REPORT 6: Cheviot Hills Heritage Project

1. Purpose of Report
   a. To inform members and seek approval for the Cheviot Hills Heritage Project, setting out the context of the project, work completed to date and next steps.

2. Recommendations
   a. Members are requested to note the progress made to date in establishing the case for the project, to agree its scope (including its geographic coverage) and to approve the release of funding for the next steps.

3. Implications
   a. Financial: A further drawdown from a private donation already made to the Authority via the Northumberland National Park Foundation will be required to progress the project further. There is no net impact to the Authority’s budget or resources in delivering this project.
   b. Equalities: None.
   c. Link to Business Plan: This project arises out of Aim 2: Deliver a new project to enhance access to, understanding of and community engagement with the unique historic environment of the Cheviot Hills. This was one of the projects identified as requiring additional resources and capacity to be taken forward in the current Business Plan period.

4. Background
   a. As part of the 2017-2021 Business Plan, the Authority had an ambition to deliver a new project to enhance access to, understanding of and community engagement with the unique historic environment of the Cheviot Hills. In a report considered by members in December 2017 it was acknowledged that this and a number of other ambitions within the Business Plan would only be realised through additional resources. Seed funding (from philanthropic fundraising) has been secured for the project, some of which was released for three necessary first steps in the process of project development:
      - To complete the assessment and to publish the results of the Breamish Valley Archaeology Project;
      - To commission a Scoping Study; and
      - To bring together members of the academic, commercial and local communities to establish the level of interest in and direction of the project.
   b. In pursuance of these tasks, an agreement was reached with Durham University Archaeological Services to enable the outstanding assessment and publication work for the Breamish Valley Project (up to 2004) and Oracle Heritage Services commissioned to prepare the scoping study and lead on the hosting of research workshops held at The Sill in November 2018 and in Wooler in May 2019.
   c. The new project provides opportunities to extend the legacy of previous projects, particularly the Discovering Our Hillfort Heritage project which created a legacy of understanding, public access and informed management of the hillforts of Northumberland National Park. The Cheviot Hills Heritage Project has established a high level of interest in and willingness to engage with heritage across the English and Scottish Cheviot Hills. This has created a platform for further work aimed at a deeper understanding of these hillforts within their landscape contexts, and the opportunities for a new project, across both sides of the border, are significant.
5. Research case
   a. The Cheviot Hills contain some of the most distinctive archaeological landscapes seen anywhere in Britain. These represent 10,000 years of human activity, from the first people to set foot in the hills to the generations of farmers and land managers who look after the landscape today. For all the work which has taken place on both sides of the border, there are places where the landscape is poorly recorded, and in others poorly understood. The collection of cairns, hillforts, cultivation remains, farmsteads, towers, bastles, battlefields and routeways all deserved of primary research relating to the Research Frameworks for both areas. This in turn offers extensive opportunities for interpretation and public engagement with the historic environment.

6. Current situation
   a. Consultation and two project workshops have demonstrated widespread support amongst the academic, professional and local communities for an ambitious archaeological project in the Cheviot Hills. There was consensus for high level objectives for the project, investigating, recording and celebrating the link between land, people and environment over time. Focus on prehistory was popular, perhaps reflecting the character of the known historic environment and the research interests of those who attended the second workshop in particular. The exercise concluded that a landscape approach was preferred, avoiding bias towards any one period and allowing for an holistic look at the story of humans in the landscape, at a catchment scale.

   b. Consensus was also achieved regarding:
      - High quality research and inclusivity should be core aims of the project;
      - The inclusion of better access and interpretation of the historic environment for as wide a range of groups as possible, built into the project and not simply a product at the end.

   c. There was also a strong consensus for developing a cross-border project, for several reasons:
      - The character of the historic environment both sides of the border have much in common. For example, the Iron Age in the Cheviot Hills has more in common with Iron Age Scotland than the Iron Age of Southern Britain, extending over a longer period to 300 or 500 AD. The language used to describe this period changes at the political border, not reflecting the character of the landscape and historic environment.
      - How the border has influenced the character, resilience, identity and culture of its people;
      - Land use and landscape character have more in common both sides of the border and opportunities for comparison, better enhancing our understanding of the problems and opportunities of historic land management over time;
      - Fostering a culture of genuine partnership and collaboration: This makes project delivery more complex but more rewarding and creating a stronger legacy. It also creates a project attractive to a wider range of funders.

