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SOUTH WEST PEAK LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Name of Project	Future Farmscapes
Delivery Partner	Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA)
Name of Person Completing Report	Andrew Farmer and David Cooper
Start Date of Project	March 2017
End Date of Project	April 2022
Date of Report	May 2022



Aims and Objectives of the Project

The project aimed to build stronger working relationships between farmers and other communities of place and interest in the South West Peak – notably the ‘authorities’ (National Park Authority, Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency), conservation organisations (e.g. the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, National Trust), the farming representatives (NFU, CLA, Farming Life Centre) and the resident communities.

There is a certain amount of distrust and misunderstanding between different parties in the South West Peak, some farmers perceive the turnover of staff from the ‘authorities’ as an obstacle to

building good working relationships. Farmers' engagement with the SWPLP and its component projects will be vital to the success of the scheme.

This project aimed to establish a group of 'farm link workers' to ensure that this happened, as well as helping to make sense of the variety of projects that the SWPLP was running. These farm link workers needed to combine farming knowledge with good communication and administrative skills.

The farm link workers would perform a vital engagement role with the farming community with four elements: 1) engage effectively with farmers to earn and maintain trust; 2) act as an integral link between farmers and the SWPLP; 3) raise capacity and empower farmers; 4) signpost national and local funding and support opportunities.

The benefits expected to be derived from this project were: improved relationships between farmers, landowners and others living and working in the area; improved understanding and communications benefitting all other projects run as part of the SWPLP scheme that involve interaction with farmers and/or their land.

A key beneficiary would be the farming community. Not only would they be more involved in discussing the future proposals for the area and better engaged with other activities and opportunities, but they would also have the chance to propose additional delivery ideas (with support) with a specific funding pot earmarked for 'special projects'.

Project Delivery

This project stood alone in its own right but fundamentally provided engagement, support and technical expertise to a number of other projects in the LPS. As encouragement to get involved in the LPS, a limited grants pot was available for small on-farm projects (Local Farm Grants), capped at £1000 per grant, the intention was to offer this as an incentive to engage. However, it soon became apparent that this cap was either too low or that there were more appropriate sources of funding for the project ideas which were proposed. A Water Environment Grant award received in early 2019 enabled us to increase the value of on-farm grant awards specifically targeting water quality and utilise the farm link workers to administer these via the related Upstream Thinking project.

Staff resource

Two part time farm link workers were employed to deliver this project and support the delivery of the other land-management themed projects, notably Crayfish in Crisis, Glorious Grasslands, Slowing the Flow, Upstream Thinking and Working for Waders.

Budget resource

The initial planned project budget for Future Farmscapes was £345,000 (figures excluding VAT) and was subdivided as follows, showing planned and actual costs incurred against each budget heading:

NLHF budget heading	Example items	Intended cost	Actual cost
Repair and conservation work	Local Farm Grant fund (£50k grant plus £15k contribution from farmers)	£65,000	£70,039
New staff costs	Salary costs for farm link workers	£157,832	£152,238
Training for staff		£4,574	£3,621
Travel for staff		£4,440	£6,732
Equipment and materials (activity)	Sundry equipment	£500	£519
Other costs (activity)	Venue hire & refreshments. Mobile phone handsets	£4,910	£4,829
Recruitment		£1,000	£1,220
Publicity and promotion	Advertising of farm grants	£210	£0
Contingency		£2,000	£0
TOTAL		£240,466	£239,198

In addition, the project received non-cash contributions of £3,263 and volunteer time valued at £1,950.

Overall the project came in very close to budget with some adjustments made during the project in agreement with our NLHF investment officer.

Partnership working – team involvement, steering group etc

This project and its staff team worked closely with all partners and projects. The main projects were Working for Waders, Glorious Grasslands, Slowing the Flow, Crayfish in Crisis and Upstream thinking.

Volunteers

Volunteers were engaged peripherally through other projects and also for Upstream Thinking. The farm link workers engaged and led volunteer groups for a range of activities including sphagnum planting, hedge planting, tree planting and leaky dam construction.

