Dyslexia Association of Staffordshire	Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent	Neurodiverse group	6
Biddulph Moor Community Association	Biddulph Moor	Residents association	14
Newcastle Mental Health Group	Newcastle under Lyme	Mental health support group	6
Cerebral Palsy social group	Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke on Trent	Cerebral Palsy support group	5
Biddulph Youth and Community Zone	Biddulph	Youth Club	27

Farming group and land owners	Staffordshire Moorlands	Informal farmers group	5
Greenway Moor WI	Biddulph Moor	Biddulph Moor Women's Institute	36
Telephone Calls			
Bolton Gate Farm	Staffordshire Moorlands	Arts centre	1
Trentham Boat Club	Trentham	Boat club	1
Festival Stoke	Stoke on Trent	Arts centre and workshops	1
Headway North Staffordshire	Stoke on Trent	Supports adults with brain injury	1
Urban Wilderness CIC	Stoke on Trent	Arts organisation	1
Events			
New Vic Theatre	Newcastle	Open invite to the community	16
Biddulph Town Hall	Biddulph	Open invite to the community	19
Asha	Stoke on Trent	Supports asylum seekers and refugees	13
Community Share Network	Stoke on Trent	Community Health Champions	10
Totally Stoked	Stoke on Trent	VCSE Community Groups	11
World café			
Dudson Centre	Stoke on Trent	Open invite to the community	9

Who We Talked To – Some Demographics

- The age of participants was not collected as part of the consultation process, but the groups approached had services users whose ages ranged from 10 + with no

upper limit captured. Attendees at any sessions who were below the age of 16 years were accompanied by responsible adults.

- E.g. Biddulph Moor Girl Guides had 3 adults who volunteered as part of the Girlguiding Association, with the appropriate safeguarding and DBS checks in place.
- Project officers met with 4 groups with additional needs, including people living with long-term health conditions, communication needs and disabled people. We also spoke to members of the Deaf community.
- No participant disclosed their sexual preferences or their gender identity.

Limitations and Caveats

- Whilst the names of organisations were captured for accuracy of reporting, no names or data were captured that could identify participants. This means that demographic information is very limited. Please see previous comments above.
- Urban Wilderness CIC requested any information, feedback and comments they provided that was used in the report must be accredited to them.

Guiding Principles for all Potential Projects

This report has been produced with the following principles in mind:

Creating accessible spaces for all. Everyone deserves the opportunity to engage as they wish in society. By designing places and spaces that are accessible to all we break down barriers, promote independence, and ensure no one is left behind.

Researchers say that local authorities could improve the mental health of their community by increasing the greenery in their towns and cities and improving access to green and blue spaces.

4.1

Potential Project 1 – Trent Headwaters Well Dressing

Tam Harrison and Siobhon Hayes met with Biddulph Moor Community Association (BMCA). Their attendance was at a regular meeting held by the BMCA Committee with the local community at the Rose and Crown Pub in Biddulph Moor. The meeting is open to anyone in the community who wishes to attend. The scoping of the TTH formed the first half of the agenda. 14 locals including the BMCA committee members attended the session.

The BMCA is a community benefit society with charitable status. This type of organisation works to create long-term positive social impact, reinvesting any surplus income back into the community, while also enjoying the benefits and recognition associated with being a charity. A community benefit society which wants to enter into joint ventures or other arrangements should consider how this would benefit the community, particularly if the partner organisation does not exist to benefit the community.

The BMCA support the general needs of the Biddulph Moor community. They help plan and provide support for the annual well dressing in June every year.

They shared an example of a potential project for their annual Well Dressing . There is an engaged community group who would love to see their annual well dressing supported and enhanced. The current well dressing event takes place in a field as the well is crumbling away and is difficult to get to. They are very proud of their history and have a network of support for any project that is identified and agreed.

The suggestion for a project around the Trent Head Well was also shared with a group discussion held by VAST in Stoke on Trent.

Project Plan: Revitalising the Trent Head Well and Supporting Biddulph Moor Well Dressing

The project would aim to restore and enhance the Trent Head Well in Biddulph Moor and improve the setting and experience of the annual Well Dressing festival.

Key stakeholders: Biddulph Moor Community Association (BMCA), this initiative seeks to preserve local heritage, strengthen community identity, and create long-term social value through heritage conservation.

Objectives:

- To restore or stabilise the Trent Head Well to make it safe and accessible, if possible.
- Relocate or enhance the site of the annual well dressing to align with the restored well. Ideally, the community would like the well dressing to actually take place at the well.
- Strengthen community pride and involvement through heritage-led regeneration by engaging local groups, Youth Centre, Guides as well as the Residents Association.
- Collaborate with these key groups to ensure sustainability and long-term impact.
- Increase visibility and footfall for the event, promoting local history and tourism.
- Ensure that Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and heritage groups are included as key stakeholders.