   d. The second workshop concluded with a recommendation to establish an advisory panel to lead on strategic decisions including the selection of areas for detailed investigation. This group should be inclusive, empowered to make recommendations to the project managers and meet only when necessary, making best use of email, telephone and video conferencing.
e. A wider environmental approach was also welcomed, to include research and training in techniques of environmental archaeology, identifying pollen sites for investigation and analysis early on in the project in order to define a study area around its environmental potential. Too often pollen analysis is seen as a bolt-on to projects focused on upstanding archaeological remains. The benefit of this approach could tell us much about the changing landscape through time, while also being relevant to the issue of climate change in upland landscapes.

f. In addition to the identification of pollen sites, the project should begin with aerial photographic and LIDAR survey and mapping. This would produce a comprehensive map of the chosen study areas which would inform decisions regarding ground based fieldwork.

g. It is crucial that landowners support the project, and they have been consulted at an early stage. Much of the proposed project area (on the English side) is owned by a small number of key landowners who have in the past expressed interest in archaeology. They will be consulted throughout the proposed development phase, and 'in principle' consent sought for work on their land.

h. In terms of the project’s long-term legacy, consideration will be given not only of the enhanced understanding of the historic environment (enabling more efficient landscape management), but also public interest in Cheviot heritage and more generally in enhanced public well-being. The project would contribute to better interpretive provision in the Cheviots, and the potential for activities and exhibitions, within the Cheviots (Wooler, Ingram and Rothbury) and also further afield, for example at The Sill, Great North Museum and National Museum of Scotland.

7. Next Steps

a. Having scoped the project and confirmed support for the concept it is proposed to take forward a project design to a Phase 1 funding bid. The focus on landscape, heritage and community engagement would make this a good fit for the current National Lottery Heritage Fund priorities, though other funding sources have been identified in the scoping study, including Research Council funding through partnerships with Higher Education Institutions.

b. Staff capacity within the Authority is limited and has in the past year been displaced in delivering the Traditional Farm Building Scheme. Additional staff capacity is therefore required to take the project forward.

c. The next step to move the project forward is to increase staff capacity to produce an expression of interest in sufficient detail as to support early discussions with the National Lottery Heritage Fund bid and matched funding from Universities, heritage agencies, relevant grant giving trusts and societies and from private donations. We believe we have sufficient evidence for a fundable project but need guidance from NLHF before proceeding further. Additional capacity is required for the Expression of Interest submission prior to the preparation of a bid for a development phase.

d. During the development phase a project advisory panel should be convened to oversee the research case and selection of project areas for the “landscape laboratories”. It will develop a GIS resource collating all existing information contained within the relevant Historic Environment Records to target those catchments according to research potential, gaps in understanding, potential threats, accessibility and potential for improved interpretation. The development phase will also identify a series of project proposals based on the research questions and techniques recommended by the scoping study.

e. The development phase bid should set out the outcomes and outputs of the project and the tasks required to achieve them, setting out stages and a timetable for
delivery. This phase should contain sufficient detail required to obtain necessary permissions, consents and funding.

f. The project needs to be taken forward in line with the Authority’s strategic vision for the Cheviot Hills area.

8. **Budget and Timescale**

a. The funding required in the next development phase is likely to exceed £100,000 for a project of this size and scope, and the main project is likely to require up to £5 million to deliver.

b. The National Lottery Heritage Fund has regular deadlines for projects of this size, the next deadline for applications is 19 November, on the assumption that we would have submitted a successful Expression of Interest. A more realistic deadline is 2 March 2020 for a decision by the end of June 2020, with an anticipated start date in September 2020. This would allow for the completion and final evaluation of The Sill project prior to the formal recruitment of a Development Officer to develop the project and prepare the submission for the delivery phase.

c. This timescale would fit with delivery and publication of the Breamish Valley project before the end of March 2020.

d. The additional capacity to take the project to a funded Development Phase can be achieved by drawing down a further £30,000 from the donation already received to be spent on consultancy fees, further meetings and events. Some in kind staff time is required from the Director of Park Management and Historic Environment Officer to provide oversight and lead on discussions with funding bodies. This pre-development phase activity should include site visits for those who attended the workshop discussions.

9. **Conclusions**

a. Significant progress has been made in the development of this project from an outline idea to a firm project proposal. This includes the conclusion and publication of the Authority led Breamish Valley Archaeological Project and establishing a strong public appetite for a new project in the Cheviot Hills.

b. In view of the expectations among the academic, commercial and local communities and in the light of limited staff capacity, further funding is required to be drawn down from the existing private donation to take the project forward in line with the programme set out in this paper.

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**Background papers:**
Final scoping study report (updated July 2019)