Consultants and contractors

Local contractors were employed as appropriate to deliver capital works for local farm grant delivery, Working for Waders capital works, Upstream Thinking delivery. A list of local contractors, together with their available equipment and skills, was drawn up to facilitate work delivery.

Community involvement

Farm link workers were in regular contact with the local farming community, signposting towards national and local funding and support opportunities.

What Has (and has not) Been Achieved

Outputs

	Intended Output	Delivered Output
1	2 - 3 part-time farm link workers will be employed and retained for the duration of the delivery phase	2 farm link workers, comprising an average of 1.0 full time equivalent over duration of project
2	300 farmers in the South West Peak will receive at least 1 visit/contact from a Farm Link Worker	276 farmers/land managers contacted, visited or actively worked with
3	Myth busting page on South West Peak website to air and resolve common misconceptions	Myth busting carried out face to face and by multiple engagement strategies. Website considered as a too limited resource for this purpose
4	50 farmers in the South West Peak will be actively involved in the delivery of one or more SWPLP projects	186 different landholdings/landowners have been actively involved in the LPS, of which 152 have been facilitated by the farm link workers
5	60 farmers in the South West Peak will be offered Local Farm Grants (LFGs)	40 farm project applications/proposals received, 8 of these were signposted to alternative funding/other SWPLP project. There is a diverse funding network and so the LFGs were repurposed when alternative funding was available for signposting or administering
6	50 Local Farm Grant projects will be completed	20 farm grants were awarded through Future Farmscapes and Upstream Thinking for 26 project elements (sometimes a number of separate projects on one farm holding). Additional projects were administered or signposted to other grant funding or different SWPLP projects

Key Outputs

The most important outputs for this project were the connections made with farmers and land managers. These connections were made by telephone call, very occasionally by email, face to face visits, meeting at markets and on farm. Building up trust enabled delivery of not just Local Farm Grants, awarded via this project, but a wide range of delivery through other project officers.

Outcomes

	Intended Outcome	Delivered Outcome
1	Improved understanding and relationship between different communities	Farm link workers have provided improved communication between the farming community and the project officers and partner organisations. They have acted as a

	go between by introducing appropriate project officers to the land owners, helping to improve a mutual understanding of aims and objectives.
2 A move towards economically and environmentally sustainable land management or 'high nature value farming'	The farm link workers have passed on information about Countryside Stewardship (CS), Hedgerows and Boundaries grant scheme, and latterly, Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme to farmers and landowners; signposted them towards grant opportunities and recently signposted towards the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme. In total, 33 were signposted to either Countryside Stewardship mid-tier or National Park Grant Scheme agreements.
3 The landscape is better managed for multiple benefits	The farm link workers have worked with landowners and project officers to deliver multiple benefits on the same holding (approximately 46). Building a strong, trusting relationship with landowners has helped deliver multiple benefits across the same site. Good examples of this at Swainsmoor, Cisterns Clough or High Ash.
4 People have a stronger sense of place, they are engaging with the landscape, have better experiences, and have gained respect and understanding	Farm link workers have engaged with landowners constantly, responding to any enquiries and questions as part of their 'myth busting' role. Communication has led to a better understanding of the issues faced by farmers, such as financial shortfall due to changes in governmental funding. Farm link workers have strived to encourage farmers to value the management of the landscape, with restoration projects and habitat enhancement projects.
5 People have gained skills and knowledge about the landscape	Knowledge has been gained by working with the partners of the SWPLS, such as NE and EA officers. An understanding of the working of new schemes such as ELM has been gained by attending meetings and seminars. Constant contact with SWP landowners has improved the understanding of the landscape we work in and the issues faced by farmers.