Deliverables:

- Structural engineer assessment and restoration plan for Trent Head Well.
- Landscape improvement and access path construction around the well site.
- Infrastructure for a permanent or semi-permanent well dressing site.
- Interpretation panels/signage on the local history and tradition of well dressing.
- Community-led planning sessions and skill-building workshops.
- A revitalised Well Dressing Event to launch the completed project hosted at or near the restored well.

Resources:

- Structural and conservation expertise.
- Funding.
- Community groups and volunteers.

- Marketing and communications support.
- Legal expertise.

Potential Project 2 – General Physical Accessibility to the Trent Head Waters

Footpath accessibility to the Headwaters and surrounding area.

- Currently, access to the Headwaters is not well maintained
- Opportunity to explore a potential new access point near housing, rather than over farmland

Project Plan: Accessible Pathways to the Trent Head Waters

Objectives:

- Make access to the Trent Head Waters safer, more inclusive, and well-maintained.
- Where possible, reduce reliance on existing paths across farmland, to minimise landowner concerns.
- Explore and assess a new access point nearer to local housing to improve usability.
- Encourage community access, recreation, and appreciation of local natural heritage.
- Align with local rights of way, accessibility standards, and land use regulations.

Stakeholders:

- Biddulph Moor Residents Association for local coordination, engagement, and community liaison.
- Local residents for input on preferred routes and needs. Provide an opportunity to express concerns.
- Landowners to ensure land use rights and minimize disruption.
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council for consideration of rights of way, planning, and other potential funding opportunities.
- Local walking groups for input on practical use and design.
- Disability groups to ensure coproduction of design.
- Environmental consultants to understand any impact on the local area.

Deliverables:

- Report of current and alternative access routes.
- Design and costing for improved or potential new footpath (surfacing, signage, drainage).
- Permissions secured from relevant landowners and local authorities.
- Construction of an improved or potential new pathway.
- Signage and interpretation features for safe navigation and education.

Resources:

- Footpath safety and accessibility experts.
- Legal experts for access rights.
- Experts in footpath construction and surfacing.
- Local volunteers.

Potential Project 3 – Current Known Issues Affecting Accessibility and Safety

- Existing benches and facilities at Apedale Country Park need improvement
 - More would be beneficial
- U3A Walking Group in Biddulph report that stiles are in poor condition around Victoria Road and Mill Hayes Road.
 - Farmers have put barbed wire around some stiles.
- Marsh Green footpaths are frequently blocked off due to mud, foliage debris.
 - Friends of Biddulph Way used to keep some of these spaces clear and appear to still meet.
- Biddulph Brook is often filled with rubbish and is a feeder to the River Trent.
- Knypersley Pool footpaths and the footpath to Coppice Mushroom Farm and Bluebell Wood are muddy to the point they become impassable during long rain showers.
- Knypersley Bridge is broken and difficult to cross.
- Traffic speeds along Woodhouse Lane and Marsh Green Lane in Biddulph. Traffic lights would slow traffic and allow people to cross safely.
- Grange Road in Biddulph has no safe place to cross to the footpath due to the blind bend at Fold Lane and the local pub.
 - There is also an excess of litter down Grange Road.
- At Park Lane in Knypersley, traffic signs would allow school children to cross safely.

“Need accessible paths with wheelchair access.”

Project Plan: Improving Accessibility and Safety Across Biddulph’s Paths and Public Spaces

Objectives:

- Upgrade benches and public facilities at Apedale Country Park.
- Repair or replace hazardous stiles, particularly those obstructed by barbed wire.
- Improve drainage and clearance on muddy or blocked footpaths (Marsh Green, Knypersley Pool).
- Restore safe access for walkers at Knypersley Bridge.
- Reduce litter and environmental changes, especially at Biddulph Brook and Grange Road.
- Install safe road crossings and signage on local high-risk roads (Grange Road, Park Lane, Woodhouse Lane, Marsh Green Lane).
- Ensure pathways are wheelchair accessible and inclusive e.g. white lines or markers for those who are visually impaired.

Stakeholders:

- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council for planning advice, permissions, and potential for additional council funding.
- Friends of Biddulph Way who have an interest in path maintenance and experience in volunteer coordination.
- U3A Walking Group are a local group who can provide feedback and route mapping.
- Local landowners and farmers to work with for cooperation on stile and barbed wire issues.
- Community Safety Officers and local Highways Authority for traffic advice and management and signage.
- Environmental groups to support litter removal and brook restoration.
- Schools and families in Knypersley who may have concerns for road safety.

Deliverables:

- New or restored seating and signage in key locations.
- Safe gates or inclusive stiles with farmer and / or landowner support and cooperation.
- Drained, cleared and walkable paths all year-round.
- Regular community litter picks and clear signage to deter dumping.
- Repaired or replaced bridge with safety features.
- High-visibility signs with possible traffic lights or islands.
- Installed ramps, surfaced paths and widened entry points.

