

## Project Number : C4 Visitor Experience – Access for All at Three Sisters



**Project Overview:** The provision of innovative interpretation materials and signage for the proposed Flashes Visitor Centre. The Centre will provide a significant visitor attraction where the Carbon Landscape story will be able to be told in an inspiring way. The natural and cultural heritage of the landscape will provide an engaging visitor experience and the Centre will provide a lasting legacy.

**Project lead organisation and other organisations involved:** Wigan Council

**Project Location:** Three Sisters Access for All

**Project dates:** Completed early 2020

### Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
Design and install a range of new interpretation	Some	5 AO lectern 1 braille 1 oak monolith 30 waymarks	
<b>Additional outputs delivered</b>			
Anything unexpected or additional outputs!			This was originally meant to be in Westwood paid for by the new road. However, the road was delayed so this was Plan B Three Sisters paid significantly for by FCC Communities (Formerly Wren Landfill Tax)
Designed through a process of co-production with disability organisations		24	Notable disability organisations Leonard Cheshire Disability, The Hamlet (training provision for 19-25 year olds on Three Sisters), Thrive who installed the gabion here, More Than Words CIC who did the original access audit
New wheelchair accessible paths including bridges over a brook		3km	A huge asset to the community of people living with disabilities including profound disabilities as there is a hoist accessible toilet.
Trails – Lakeside, Wildlife rubbing, Enchanted tree trail, Wildlife and Heritage Audio Trail, Bird Hide and Wetlands		5	

Trail installation and wheel chair accessible picnic benches co-produced		Multiple	Installation was done “in house” with the support of the CL support officer Steve Ormerod, volunteers and Nomad Rangers CIC.
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## Reflecting on the last 5 years, what’s the one thing that you’re most proud of that has come from your project being part of the Carbon Landscape?

There are two perspectives on greatest achievements. Firstly, from the infrastructure design point of view Mark Champion (Wigan Manager Lancashire Wildlife Trust) and Martin Purcell (Greenheart Officer Wigan Council) became “designers” when FCC Foundation afforded £139,000 in a short space of time, whilst adhering to Construction (Design and Management) Regulations. The wheelchair accessible bridges are special. As Mark says “there is a lot of learning in designing and delivering bridges. We are also part of the Wigan Community so professional upskilling is important.”

An ethos of “Access for All” has enabled 3km of wheelchair accessible pathways at Three Sisters “it requires a lot of landscaping to get the gradient curve for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. The team and the contractors had to work with the coal spoil to create sweeping curves to enable wheelchairs access to the whole site. These have now influenced ways of working within Wigan Council.”

Jenny Griggs (Sense of Place Co-ordinator) oversaw the community, arts and culture trail aspects.

“You only need to look at the Friends of Three Sisters facebook page just to see how impactful the project has been, and I would say a career highlight for me. Even on my own friends’ facebook timelines it is always getting name-checked and photos of children, in particular, having joyous experiences on what was once three spoil heaps. It is a fantastic achievement from the 1970s moonscape of devastation to the now obvious place to go for first experiences in nature connection for generations to come. I am particularly proud of the mining storytelling, because that heritage was at risk of being lost and the nature storytelling from primary aged children around the enchanted tree trail. If I can say I brought anything to the party it was enabling the re-interpretation of local heritage in an inclusive way, bringing in previously unheard voices to the landscape.”

## What difference has this project made to the cultural and natural heritage of Carbon Landscape?

Crown lifting trees, path surfacing and a localised Sustainable Drainage scheme (SuDs) along the main path has increased the ability to enjoy scenic spots and viewpoints suitable for benches, sculpture and interpretation, enhancing the visitors experience on site. This project was devised under the banner of “Access for All” including people living with profound disabilities and incorporates the sensory aspects of nature. However, one of the side benefits of the SuDs is that it has produced an embankment in which wildflowers can grow with marsh orchids already making an appearance.

The trails incorporate a range of habitats captured in the podcast narrated by 12-year-old Emily “Why I love Three Sisters” [www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/love-wildlife](http://www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/love-wildlife) co-written with the Friends of Three Sisters.

“If I come here in every season I can see every type of mammal. In Spring hares box each other for a mate. In summer a rabbit perches on her back legs to check for predators as a buzzard swoops over her. As Autumn draws in the hedgehog scurries around at night to get as much food before hibernation. In Winter the fox’s red coat against the snow is a scene from Narnia.”

Part of the work has involved visitor zonation especially ensuring that where the willow tits nest (Britain’s rarest non-migratory bird and the emblematic species of the Carbon Landscape) could not be disturbed. Outside the well-loved bird feeding station, where people traffic is encouraged, is the willow tit interpretation and an opportunity to listen to a willow tit guided meditation podcast.

