

# Collingham - Discussion on Sustaining NFM into the future

## Summary of Key Points:

1. Actual and perceived barriers to NFM:
  - Liability –ongoing struggle to quantify and no one wants it.
  - Maintenance – need further clarity on requirements/ possibly design out, as well as funding.
  - Landowners – understand their business and engage early.
  - Community and volunteer involvement seen both as asset for sustainability and potentially unreliable long term.
  
2. Sustainability measures currently in place:
  - Monitoring in place for length of DEFRA pilots, using citizen science.
  - Maintenance – incorporating into contracts with landowners, annual checks. Build cultural change on farms to sustain maintenance. Living structures; Community buy-in.
  - Liability – work moving to contractors rather than community groups to address liability; Soil improvement – no liability, win-win.
  
3. Key learning points from day:
  - Still learning best practice.
  - Beware design rules of thumb – every catchment different.
  - Put NFM officer desk next to consenting officer in Lead Local Flood Authorities.
  - Use local knowledge and be proportionate.
  
4. Barriers to NFM that we did not discuss in detail:
  - Need long-term catchment management not 2/3 year projects.
  - Getting NFM funding into future investment programmes.
  - How to categorise willing landowners.
  - Understanding of flood engineers.
  - Understanding multiple benefits of NFM.

## Appendix: Notes from discussion session

### 1. What are your actual or perceived barriers to sustainable management of NFM interventions?

- Community ownership is important for sustainability, not just landowner consents
- Treating things as flood assets means we only look at one part of their value
- Liability – no one wants it and we struggle to quantify the risk.
- What is sustainable? Are we trying to keep each asset perfect or is it just the idea/principle of having some sort of NFM on this watercourse?
- Consistent evidence base will help evidence future investment or frameworks
- Funding mechanisms need to look wider into green investment. Government sources often for limited projects and capital investments.
- Still in an exploratory phase – not all avenues explored will be sustainable.
  
- Funding maintenance and maintenance per se, responsibility for maintenance – landowner, organisation? Lack of knowledge on maintenance,
- Liability for landowner if land sold.
- Potential payments – ELM potentially positive for landowner.
- Out of date data – crops grow, housing estates built, ecological records; data is not high resolution and out of date.
  
- Funding for maintenance, land manager buy-in
- Design out maintenance
- Are we re-stocking trees for future natural fall
- 180 volunteers/ each week - WYRE coastal and countryside service – been going for 5 years; barrier if not community volunteer engagement days
- What if community unable – bypassing is ok
  
- Landowner engagement – engage early on about maintenance and ensure they are bought in so ‘no surprises’ when the subject arises. Will they want the responsibility and liability?
- Funding for maintenance
- Timing
- Many people and groups involved – who takes responsibility? ‘Someone else will do it’
- Expectations
- Belief in the benefits of NFM
- What/perception of maintenance required
- Expertise
- Volunteer availability – not always reliable and sustainable
- Using organisations – CDM
- Consenting and permitting
- Using local sustainable materials
- Links to climate change not made – e.g. carbon sinks

- Brexit uncertainty
- Understanding landowners business
- Defining NFM scope and managing expectations /timelines
- Understanding from the beginning – scope/aim of project
- Differing terminology
- Foresight of longterm progression
- Funding performance – funding fatigue, withdrawal risk, ELMs, idea fatigue

**2. What do you currently have in place or are working towards to ensure:  
Maintenance and or replacement?  
Long term monitoring and analysis of outcomes?  
Longer term liability concerns?**

- Monitoring is in place until the end of the DEFRA pilots.
- This might be enough in many cases – what do we want to prove by collecting data?
- We are building baseline knowledge amongst land owners and in communities. Cultural change to see NFM as a normal part of the farm will help maintenance. Also links to wider mindset changes around wildlife, pollinators, water quality.
- Working to change the narrative from farmers being the problem to farmers being the solution.
- Having landowners on board, especially with their choice of contractors.
- More long term projects rather than short term – Upper Aire since 2010, carried out walkovers and now have landowners coming to YWT. Project well established and single point of contact.
- Local community becoming more engaged in citizen science.
- Hardcastle Crags (NT) – included large leaky dams into an existing annual maintenance check, easy as part of NT site, more difficult if on 3<sup>rd</sup> party site.
- Brompton DEFRA funded project – keen local community group want to be involved in maintenance.
- YDRT standard approach for landowner taking on responsibility - contracts.
- Tree planting at Gorpley has raised questions around liability, and was one of the reasons that Woodland Trust went with a commercial contractor rather than local volunteer group, as the contractor's insurance will cover loss of trees for 3 years after planting (e.g. fires) Concern over responsibility for re-planting has meant that in this case a community group has lost out on a planting opportunity.
- Do work with different LAs and capture sum of maintenance
- Living structures.
- Larger systems - more structured Memorandum of Understanding needed; 25,000m<sup>3</sup>. Reservoirs Act – structures less than.