Resources:

- Civil engineers and pathway business contractors.
- Environmental expert clean-up teams of volunteers.
- Traffic and highways consultants.
- Funding.
- Legal support (access rights, agreements with landowners).
- Volunteer groups for maintenance and clean-up.

Potential Project 4 – Signposting

Clear and visible signage is essential for guiding people efficiently and ensuring everyone can navigate spaces with confidence. Well-designed signs not only enhance accessibility but also create a sense of safety and inclusion, helping individuals of all abilities feel informed and empowered to move through their environment with ease. Participants frequently raised this topic as important. Examples of areas of concern were:

- The canal and river path around Trentham is poorly signposted and impassable in winter.
- Guidance for visitors around accessing green spaces e.g. a website; an app and signposts, to ensure people know what to expect from various walking routes.

- Include the condition of pathways, steps, handrails, overhanging branches etc.
- Share locations for amenities and local activities – sports courts, outdoor gym equipment, cafes
 - Particularly for people with disabilities – Dyslexia Association of Staffordshire, Cerebral Palsy social group, Staffordshire Sight Loss Association and Headway said this would be useful for service users.

Project Plan: Inclusive Signposting and Information Systems for Biddulph and Trentham Green Spaces

Objectives:

- Improve signposting across green spaces, canal paths, and riverside trails.
- Provide clear guidance on trail conditions, route difficulty and any identified hazards.
- Develop a digital resource such as a mobile app or website for route planning and navigation.
- Promote accessible routes for users with visual, cognitive and mobility needs.
- Collaborate with disability organisations to ensure inclusive design. The participants in the community engagement are noted in the thanks at the end of this report.

Stakeholders:

- Local Authorities for permissions, potential further funding and infrastructure.
- Disability advocacy groups such as Dyslexia Association of Staffordshire, Staffordshire Sight Loss Association, Headway, Cerebral Palsy networks could all provide input and coproduce inclusive design.
- Environmental groups and volunteers to support installation and maintenance.
- Local residents and walking groups for local expert insight and feedback.
- Tech designers for app and / or website development.
- Recreation organisations to support promotion and usage.

Deliverables:

- Route maps with signage locations, safety notes and updates.
- Signage templates.
- Mounted signs with consistent look and feel.
- Printed materials, workshops and online content.
- Maintenance schedule and feedback mechanism for problem areas.

Resources:

- Graphic designers and accessibility consultants for signs and digital design.
- Web and app developers with accessibility expertise.
- Survey and mapping tools.

- Materials for signage that can withstand long periods of poor weather but also provide tactile options.
- Community volunteers for checking and reporting routes.
- Funding opportunities.

Potential Project 5 – Culture and History

Culture is important because it shapes our identity, values, and sense of belonging. It influences how we think, communicate and interact with others, creating connections. Culture fosters creativity, promotes diversity and helps preserve traditions and knowledge across generations.

Local history is important as it helps us understand the unique stories, traditions, and experiences that have shaped a community over time. It connects people to their roots, providing a sense of identity and belonging. Local history also fosters pride and appreciation for the community's heritage and can promote a deeper understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

“How do we make Stoke on Trent a destination that people are interested in visiting?”

“Need to publish the importance of Biddulph Moor.”

“Need to publish where the River Trent starts!!!”

Project Plan: Roots and Routes: Showcasing the Cultural Heritage of Biddulph Moor and the Trent Headwaters

(Title similar to Roots and Shoots programme – Jane Goodall)

Objectives:

- Document and share the cultural and historical narratives of Biddulph Moor and the River Trent.
- Create materials that showcase local heritage.
- Develop heritage trails and cultural maps that make exploration accessible and engaging.
- Promote Stoke-on-Trent and its surroundings as a culturally rich destination with a rare industrial history.
- Engage residents in storytelling, performance and creative heritage projects.

Stakeholders:

- Local history groups (e.g. Biddulph Local History Society) for research and historical content.
- Local organisations and volunteers for local coordination and project input.
- Staffordshire County Council & Stoke-on-Trent City Council for strategic support and tourism links.
- Artists, writers and performers to provide creative vision and engagement.
- Heritage funders and Arts Council England for additional, potential funding.
- Schools and youth organisations for educational engagement.

Deliverables:

- Video and audio interviews, written materials for shared stories and lived experiences.
- Performances and digital stories.
- Trail maps, physical signage, QR-coded stops.
- Website updates, brochures, press releases.
- Local heritage days including a River Trent celebration.
- Learning packs, school-led exhibits.

Resources:

- Oral history and media recording equipment.
- Local historians and artists.
- Signage and print materials.
- Event planning and logistical support.
- Digital and marketing expertise.
- Volunteer coordination and training.

