

Stakeholder Update Report

Quarter 1 2024



Ock and Thame Farmers: Freshwaters and Floodplains Restoration Project



Landscape Recovery

1.Executive Summary

Our first quarterly stakeholder report for the project outlines key progress since funding was awarded for the project at the start of April 2024.

2. Project Timeline

The project timeline is still in development and will evolve and be refined to reflect feedback and discussions being held within the project team and with external partners and stakeholders over the coming weeks.

The project timetable outlines the timescale for the delivery of the 6 plans required by DEFRA to be developed over the next two years to inform future delivery. An overview of this is shown in Figure 1.

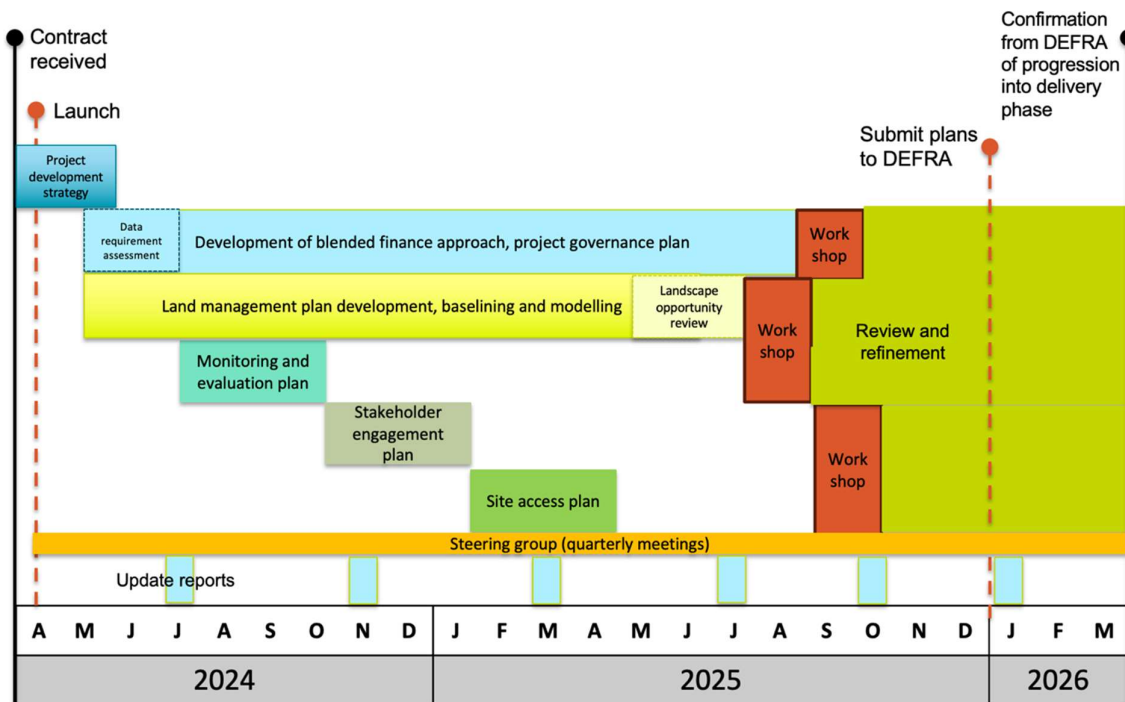


Figure 1. Overview of project timetable

2.1. What does this mean for landowners and managers?

- **June 24:** We'll arrange a phone discussion with you during June to review the landholding maps that were submitted as part of the bid and ensure there are no major changes that need to be considered.
- **June 24 – May 25:** Landholdings will be spilt into 4 engagement rounds over the year, where project officers, Ellie MacDonald (Ock) and Bruce Gardener (Thame), will visit you to undertake:

- A one to one discussion with you to understand all about your landholding - it's management, key requirements and considerations, business and farming operations and long term aspirations.
 - A walkover of the landholding to identify key opportunities for nature recovery and the provision of ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration. This will be informed by the one-one discussions and reviewed by you after to create a co-designed plan for the landholding.
- **June 24 – May 25:** Arrangement of baselining surveys. This may include both environmental and carbon baseline assessments to understand the current status on landholdings and the potential for uplift that could result in provision of ecosystem services, which might command additional farm income.

The type of baseline surveys (e.g. carbon, biodiversity), will need to be prioritised according to where the greatest opportunities are. However, all landholdings will receive a significant proportion of baseline assessment.

