

Launch Event Workshop Feedback

23rd April 2024



Ock and Thame Farmers: Freshwater and Floodplain Restoration Project



Landscape Recovery



Thame
Catchment
Farm Cluster

Workshop Details

The first of the workshops for the Ock and Thame Farmers: Freshwater and Floodplain Restoration Project was held on the 23rd April 2024 during the launch event at Fison Barn, Little Wittenham.

Workshop contributors included farmers and landowners from across the project landholdings, as well as key project partners and technical experts including but not limited to Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), University of Oxford, Pilio, The Newt Conservation Partnership, Thames Water, Environment Agency, Rothschild Foundation, Buckinghamshire Council. Natural England and Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE).

The workshop aimed to obtain key input at an early stage from project partners on the aims and objectives of the project, and key questions that the project should look to address. Feedback will be incorporated into the development of the 6 deliverable plans.

Workshop Feedback

Three questions were posed to the groups during the workshops. These are outlined below with a summary of the key themes and outcomes.

Question 1. What vision do you want to see realised for the landscape in 20 years' time?

Theme 1: Water

- Clean unpolluted water free from litter, sewage, nutrient run-off and sediment.
- Freshwater bodies that allow species to thrive.
- Improved monitoring and reporting of water quality.
- Flood storage and control including slowing the rate of flow and improved drainage on-field. Financial reward to underpin these measures.
- Ensuring the landscape holds water for periods of drought.
- A strong network of interconnected ponds and freshwater corridors.
- Governance to take account of bigger issues such as climate change, land availability and food security.

Theme 2: Species and Habitat

- The right habitats and species in the right place including return of indigenous species and removal of invasive non-native species.
- Valuing wider ecosystem services.
- Greater interconnectivity of habitats and better land sharing and integration into farming systems. Improved diversity across the landscape.
- Increased wildlife including curlews, swallows, lapwings, bats, water voles, beavers, trout, white clawed crayfish, insects, deer and beavers.

- Expanding habitats including alkaline fens, flood plain meadows, rested meadows, peatlands and ponds.
- Greater understanding and awareness of priority species and how they can most effectively be supported.

Theme 3: Soils and Farming Practices

- Productive, healthy and well-drained soils that support carbon storage, and improved biodiversity.
- Greater awareness and integration of livestock with local supply of organic matter.
- Reduction and phase out, where possible, of chemicals and move towards organic based fertilisers.
- Phasing towards more regenerative land management, integrating wildlife whilst enhancing food production and climate resilience.
- Improved monitoring and evidence for what works and access to information.
- Compensation and management of on-going costs.

Theme 4: Communities and Farmers

- Financial and community support for farmers to ensure profitability and cover time for community engagement.
- Thriving local communities.
- Greater awareness from local and national communities as to the value of farmers and farms
- Better connectedness and access for local communities, including schools, local businesses and all ages.
- Shortened supply chains and local food systems.

Question 2. What questions do you want answered through the project? What key outputs would benefit you most?

- Who will pay for project proposals and how will ecosystem services be priced?
- Will funding be reliable in the long-term, particularly with political instability?
- How can we integrate funding into/ from existing local nature partnerships?
- Are there any tax considerations of land-use changes?
- How much farmland should be set aside for nature and how will loss of food production be accounted for?
- What are the priority species and habitats in the region and what and where are the best options for delivering greatest impact?
- How can farmers reduce run-off and freshwater pollution and what needs to be done to restore natural water flows?
- How can neighbouring farmers and landowners better connect (partner) to improve outcomes?

- How will agreements be drafted and how long is the commitment?
- Could there be any impact on neighbouring land as a result of any interventions and how would these be accounted for legally?
- How will proposals be affected under different land ownership structures (landlord/ tenant) and ownership changes?
- How can opportunities for community access be integrated into proposals and agreements?
- What flexibility will there be in management agreements in the long-term to adapt for changing climate?
- What can be done to mitigate pollution from big business, new developments and utilities companies?
- What measurements will be taken to monitor and define success
- What training will be made available to farmers.

Question 3. How can we best develop plans in a co-designed approach? Do you agree with our current plan and if not, how could it be improved?

- General agreement with the proposed co-design approach with representation through the Steering Group.
- Workshops to be flexible with agendas sent out in advance to allow farmers to plan and bring ideas to the table.
- Ensure transparent and regular communication with opportunities for knowledge exchange between farmers.
- Integration of farmers from within clusters who are unlikely to attend group meetings and/or workshops.
- Online map showing which farmers are part of the scheme. Active outreach to ensure those landowners are integrated to join up the landscape.
- Potential for mini catchment group workshops with 3-4 farmers with expert input from specialist to ensure deeper discussion.
- Ensure Steering Group achieves farmer representation and includes private finance expertise.
- Potential for farmers to be remunerated for their time.
- Monitor a range of ecological data beyond biodiversity and carbon, for example water management.
- Integrate with LNRS and local partnerships wherever possible. Extend interests to organisations such as NFU and CLA.
- Training to support farmers and landowners through the project.

Next steps

The co-project hosts are working through this feedback to assess how these can be incorporated into the project design. We propose to provide a response and action plan against each of these items to set out how we might best address this as part of the project.

Any comments or additional observations can be made by contacting the co-project hosts via the contact details on the back page of this report.

Photos from the event

Several photos of the event are included below.





Report prepared by project co-leads and co-sponsors:



Freshwater Habitats Trust

Bury Knowle House
North Place
Headington,
Oxford
OX3 9HY

River Thame Conservation Trust

Unit 16
Wheatley Business Centre
Old London Road
Wheatley
OX33 1XW

Hannah Worker (Project Director)

hworker@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk
07871 637358

David Fraser (Technical Director)

david@riverthame.org
07858 113705

Adam Wagstaff (Project Manager)

awagstaff@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk
07586758521

Hilary Phillips (Catchment Lead)

hilary@riverthame.org
07764 502216

Adam Bows (Catchment Lead)

abows@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk
07900 366681

Bruce Gardiner

bruce@riverthame.org
TBC