Potential Project 6 – Building on Previous Funding Bids

Building on previous grant funding bids that were unsuccessful is an opportunity for growth and refinement. One such participatory arts project in the Stoke Minster area previously applied for an Awards for All funding grant through the Green Network but this was unsuccessful.

The bid originally looked at linking up the River Trent footpath between Stoke and the old Victoria ground. The focus was on delivering outdoor nature activities such as bug hunting and nature trails. The original idea came from a member of the public, but the bid ultimately failed due to lack of community engagement.

Here's how this can be approached:

- **Review Feedback:** Use as a roadmap for improvement. Address the specific concerns and areas that were identified as weaknesses, then demonstrate how the future bid will adapt or change the approach.
- **Refine the Proposal:** Review the original proposal and refine it based on what has been learned. Strengthen the objectives, ensure the budget is clear and realistic and ensure the outcomes are SMART – specific, measurable, achievable and timely.
- **Highlight Progress:** Has there been any progress since the last application? If so highlight any new developments, partnerships, or successes that show momentum and growth. This demonstrates commitment.
- **Align with Funders' Priorities:** Revisit the funder's priorities and make sure the proposal clearly aligns with their goals.
- **Address Market Changes:** If there have been any shifts in the community or industry since the last bid, address these changes and show how the project is more relevant now.

Potential Project 7 – Access Rights, Land Ownership and Defined, Legal Responsibilities

A member of the Greenway Moor Women's Institute is aware of the owner of the field that contains the Trent Head Well. The Land Registry will confirm ownership of the land surrounding the Head Well.

Key Legislation and The Countryside Code

There are 2 pieces of UK Legislation that underpin access and rights of way to common land and footpaths. They are:

- **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000:** This is the main piece of legislation in England and Wales concerning rights of access and public footpaths.
- **The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981:** This act helps protect rights of way and makes provisions for the management of footpaths and bridleways.

In addition to these pieces of legislation, there is also The Countryside Code. This sets out the rules for visitors to the countryside to follow. For landowners, it includes rules and guidance about public rights of way, protecting livestock and keeping visitors safe.

Rights of Way Act (2000): This act made it possible for historical paths (often unrecorded) to be added to the Definitive Map.

Definitive Map and Statement: In England and Wales, there is a legal document called the "Definitive Map," which records the locations of public rights of way. Local authorities are responsible for maintaining and updating this map. The map shows where footpaths, bridleways and other public paths are located. The map helps prevent landowners from blocking access.

Blocking or obstructing a public right of way is an offence. The local council can enforce the removal of obstructions, and penalties may be imposed on landowners or others who prevent access.

Project Plan: Clarifying Land Ownership and Access Rights to Trent Head Well

Objectives:

- Confirm land ownership of the field and buildings around Trent Head Well.
- Identify whether a public right of way exists or can be legally established.
- Ensure any future access or development complies with legal responsibilities.
- Promote cooperation with landowner(s) using a collaborative approach.
- Reduce the risk of disputes, obstructions, or liabilities in future heritage or access projects in the location.

Stakeholders:

- The legal landowner will be a key party in access negotiations and land management.

- Staffordshire County Council – Rights of Way Team. This team maintains the Definitive Map and is responsible for enforcing rights of way.
- Biddulph Town Council and Residents Association for local engagement and oversight.
- Key voluntary groups such as the Ramblers Association for support with path verification and legal routes.
- Greenway Moor WI are local advocates who identified ownership concerns.
- Community residents who are interested users and will potentially maintain the heritage of the project upon completion.
- A legal adviser for legal interpretation and negotiation.

Deliverables:

- Official title documents and land boundaries.
- A report on the status of footpaths and bridleways.
- A summary report of the current legal situation.

Resources:

- Land Registry access. Please note there are costs for searches and copies of plans. - £3 per title or £7 for title with plan.
- Legal or rights of way expert.
- Mapping tools (OS map access).
- Meeting and engagement logistics.
- Volunteer community liaison (Greenway Moor WI are very engaged in the local area).

Potential Project 8 – Infrastructure

Concerns around the current lack of infrastructure for key spots in Biddulph and Biddulph Moor mean that an increase in visitor numbers may not be a great experience for residents and visitors.

- The car park in Knypersley is poor and insufficient for large vehicles and any increase in volumes of visiting traffic is a concern.

Project Plan: Infrastructure Improvement for Biddulph & Biddulph Moor

Objectives:

- Understand the changes required to local infrastructure, particularly transport and visitor facilities.
- Ensure the area is prepared for increased visitors without negatively impacting residents.

Stakeholders:

- Local authority (Staffordshire Moorlands District Council)
- Biddulph Town Council
- Residents and community groups

- Environmental agencies
- Additional funding (e.g. Levelling Up Fund)

Deliverables:

- Increase in positive visitor feedback.
- Reduction in parking-related complaints from residents.
- Improved resident feedback on infrastructure management.
- Increased usage of sustainable transport options.