6	People value the environment and understand the benefits it provides	Working with volunteers on environmental projects has spread the value of the benefits of the landscape to a wide audience. Attending events, such as shows and country fairs has enabled the farm link workers to engage with a wide spectrum of people, celebrating the value of the landscape and promoting SWPLP projects.
7	Ecosystem services enhanced	Farm link workers have engaged with project officers across the whole programme to deliver projects that enhance ecosystems. Examples of this are helping deliver grassland restoration, NFM measures as part of slowing the flow, wader habitat enhancement and crayfish translocation.

Key Outcomes

The key outcomes from this project were the connections made between project officers, partners and land managers, many of which enabled works to take place on the relevant landholdings which benefitted landscape, nature, heritage and people. This is evidenced by multiple project activity on 46 different landholdings, with advice and management interventions for multiple interest features which has a wider benefit for landscape and ecosystem services.

What Made The Difference

Knowledge and understanding of the local community was essential for the Farm Link Worker role, as was taking the time to build up relationships with landowners. As the farm link workers both came from a farming background, and therefore had knowledge of working practices and pressures faced by farmers, with previously established contacts and presence in the area, this certainly helped with building up trust within the farming community.

Challenges

Due to the nature of the Farm Link Worker role there were multiple demands from all directions. Some partners did not consider discussing work requests with the Scheme Manager who line managed the farm link workers, so it was challenging to manage workloads and set priorities. Having one or both of the farm link workers and the Scheme Manager involved in the steering groups for demand-heavy projects such as Working for Waders, Slowing the Flow and Glorious Grasslands helped to ensure better coordination of farm contacts and workload.

Covid restrictions prevented the team working together from the office, which led to a slowdown in information being exchanged and loss of ideas being worked on together. This was partially overcome by contact using video conference calls on a regular basis. Momentum was reduced as working practices were inevitably altered and face to face contact with landowners was paused.

Offering Local Farm Grants to land owners with capped funding was a challenge, as some project proposals exceeded this amount. Also challenging was working within the confines of Countryside Stewardship standard rates for capital items such as stock fencing, particularly when rates had not been reviewed for some time and costs for both materials, fuel and labour spiralled as a result of the pandemic. This was overcome in some cases by delivering using volunteers instead of contractors, or by signposting towards other funding sources.

The Upstream Thinking project was introduced in early 2019 when funding was awarded from a Water Environment Grant (WEG). The objectives and planned outputs for Upstream Thinking married well with the focus on landowner liaison and on-farm delivery within Future Farmscapes, however, it did add immeasurably to the workload. Other partners did not always appreciate or consider the workload, or provide the expected input to deliver natural flood management measures.

Excessive bureaucracy amongst the statutory agencies was often seen as a barrier, slowing down momentum in the delivery of projects. There were often many stakeholders involved in the delivery of projects, often having differing objectives, which had to be balanced. However, appropriate checks and balances had to be put into place to meet the requirements of working in a protected landscape and working with public funding.

Case Studies

There were a number of farm holdings with multiple project activity, for example:

Swainsmoor – A large holding of approximately 300ha, partly on the Ministry of Defence training estate, the whole farm is managed by long-term tenants. The farm comprises a range of upland habitats: semi-natural woodland, moorland, rush pasture, semi-improved grassland and rivers and streams. With this range of interest and an engaged landowner a number of activities took place:

- A grassland fungi survey was completed, finding parts of the holding to be of international importance for waxcaps and national importance for earthtongues.
- A wader plan was produced, providing management recommendations and a volunteer wader warden is paired with the farmer.
- Slowing the Flow capital works were undertaken to complete willow pleaching along some of the watercourses.
- A soil and water plan was written for the farmer, and as a result 6ha of sphagnum planting to diversify species-poor blanket bog, and historic hedgerow restoration of just over 200m was completed.
- The farmer was signposted to a hedgerows and boundaries grant to deliver additional hedgerow planting/restoration; and was signposted to a FiPL grant to concrete the farm yard to make daily maintenance easier and thus reduce dirty water run-off and improve water quality in the river Churnet.

High Ash – A comparatively small holding of approximately 20ha, owned and managed for conservation and education purposes. Although small, with an engaged owner there was scope for a range of project activities:

- A wader plan is in place, and scrapes were created in the rush pasture to enhance foraging opportunities.