- Pressure on revenue funding – needed for funding for longevity of benefits
- Monitoring best practice
  - a. Q-NFM Lancashire University;
  - b. Welland York University;
  - c. working with students and longer term.
- Shropshire NFM project – Council in partnership with Wildlife Trust, supported by the National Flood Forum
  - Community flood partnership monitoring
  - Buy in of community at start; take part in maintenance
  - Liability being looked at
- Hardcastle Crags (Slow the Flow)
  - Community led group (sustainable)
  - Monitoring – funded by DEFRA booster money, cameras, river sensors
  - Maintenance – not being done ‘officially’ at the moment, it is done ad-hoc when volunteers / workers are on site
- Maintenance and replacement:
  - Movement away from leaky dams?
  - Consider maintenance from beginning everything needs maintaining.
- Long term monitoring and analysis
  - Use headline research findings to translate to local schemes
  - Quick monitoring/ analysis
- Liability Concerns
  - Leaky dams most concerning
  - Tree planting needs to be spun to highlight positives – climate change, shelter
- Soils!!! Need to be looks at more: no liability/ win-win/ sustainability

### 3. What have you learnt today that could be built into your local projects?

- Lots of great projects not always learning lessons from each other yet, but then we don’t actually know what is ‘best’ yet.
- Some projects have trouble with community engagement. Are we learning from people like NFF who have done this before?
- A lot of NFM is for ‘nuisance floods’ and it is difficult to explain this to communities.
- Maintenance agreements.
- Put NFM officer desk next to permitting officer in local authority (doesn’t always facilitate).
- Catchments different – treat generic design parameters with caution: e.g. 30cm freeboard above base flow for leaky dams. Take care with advice which might be perceived as best practice in a ‘community of practice’.

- NFM still trial and error approach.
  
- Risk for woody dams
- Approach to designing out maintenance
- Yorkshire NFM practitioners and ICASP – great practice and how can we support bespoke other approaches.
- Work needed on consenting – special process for incentivising ‘good’ work e.g. NFM
  - Everyone is learning and picking things up as they go along. Just do it
  - Start small and learn along the way (depends on size of catchment).
  - Using local expertise
  - Be proportionate
  
  - Looking at soils
  - Look at long term maintenance agreements
  - Learning about liabilities

#### 4. Any other sustainability challenges which need to be tackled, not discussed today?

- Has to be Catchment System Operator (proposal to restructure Environment Agency and other bodies) to move to 25 year+ thinking instead of 2/3 years
- NFM is not all about the ‘F’ – drought, water quality etc all also benefit.
- What can we learn from utilities, e.g: United Utilities
  
- A way of categorising land owners into those who are more likely to implement NFM, e.g. use census data, taking more of a human than a physical geography approach.
- Lack of guidance for NFM modelling, needs to be more ground truthing.
- Don't rely on ELMs Big question mark about future funding for enviro-agri schemes.
  
- Consenting guide/best practice products/tools action
- Bidding for EA money after DEFRA funding.
- How to get NFM into future investment programmes
- Implementing national capital approach.
  
- Policy changes to incorporate NFM and maintenance
- Mainstream policy around climate change

- Multiple benefits of NFM – need to understand more
  - Engineers – ‘nice to do’ not ‘need to do’ , need to change their perception on benefits of NFM
  - Succession/resilience to deliver, e.g. volunteers – need sustainable engagement with communities
  - Shouldn't rely on volunteers
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- Ensure landowners are engaged
  - Have plan/strategy to incorporate lessons learnt
  - It is a Catchment Based Approach (who will represent it?)