Resources:

- Temporary signage whilst work is undertaken.
- Clear communication plan for residents when any work needed will begin and end.
- Green travel options provided to mitigate any impact (e.g. cycling infrastructure; car sharing; provision of buses).

Potential Project 9 - Urban Wilderness CIC

One group is keen to support an art trail along the river/canals/in green spaces to encourage people to engage with this spaces from a different perspective. They believe that this may also increase safety of the area through higher levels of usage.

Urban Wilderness would be interested in being written into funding bids and being active partners and / or participants – particularly around commissioning artwork and working with young people.

- Commissioning new artwork, potentially as an art trail along the river, would be great way of drawing attention to these spaces.
- Engaging urban communities in encouraging biodiversity – need to have ‘attractive’ species as a way to engage communities in protecting wildlife.
- Reintroduction of “interesting” animals like beavers. They have a “cute appeal” which could be used this to increase engagement in learning about habitats, food chains and build learning of broader ecosystems.

Anything mentioned by Urban Wilderness needs to be credited to them – specifically **Urban Wilderness CIC**.

Project Plan: An Urban Art & Nature Trail

Objectives:

- Reimagine public green spaces through a curated art trail that invites discovery and exploration of the green space(s).
- Promote community safety via increased public presence and ownership of the space.
- Commission quality public artwork that engages local artists and reflects community voices.

- Inspire biodiversity advocacy through interaction with species and ecological storytelling.
- Empower young people via creative participation, skills development and environmental learning.

Stakeholders:

- Creative Partner: Urban Wilderness CIC.
 - Commissioning artwork
 - Facilitating youth engagement
 - Ecological education and biodiversity interpretation
- Local Authorities and landowner(s).
- Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and local voluntary environmental groups.
- Local schools and youth groups.

Key Components

1. Art Trail Creation

- Commission a number of site-specific public artworks/installations.
- Artists will work with local residents and young people.
- Themes: rivers as lifelines, hidden wildlife, “rewilding” cities, urban myths & nature.

2. Community Co-Design and Youth Engagement

- Workshops led by Urban Wilderness CIC to involve young people in:
 - Concept development for installations
 - Eco-art techniques and storytelling
 - Biodiversity-themed design (e.g., animal sculptures, pollinator murals)

3. Biodiversity Education & Wildlife Interpretation

- Educational signage integrated into trail (QR codes, AR features, species ID guides).
- Highlight “attractive” species (e.g., beavers, otters, kingfishers) as emotional entry points to deeper learning.
- Events and talks on rewilding, urban habitats, and ecosystem dynamics.

4. Safety and Stewardship

- Promote higher footfall and passive surveillance to discourage antisocial behaviour.
- Volunteer “Trail Stewards” trained to support ongoing use and maintenance.
- Collaborate with local police and community safety officers.

Deliverables:

- Increased use of river and canal-side spaces.
- Providing a sense of community and pride in “ownership.”
- Paid commissions and skills development for local artists.
- Artistic and ecological education.
- Youth leadership opportunities.
- Greater public understanding of biodiversity, ecosystems, and conservation.
- Support for urban rewilding initiatives through community engagement and support from local groups.

Resources:

- Durable materials for permanent and semi-permanent public artworks (wood, metal, eco-friendly composites).
- Bases and foundations or plinths for installing any artworks.
- Lighting (solar-powered where possible) for highlighting art pieces and increasing safety.
- Trail signage (waymarkers for public guidance, interpretation boards, QR code plaques).
- Seating, planters, or environmental design features to enhance usability and comfort.
- Funding for artists and experts in the various fields.

Potential Project 10 - Groundwork West Midlands Weir Hydro Project

One group was interested in a potential community energy programme for a weir hydro project. They believe that any future project for the River Trent could utilise a potentially usable weir at Spode in Stoke on Trent.

An existing 'Congleton Hydro Community Energy Power' is a new hydro-electric scheme and now powers the Siemens factory in Congleton. The weir in Stoke on Trent could learn from the opportunities this project produced. See the website below for more details:

[Introducing the DVCE Congleton Hydro project - Congleton Hydro](#)

Objectives:

- Assess the feasibility of hydroelectric generation at the Spode weir.
- Develop a community-owned, renewable energy scheme.
- Generate sustainable, low-carbon electricity for local use or sale to the grid.
- Utilise the learning and then replicate the successful elements of the Congleton Hydro model.
- Engage the local community in green energy and climate resilience.

Stakeholders:

- Groundwork West Midlands are interested in becoming potential project leads.
- Local community groups and interested residents.
- Congleton Hydro Community Energy Power to ensure provision of peer learning and mentoring for the new project.
- Local Authority (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) for planning and policy support.
- Environmental consultants and engineers for technical expertise.
- Additional funders (e.g. Community Energy Funds, local council) for further project financing.