- Significant work was carried out by the Slowing the Flow project to return a straightened stretch of river to its former meanders, thus slowing the flow of in-channel water to help relieve flood risk. A 300m hedgerow was planted to intercept overland flow.
- Glorious Grasslands hay meadow restoration and donor site.

Lower Fleetgreen –

- A grassland fungi survey was completed and the site was used for a volunteer training day in 2019. Parts of this large holding were also included in our grassland fungi eDNA study in 2021.
- A wader plan is in place, with capital works delivered to create foraging scrapes.

Mill Lane –

- A Local Farm Grant was awarded for 207m of historic hedge restoration, planting was delivered with volunteers.
- 10 acres of species rich hay meadow harvested for seed for grassland restoration.
- Signposted to hedgerows and boundaries grant for rebuilding 400m of drystone wall.

Onecote Old Hall – a relatively intensively managed farm producing dairy cattle, the landowner approach the team about opportunities to improve his land management to benefit water quality.

- 0.54 ha of trees were planted by SWPLP staff and volunteers, natural flood management measures completed, plus riparian fencing and pond creation to provide drinking water for livestock whilst protecting the watercourse from inputs.
- Signposted towards FiPL grant for slurry store cover.

Under Whittle –

- Traditional hay meadow restoration completed.
- Grassland fungi survey and eDNA study site.
- Wader plan in place, with two new foraging scrapes created.
- Signposted to national and local funding and support opportunities.

Legacy

Skills/knowledge/experience

- The capital works completed will leave a legacy on the landscape of the SWP.
- The 50 wader plans that the farm link workers played a pivotal role in delivering, have improved the knowledge amongst the SWP landowners. The information in these plans is not just for the landowner who received them, but the knowledge will be spread between the SWP landowners and the volunteer wader wardens.
- Experience was gained in practical skills by the volunteers, such as tree and hedge planting.
- Knowledge of available and future funding sources was passed on to land owners with our constant contact.
- Knowledge and experience gained will be fed into future projects through access to project folders and redeployment of SWPLP staff to follow-on roles within the PDNPA.

Habitat/species improvements

Through the facilitation role played by the farm link workers a range of species and habitat enhancement work has taken place which will have a long-lasting legacy in the area:

- Grasslands – species rich hay meadows restored, managed and created
- Crayfish translocated to ark sites
- Riparian habitat water quality improvements
- Curlew, lapwing and snipe management and habitat improvement
- Woodland creation, restoration and management

Capital Works

A wide range of capital works to farmland and built structures have been either directly delivered or facilitated by this project, leaving a lasting legacy, such as: wader scrapes, ponds, riparian fencing, archaeological features restored (e.g. stone bridges, sheep folds) grassland restoration, anti-predator fencing.

Data

Records of all farm grant agreements and outputs delivered are saved on file with PDNPA records relating to specific farm holdings. This helps to inform future opportunities for working with and supporting these farmers and land managers.

Equipment

A few items of equipment such as soil penetrometers and phosphate readers were purchased for use by the project, these are now available to farm advisers at PDNPA for ongoing work across the Peak District.

Connections/collaboration

The project has worked with multiple agencies, organisations and individuals as part of the LPS. All projects have involved multiple connections and collaboration, generating longer-term collaborations.

Educational Resources/Other Resources

A report was produced for Natural England on the effectiveness of eDNA techniques for monitoring crayfish: [Developing a robust technique to detect populations of endangered native white-clawed crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*, invasive signal crayfish *Pacifastacus leniusculus* and crayfish plague *Aphanomyces astaci* in lotic systems using innovative eDNA approaches - NECR284](#) (naturalengland.org.uk)

Lessons Learned

Concentrate resources and be prepared for flexibility. Iron out unnecessary stages in achieving outputs.

The Big Headline

Farmers want to look after the future – let's support them in that aim.

Appendix 1. Map of farm grants awarded and completed