The works have allowed a wider range of recreational activities to occur on site and with greater ease. An increase in community engagement with the site and over a larger area will in turn help to reduce anti-social behaviour. This will be achieved through a greater presence on site and more eyes to increase the frequency of live reports. However, the works have been done in such a way that nature is protected and can be viewed from the paths and viewing points. It proves to be an excellent case-study around addressing the competing needs of nature and people.

## What difference has this project made to people?

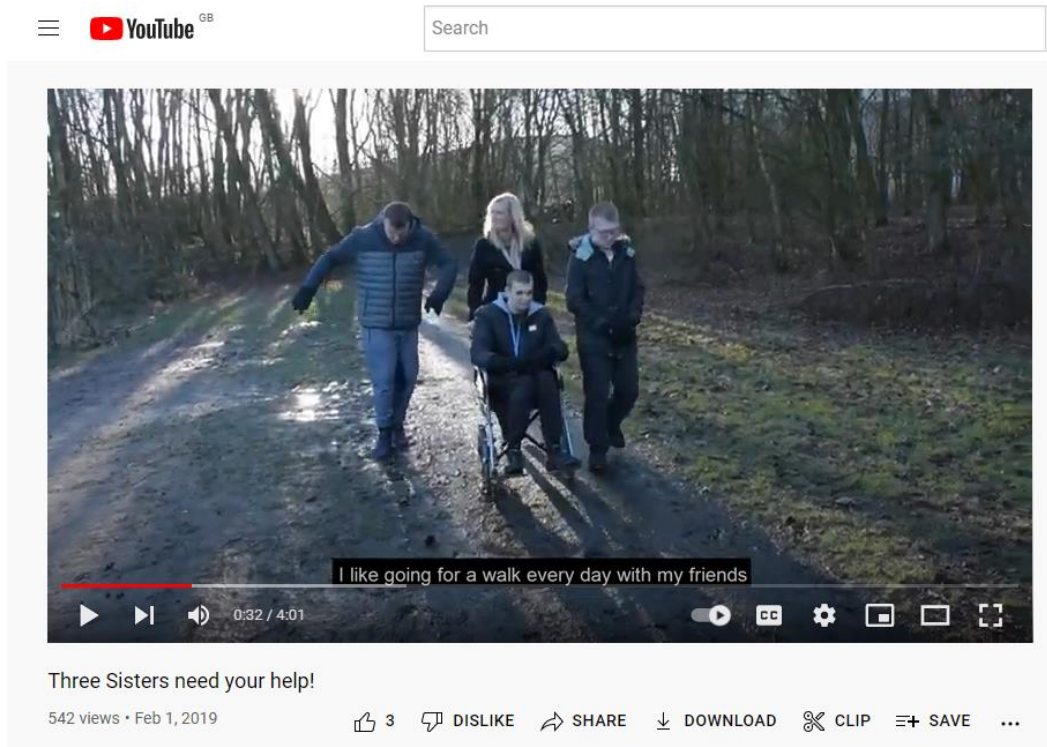
“The Friends of Three Sisters are delighted with the work carried out on the site. The resurfaced paths are saving us lots of heavy maintenance work. The trails around the site are encouraging visitors to use and see more of the site and find out about its history and the nature to be found on the site. Many visitors used to go to the lake area and playground only and now they follow the trails and learn more about the site from the information boards. We have had many appreciative comments from visitors and so you can say this was a job well done. Thank you to all involved.”

Joy Winstanley, Secretary of Friends of Three Sisters.

The two existing footbridges over the brook have been removed and replaced to make these structures more accessible in line with the Equality Act 2010. Paths to link the bridges to the trail have also been modified at a gradient not greater than 1 in 12 for improved access for families with pushchairs, the elderly and people with mobility difficulties. Both bridges have been widened to facilitate wheelchair access and have been constructed with concrete abutments and using FRP (fibre reinforced recycled fire retardant plastic). The existing timber boardwalk to the pond and dipping platforms were in a poor condition and unsafe to use and too narrow to allow access in a wheelchair. The old boardwalk has been removed and completely rebuilt from FRP. The path improvement works through the area of wet woodland and fen allow access to the bridges to provide a circular trail around the reserve.

This project was broadly envisioned years beforehand with the amazing Friends of Three Sisters wanting to ensure that the story of Garswood Hall Colliery was captured. Simultaneously disability groups, notably with the support of the Hamlet and Leonard Cheshire Disability supported the whole process from access audits, a crowd fundraiser, co-design to even help with the installation

of public artworks. In particular Sam (Hamlet) and Viv's (Friends of Three Sisters) stories highlighted issues experienced by people with mobility issues. Viv, a well-loved member of the Friends group, subsequently passed away so it is an amazing testimony to his love of the place and his influence on the bridges [https://youtu.be/ys\\_RQwBkuhs](https://youtu.be/ys_RQwBkuhs)



Members of the Hamlet helping with the crowd funder. Credit Wigan Council.