Deliverables:

- Renewable energy generation through a functioning, hydro system.

- Community co-ownership and financial benefit-sharing.
- Increased local awareness of climate and energy issues and the community support needed to make effective change.
- Another transferable model for future community hydro projects.

Resources:

- Technical and engineering expertise.
- Community and local council engagement and support.
- Financial support from interested groups.
- Potentially, highly specialised equipment.
- Electricity network operator engagement and support.
- Legal and infrastructure advice.

Potential Project 11 – Reopen Sprink Tunnel – Biddulph to Biddulph Moor

Reopen the tunnel in Biddulph Country Park that leads onto the moor. The collapsed tunnel is accessed off Woodhouse Lane but the council have sealed both ends due to the collapse. The footpath used to run through the tunnel but now skirts around it. There is a beautiful archway and there may be other, unique and interesting architectural features. For reference, a “Sprink” is a mischievous hobgoblin or sprite.

The links below provide more background to the tunnel closure and visuals:

[Local History – Biddulph – The Garden Town of Staffordshire](#)
[In search of a secret tunnel. | ludchurch](#)
[Sprink Tunnel. | ludchurch](#)

The local history group have not directly engaged with the community engagement activity undertaken during this phase of the project but a member who attended the Greenway Moor WI meeting on the 15th April at Biddulph Town Hall has indicated that they would be interested in potentially supporting any future project.

Objectives:

- Assess the structural condition of the tunnel and establish feasibility of safe restoration.
- Reopen the footpath route through the tunnel to restore historic pathway.
- Preserve and celebrate the tunnel’s heritage and folklore associations.
- Improve accessibility and encourage greater use of Biddulph Country Park.
- Engage the local community in the restoration process and interpretation of the site.

Stakeholders:

- Local authority (Staffordshire Moorlands District Council), landowner and planning authority.
- Friends of Biddulph Country Park and local history group(s).

- Heritage and conservation experts who understand the materials needed for an effective restoration.
- Local schools and arts groups.
- Additional funders (e.g. Historic England).

Deliverables:

- Safe and restored pedestrian access through the tunnel.
- Increased visitor use and enjoyment of Biddulph Country Park.
- Greater awareness of local history and folklore.
- Enhanced green infrastructure and active travel routes.

Resources:

- Technical experts (e.g. structural engineers, legal and planning experts).
- Specialist contractors and machinery.
- Local volunteers and groups with a special interest.
- Additional funding opportunities (e.g. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council).

12. Potential Project Extensions:

Additional ideas include:

- Sports and fitness programs (e.g., paddleboarding, wild swimming).
- Community clean-up and greening initiatives.
- Engaging schools and youth in environmental stewardship.
- Arts trails, forest bathing, and inclusive activities for underserved groups.

4.2

Major Themes

A number of themes consistently featured during the engagement activities. Examples of these are:

- Work with local schools and youth service providers to develop a programme to educate children.
- Encourage involvement with volunteer groups and involvement with tree and bulb planting, litter picking.
- Encourage local residents to have pride in their local area which will in turn “create security” as they have invested their time and energy in their local spaces.
 - This will encourage a feeling of community and that local green spaces are everyone’s responsibility. This feedback was reflected across a number of engagement activities.

All engagement activities with children, their parents and carers reflected a keen desire to “get them involved” and to “get them moving.”

- Sports and fitness activities to increase use of the river and green spaces such as paddle boarding, wild swimming, and green gyms.

- Community clean-up projects. Dog litter and mess appeared at almost every community engagement activity.
- Remove the stigma of groups of young people “hanging around” as there are few places for them to go and be safe.

It was felt to be important to make visitors feel informed and welcome.

- Produce information packs for visitors and people moving to Stoke-on-Trent and surrounding areas. Particularly for refugees and asylum seekers.
- ASHA provide information packs to people new to the area and could include some translated information about how to access local green spaces, some information on local history and heritage etc.

