

WEBINAR SUMMARY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN MANAGING THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE-MAKING

Tuesday 3rd July 2018. Part of the webinar series: Partnerships for people, place and the environment.

CONTEXT

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan sets out the key steps for improving the environment within a generation. To inform local implementation, Defra is undertaking research to understand how partnership working is taking place with local communities, the key role communities can play, and good practice in engaging and working with communities to deliver improved outcomes.

This webinar featured two examples of work to build the capacity of local communities to manage their environment in ways that make them resilient, healthy and prosperous. Jenny Phelps of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) talked about how the Integrated Local Delivery (ILD) approach (developed with the Countryside and Community Research Institute), uses the detailed knowledge of farmers and local residents to identify environmental concerns and find joined-up ways of meeting multiple objectives. Paul Cobbing of the National Flood Forum (NFF) discussed the work that local flood groups are doing to develop natural flood management methods in partnership with flood authorities and local landowners.

The webinar aimed to stimulate discussion of opportunities for the public, private and third sector to play their part in connecting people, place and environment, and to explore how local community action can be a catalyst for mobilising resources to deliver environmental and social benefits in the context of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. The webinar was chaired by Dr Clare Twigger-Ross of Collingwood Environmental Planning.

This summary gives an outline of who attended, the main points of the discussion, and finally provides links to further resources. The comments contained herein reflect the discussion by participants and not any proposed policy.

WHO ATTENDED

96 people registered, and 63 people participated in the webinar. Participants spanned the public, private and third sector from across the UK, including the local authorities, government bodies, charities, universities, water company and environmental consultancies.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

Partnership work with local communities to deliver improved outcomes, demonstrates the key role communities can play and the knowledge they hold. Different examples were provided of tools

and approaches to working with communities, as well as wider stakeholders, in different contexts and how this can lead to improved environmental outcomes. Approaches included community groups, GIS mapping, theatre, roundtables, multi-agency meetings, etc.

Integrated approaches are central. The integrated local delivery framework (ILD) is being used in projects throughout Gloucestershire to bring together local communities, farmers and partner organisations to identify and integrate environmental delivery opportunities within a place. The NFF also take an integrated approach, working with communities in a 2 stage process: firstly, developing a flood action group, a “team” to work with community and partners; and secondly, supporting the flood action group to deliver what they and their community want. The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) has been helpful, to enable partners to know what is important to them and to enable delivery towards this.

Local communities are important actors in delivering improved environmental outcomes, bringing a wealth of local knowledge and social capital. For example, community flood action groups have been found to be effective in managing flood risks: persuading farmers to remove silt, coordinating with partners to ensure more effective monitoring of water quality, and sharing expertise and experiences to lead to more strategic approaches. Communities are often keen to engage and know the problems. The ILD approach is helping farmers to work in partnership with others, share their learning from practice in areas such as soil building, break crops, buffering and protecting water courses and to gain in confidence to test new methods.

KEY INGREDIENTS IN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Key ingredients in effective partnership working include:

- Harnessing the wealth of local social capital, including the skills, knowledge and expertise that exist within the local community;
- Developing trust and agreements on how to work together, recognising that each partner has their own business case and skills and therefore a coordinated approach to partnership working is important;
- Good quality facilitation of local dialogue, taking into account everyone's knowledge and values, to support communities to take the leading role, not depend on others and to address the issues that matter to them.

Empowering local communities to be more central in decisions about their environment, helping them to understand their local assets and make the most of these is imperative in creating more places where people want to live, work and spend time.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership working can bring many benefits. First-hand insights were shared of the many benefits of effective partnership working, these include: reduced flood risk through the introduction of natural flood management measures, natural solutions to farming problems such as blackgrass and slugs, deepened understanding of issues, greater access to knowledge, identifying new opportunities, tapping into unused or undervalued local resources such as professional expertise,

enabling co-delivery, facilitating access to funding, being able to tackle issues that would not have been possible without collaboration, and creating a better environment.

Partnership working can result in efficiencies and stronger outcomes, delivering more, without doing more, including better outcomes for people and the environment.

CHALLENGES/SOLUTIONS

There is surprisingly little recognition of the value local community knowledge, in particular with respect to the planning system there is a sense that communities are not being listened to, for example, in relation to local plans.

There is a need for culture change in how to work with communities to ensure opinions and knowledge are respected and valued.

Funding can be a challenge, for example, finding resources to support facilitation, however partnership working can also present opportunities to increase access to funding. Notwithstanding challenges often remain in evidencing the benefits of interventions which can be long-term in nature.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) - Integrated Local Delivery Framework

The integrated local delivery (ILD) framework, developed by FWAG and the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), aims to bring together local communities, farmers and partner organisations to identify and integrate environmental delivery opportunities within a place: <https://www.fwagsw.org.uk/ild-integrated-local-delivery>

The framework has been utilised in the Water with integrated local delivery (WILD) project: <https://www.fwagsw.org.uk/wild-project>

And in the Cotswold Payments for Ecosystem Service pilot: http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=12297_CotswoldPESFinalReport23072014.pdf

National Flood Forum (NFF) - Community Engagement

The NFF works with communities as well as professional partners to help support people at risk of flooding, including providing tools and support to Flood Action Groups. NFF's community engagement hub provides a range of resources on community engagement and awareness, including 'how to' guides and a series of case studies:

Community Engagement Hub: <https://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/working-together/community-engagement-hub/>

Flood Action Group's a model of community empowerment, West Sussex Community Pathfinder: <https://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/03-Flood-action-groups-%E2%80%93-a-model-of-community-empowerment-%E2%80%93-West-Sussex.pdf>

Catchment Based Approach (CaBA)

The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) is a community-led approach to enable collaborative working across people and organisations at a river catchment scale to deliver improvements to the environment: <https://www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/>