After the contractors had finished, Friends of Three Sisters alongside the Disability groups (enabled by Sandra Hardingham of Leonard Cheshire Disability – Can Do Programme) came together to help with the installation of the post trails and fill the gabion hare. They also helped with the content for the five AO lectern interpretation boards including

- Introduction to the Carbon Landscape
- Willow tits
- Garswood Hall Colliery
- Pond creatures
- Minibeasts

and an Oak Monolith to show the Augmented Reality App trail so visitors can see the wildlife “pop out” in front of their eyes.

With the heritage aspects, Friends of Three Sisters Ian Winstanley wrote a short history of coal mining as he was worried this information would be lost on his bookshelf. Local people with strong Wigan accents came together and went into the recording studio to create an audio trail of real testimonies from the men, women and children who worked in the Wigan and Leigh coal mines starting with the 1842 Royal Commission, some of which shocked a Victorian England. There are also tastefully done stories of surviving a mining disaster and a day in the life of a coal miner and pit brow lass. Finally, year 3 of St Peters, Primary School, Bryn helped design the enchanted tree trail and wrote the “folklore tales” for the accompanying leaflet.

## Useful Links

Wildlife Rubbing Trail up and around Arena Hill (one of the previous coal spoil heaps)

[www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/brass-rubbing-trail](http://www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/brass-rubbing-trail)

Enchanted Tree Trail enabled young children ID and to learn about the folklore of trees:

[www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/enchanted-tree-trail-stories](http://www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/enchanted-tree-trail-stories)

- oak – the god or king tree in celtic folklore
- beech – the goddess or queen tree in celtic folklore
- ash – the holding the universe together: in Viking (Norse) folklore
- Willow – the healer: the bark contains an element that can kill pain.
- Aspen – the warrior: used to make shields by celtic warriors in battle
- silver birch – the wolf tree: first after the ice age when wolves roamed Britain

This starts with a large xylophone to “call the fairies and goblins”.

The Wildlife and Heritage Audio Trail brough local re-enactments, a guided meditation around the secret life of willow tits and a child’s view as to why she loves three sisters.

Heritage Booklet [Three Sisters Heritage Booklet | Carbon Landscapes](#)

Timewalk of Three Sisters [www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/three-sisters-timewalk](http://www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/three-sisters-timewalk)

Women and Children in the Mines [Early Victorian Re-enactment | Carbon Landscapes](#)

A Day in the Life of a Miner and a Pit Brow Lass [Mines | Carbon Landscapes](#) To accompany this video <https://youtu.be/D581TDHFpmE>

Mining Explosion Re-enactment [www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/explosion-re-enactment](http://www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/explosion-re-enactment)

Iconic wildlife species - Willow Tit Guided Meditation [Willow Tit | Carbon Landscapes](#)

## Future Plans and Legacy

Beneficiaries include the local residents of the wards of Ashton and Bryn, especially those living within ten minutes’ walk of the site (estimate 16,000 number), and people travelling within a 30 minute drive, with on-site parking provision to accommodate up to 100,000 visits a year. It is believed that this work has provided a massive community asset with nearly 3km of access and pathway improvements and fantastic “vandal proof” arts and culture trails on site necessary to increase the amount of community engagement on site.

## Lessons learned?

When the funding became available it had to be spent immediately. This project benefited from the “wishlist co-design” by Sense of Place Coordinator Jenny Griggs even before funding became available. There was an obvious community “need”. However, the design aspects had to be done at

pace and so that meant that Mark, Martin and Jenny all had to step up with the design aspects which pushed all three of them outside their comfort zones. For example, the contract work had to go out through competitive tender using the Wigan Council “chest” system and Jenny had to do some of the art design aspects herself with the Friends group as there was not enough funding nor time to commission an artist to do every stage. Instead trades people were commissioned e.g. to do the metal work for the hare gabion and that worked very well and something that we would repeat. Steve Ormerod, (formerly Support Officer who took over as Volunteer Coordinator) on the Carbon Landscape also had to do a lot of the installation in house, e.g. posts for the rubbings trail and gabion, so the vast majority of the funding could be spent on the bridges and path improvements.

### Photographic Evidence



Wheelchair accessible bridge and start of the Enchanted Tree trail – credit Friends of Three Sisters



The xylophone to call the fairies and goblins. Photo credit Friends of Three Sisters.



Co-production of the Hare Gabion with Thrive CIC and young people with additional needs and Sandra Hardingham of Leonard Cheshire Disability.

Photo Credit Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

Braille Board

Photo Credit Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

## Funding Partners



The Ashton Linen and Woollen Stock  
Charity