5. Conclusions

- There is strong potential to use public art trails to enhance community engagement with underutilised natural spaces such as rivers, canals, and green corridors.
 - Partnering with local “green” groups and networks presents a valuable opportunity to integrate artistic commissioning with environmental education, particularly through youth involvement.
- Leveraging charismatic, local birds and wildlife (e.g., beavers and wading birds) as part of biodiversity campaigns can be a powerful tool to spark public interest in broader conservation that is not perceived as easily accessible to the lay person.
- Any future funding bids should formally include key groups as key delivery partners and credit them for their concepts and contributions.
- Whilst there is interest for a community-led hydroelectric scheme at the Spode weir in Stoke-on-Trent, inspired by the successful Congleton Hydro model.
 - A more detailed feasibility study is required as the costs involved in a project of this type may mean additional funding is required from other sources.
 - This may mean this project falls outside this National Lottery bid if the funding for a project of this type becomes prohibitive when weighed against other project opportunities.
 - The project presents a compelling opportunity to generate clean energy, reduce carbon emissions, and enable local ownership of energy assets.
- For a number of projects, early engagement with technical consultants, regulatory bodies, and local stakeholders is crucial to address environmental, structural and planning requirements.
- Securing diverse funding sources and learning directly from other successful initiatives and projects will enhance the success and sustainability of any projects undertaken in future.
- A number of projects have high community, heritage and environmental value, with potential to enhance community connectivity and increase footfall in green spaces such as Biddulph Country Park.
- Structural and environmental assessments are required to determine the feasibility and scope of any restoration projects e.g. Sprink Tunnel.

- Community interest and the folklore link to the “Sprink” sprite offer unique opportunities for heritage interpretation, storytelling, and educational engagement.

Authored by Support Staffordshire Research and Engagement Team:

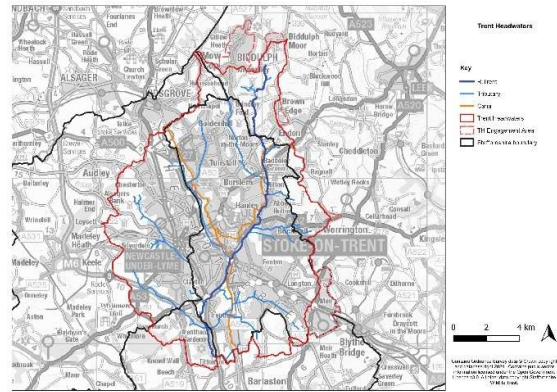
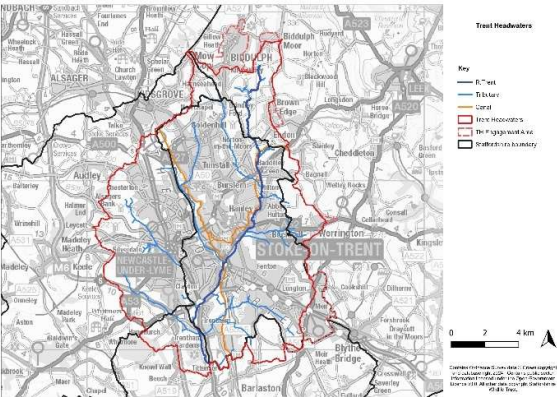
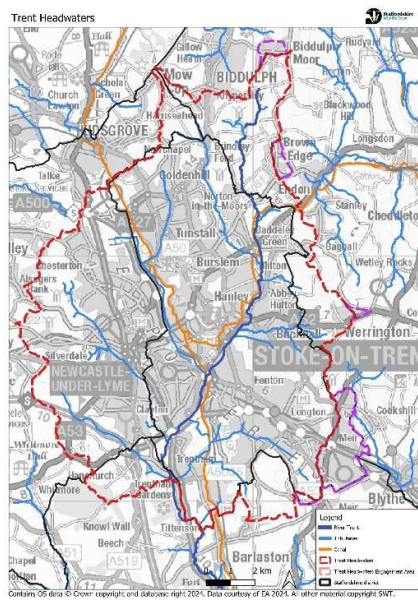
Michelle Vodden, Research and Engagement Manager
 Siobhon Hayes, Engagement and Research Officer
 Kezia Liddle, Support and Volunteering Project Officer'

With thanks to:

Blaze Trail	Trentham Boat Club	Father Hudson's Young at Heart Group
Biddulph Youth and Community Zone – Warm Space	New Vic Theatre	Biddulph Guides
Dyslexia Association of Staffordshire	Asha	Biddulph Moor Community Association
Newcastle Mental Health Group	Totally Stoked	Cerebral Palsy Social Group
Biddulph Youth and Community Zone – Youth Club	Port Vale Football Club	Farming and Landowners Social Group
Greenway Moor WI	Headway North Staffs	Bolton Gate Farm
Festival Stoke	Urban Wilderness CIC	Biddulph Town Hall
Community Share Network	The Dudson Centre	

