



Executive Summary

The SaltscapE

SaltscapE is a £1.4million landscape partnership project made up of the community, the public sector, voluntary organisations and the private sector working together to celebrate, protect and enhance the post-industrial salt landscape of the Weaver Valley in Cheshire, a landscape that is rare both nationally and internationally. It will run for just over three years starting in July 2014.

The rich and often unique features within the salt landscape have developed as a result of the underlying geology in the area, nature establishing over millennia, man's exploitation and management of the local resources, associated development, and nature's adaptation to the on-going changes. Until recently, this important landscape was not fully recognised or valued. There has been a groundswell of interest from many people and organisations to change this. The SaltscapE partnership is part of this movement and it sits alongside other action such as the Anderton Boat Lift renovation, Weaver Valley Initiative, restoration of the Lion Salt Works, Middlewich Heritage Programme and the Northwich Townscape Heritage Initiative.

Threats to the salt landscape

There are a number of risks which threaten many valuable and unique features in the salt landscape as well as the history and memories associated with it. The partners have assessed these risks and believe that if action is not taken now, some of these features will be lost and the heritage of the area will gradually disappear both physically and in the collective consciousness of the community. The risks include:

- Unmanaged habitats and a lack of knowledge of how to manage these habitats leading to the reduction or loss of those unique habitats and the associated flora and fauna
- Climate change and associated flooding which could be exacerbated by more development that could threaten habitats
- A lack of records which could be used in the planning process given developmental pressures
- Invasive species that are threatening and encroaching on native habitats
- Important built structures falling into disrepair, which may become unsafe and therefore lost
- A lack of awareness and therefore interest in the loss of these features
- Education not using the local characteristics and history of the area to bring the curriculum to life and engender understanding, respect and enthusiasm for it
- A disconnect with and lack of pride for what has shaped the towns and communities in the area
- Restricted access to many of the areas and a lack of information about it which minimises the chances for people to interact with it and understand it

Developing the response to the threats

The core partners saw these threats as a challenge and over the last few years have:

- Developed, expanded and strengthened the partnership and developed a Community Forum
- Reviewed research and knowledge about the area and carried out surveys and consultation to better inform the actions that need to be taken and the people we need to target
- Refined the programme of works.

These steps mean that the partners are now ready to achieve their ambition to mitigate the risks that could lead to a loss or reduction of the natural, built and cultural heritage of the area.

The Saltscapes Vision

In response to the threats a vision was developed, and it states that the partners will:

- Protect, restore, enhance and manage this unique place as one environment
- Reconnect the community's relationship with their landscapes, heritage and history
- Make the area a better place to work, live and visit.

The Actions

There are four broad programmes with associated and complementary actions which will raise awareness and use local skills and volunteers to enhance the salt landscape.

- 1) **SALT LEGACY** will restore, enhance and protect the natural and built features that salt affected. We will help bring local wildlife sites and nature reserves into positive management, and will conserve ancient woodland along the Saltscapes incised valleys. Vulnerable species like water vole will be targeted during some of our habitat improvements, and we aim to improve water quality via reedbed works. We will also repair and restore the built heritage features that arose as a direct result of the salt industry so that they are not lost to the landscape, including the Vale Royal Locks Walkway, Anderton Boat Lift Toll Buildings, Three Locks in Middlewich. To leave these features in capable trained hands we will raise awareness of archaeological skills in local communities using professional archaeological techniques.
- 2) **SALT PEOPLE** will engage with and develop the specialist and organisational skills of community volunteers and community groups so that they build a strong and supportive network and continue to enhance, protect, manage and celebrate the area, and contribute to and take responsibility for the area in the long term. We will facilitate and promote heritage festivals, use interactive social media, technology and arts to encourage wide participation in Saltscapes. We will carry out geodiversity audits with the community and run geology conferences so that specialists and amateurs can understand the unique geology that shapes the land. Similarly, we will give conservation advice to landowners in the salt landscape to improve, enhance and ensure on-going management of habitats and heritage features.
- 3) **SALT WAY** will ensure that the salt landscape will be more accessible, better signed and interpreted, recognisably branded and experienced by more people. We will provide, improve and interpret a network of key access routes with the community. We will also provide opportunities for local schoolchildren and adults to experience the routes and the features and history associated with them. We will run school sessions linked to water-based routes and will link this to education programmes which will explain and help interpret the built and natural environments. We will organise a series walks and talks to explore Saltscapes's important and unique geodiversity and habitats. To support this we will also develop written materials and social media to help people explore the salt landscape.
- 4) **SALT SKILLS** will develop specialist skills and enthusiasm in the community that complements the Salt People programme. Our traineeship staff will embrace Saltscapes, become ambassadors and learn heritage/conservation/community sector skills and we will support them to use these skills in the area after their traineeship. We will provide training in traditional heritage skills such as lime mortaring, and these skills will enable people to assist with the renovation and maintenance of buildings and consolidate the legacy of these specialist features. Survey techniques, wildlife watching and recording and cataloguing skills will be developed and used to update records which will be an essential resource for education and for protecting the landscape. We will run sessions in traditional local folk crafts by providing courses in 'Roses and Castles' canal artwork, so promoting use of Saltscapes. To further encourage the interest generated we will provide local history research sessions, enabling local people to look at their recent past, the salt legacy and the way forward.

The Legacy

Through all the above actions, we will, by the end of the three years, have improved many features and the access to the area. We will have built a network of skilled, practical, knowledgeable, motivated and enthusiastic people. This partnership, with strong leadership, will be coordinated and it will be able to continue maintaining the works done and seek new funding to do complementary works in the salt landscape. The partnership will also be able to enthuse, train and engage others in what they have discovered and nurtured, and will find others who can help them from other areas.