These surveys may need to occur at different times to the project officer visits as they are more dependent on the seasons.

3. Key Progress during Last Quarter

3.1. Project Launch Event

A successful project launch event was held on 23rd April 2024 attended by farmers, landholders and wider stakeholders involved in the project. The day offered an excellent opportunity to meet project partners and find out more about the next steps for the project.

During the day we heard from Hannah Worker (Freshwater Habitats Trust) who provided an overview of the project development phase which will run for two years through to March 2026. Topics included, planned activities, timelines and an introduction to the project team.

We also heard from Tim Field, co-chair and project lead for the North East Cotswold Farmer Cluster, a landscape scale project which formed part of DEFRA's first phase of landscape recovery pilot. Tim provided excellent insights the project, which we anticipate will provide valuable learning for the Ock and Thame project.

A workshop, led by Hilary Phillips at River Thame Conservation Trust, was held following refreshments to better understand the concerns and desired outcomes from landholders across the project. Through collaborative discussion, ideas were

shared and feedback provided. A summary of the workshop is set out within the next selection.

For those that could attend, the afternoon's events concluded with an excellent guided tour from Robin Buxton of the River of Life II a short walk from Little Wittenham. The project is spread across nearly 5 hectares comprising 3 landholdings and is composed of 16 ponds, 7 backwater channels and 1.6 hectares of woodland. The tour was a great opportunity to hear about and see an already completed project which integrates freshwater management, carbon storage and biodiversity.

Thanks again to those that were able to attend and contribute to the day's events. Photos from the day are captured below:



Figure 2. Collaborative workshops between key stakeholders, partners and technical experts



Figure 3. Guided tour of River of Life II wetlands

3.2. Workshop Feedback

During the launch workshop, three questions were asked of the groups. Ideas were collaboratively shared between different groups and a detailed breakdown of key feedback can be found on the FHT website:

www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/ock-and-thame-farmers

A detailed review of feedback from the discussion groups is being undertaken by the project team which will be assessed, responded to and integrated into the project.

3.3. Steering Group

Throughout the two-year project development phase and longer-term implementation phase the project will require a Steering Group. The Steering Group will be made up of organisations and groups from the local area with an interest in the long-term landscape, and. Or that will directly influence and steer/ guide the direction of the project.

The project leadership team have carried out a process to assess suitable partners for the Steering Group. This includes preparation of a Terms of Reference setting out the requirements of the members. The Terms of Reference document can be viewed here:

Based on the needs of the project, the following Steering Group is proposed.

| Organisation | Role and Expertise |
|---|--|
| Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) | Landowner with significant inclusion of land in the project. Reserve management expertise. |
| Earth Trust | Recent experience of implementation of landscape-scale wetland restoration |
| Freshwater Habitats Trust | Core project team |
| NE Cotswold Farmer Cluster Rep | Opportunities for learning and experience from a highly relevant project (LR round 1) |
| Ock Farmer Cluster Group Rep 1 | Farmer Representative |
| Ock Farmer Cluster Group Rep 2 | Farmer Representative |
| River Thames Conservation Trust | Core project team |
| Thame Farmer Cluster Group Rep 1 | Farmer Representative |
| Thame Farmer Cluster Group Rep 2 | Farmer Representative |
| University of Oxford, Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery | Scientific rigour and opportunities for significant knowledge exchange from (and to) academia. |

We are currently exploring a small number of other potential members, who will be added to this list in due course.

There is time pressure to assemble the team to remain on programme in what will be a fast moving design development phase. With an emphasis on collaboration and co-design, it is imperative we ensure key project stakeholders are in agreement with these proposals.

Action: If you have any comments or disagreements with the above list, please write to us by no later than **14th June 2024**.

Key activities the coming quarter

The following activities are scheduled for the coming quarter:

- **Establishment of steering group** and quarterly meeting dates.
- Developed **protocol for the carbon and environmental baseline assessment** for the coming year, including seeking quotations and awarding the contract.
- **Review of the potential private finance requirements for data and evidence**, to inform the baseline assessment protocol.
- **Produce a timetabled plan for the farm visits** by catchment Project Officers, including one-to-one landowner/manager discussion and landholding walkovers.

- **Commission of a catchment model(s)** to assess water quality and flow benefits that could be provided to greater scale across multiple landholdings, that are best assessed via a modelling approach.

Questions & Feedback

Contact details are outlined on the back page of this report. Should you have any queries relating to the project, please direct these to the relevant team members.

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