Appendices

Appendix 1: Maps used during community engagement events and interviews



Appendix 2: Graphics used in promotional materials



Appendix 3: Images from the VAST Conference



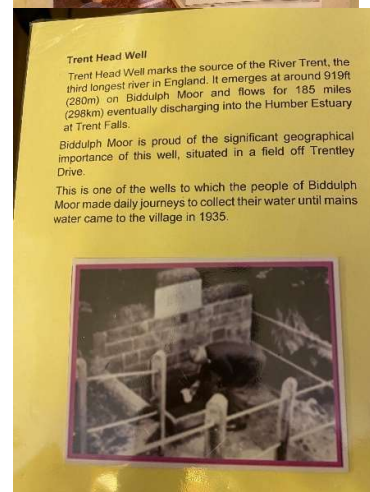
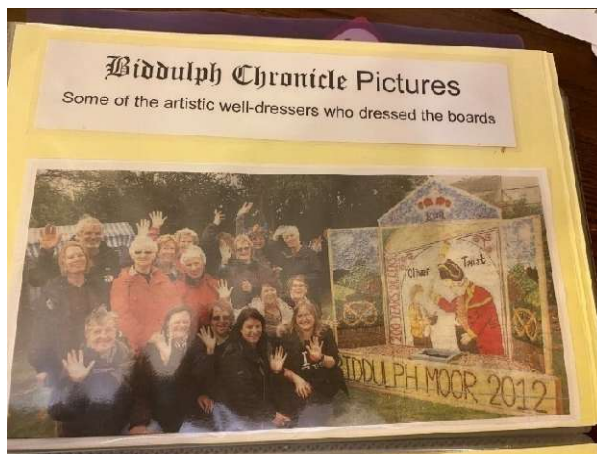
Agenda	
9:30 am	Registration and Networking Sign-in, refreshments, and breakfast
10:00 am	Welcome and Introductions with the Hosts and Stephen G. Smith
10:30 am	Asset-Based Community Development with Doris Hyle, VASA North Suburbia
11:00 am	Morning Workshops
	Building Community Engagement
	Building Partnerships for Sustainable Community Development
12:40 pm	Lunch Break Lunch, refreshments, and networking
1:30 pm	People-Led Change with Rebecca Smith, The Portland Inn Project
2:30 pm	Afternoon Workshops
	Identifying and Maximizing Community Assets
	Building Resilience in Communities
4:00 pm	Q & A Session and closing remarks



4 | Page



Appendix 5: Images from Biddulph Moor Residents Association Well Dressing, Father Hudson Group and Greenway Moor WI



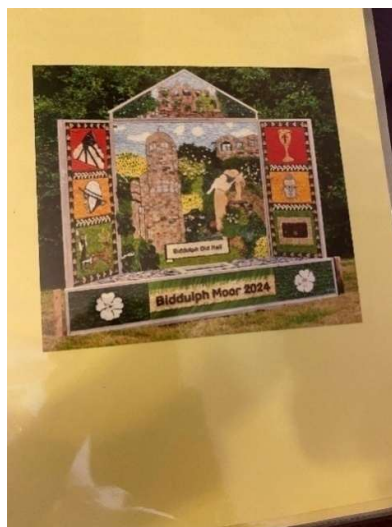


We are proud to be listed on the foremost website detailing all the well dressings within Derbyshire, Staffordshire and beyond

welldressing.com
All about Well Dressing in the Derbyshire tradition

Well Dressing Events 2022

May 25	June 1	Middletown by Yougrave
	Dedication: May 26, 6.30p.m.	
	Making: May 19 to 24, during the day	
May 25	June 1	Mossyash
	Dedication: May 25, 2.00p.m. (TBC)	
	Making: May 21 to 24, evening	
June 9	June 16	Cresbrook
June 15 (afternoon)	June 16	Chester Green
	Dedication: June 15, 2.00p.m.	
June 15	June 22	Biddulph Moor
	Dedication: June 15, 2.00p.m.	
	Making: June 13 to 14, 10.00a.m. to 5.00p.m.	
June 15	June 22	Edgerton Winstan
	Dedication: June 15, 2.00p.m. (TBC)	
	Making: June 10 to 14, various times	
June 15	June 22	Flash
	Dedication: June 15, 2.00p.m.	
On June 15 (afternoon)		Buxton
	Making: June 14, 11.00a.m. to 3.00p.m.	



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

2020/21: Well-dressing suspended due to the Coronavirus Pandemic –

During these two years four members of the well dressing team worked independently to decorate a small board each related to the pandemic.

These were placed on the village green garden on the date that would have been Well Dressing Day to maintain continuity.



Appendix 6: Word Cloud from Participants Quotes



Word cloud of
quotes.pdf

I'm not sure about the local wildlife but I would like to learn

Tell me about the wildlife I see

Tell me about sights and sounds

I'm proud of where I come from

I love living here

I want it to be better

There's no history in Biddulph

The Big Lottery helped the community to build the community centre

I want to have fun

I want to be able to talk to my children about the wildlife and trees

It's easier to think of places that join the canal than the river

Need to publish exactly where the River Trent starts

Need to publish the importance of Biddulph Moor watershed

Reinstate old wells and springs

Educate us on the things that are of historical note

We want to be involved in citizen science projects

Health and Mental Wellbeing staff are always encouraging us to “get outdoors and get some sunlight!”

Apedale is special but needs facilities

Appendix 7: Community Engagement Consultation Notes