

Development of Fen Monitoring, Research and Management

Report 3 A Future Fen Management Partnership Project - Scope and Structure



The study is a Broads Authority and Natural England initiative, undertaken by Mike Harding, funded by the Broads Authority and Natural England.

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following people who helped us with this project:

- Members of the project steering committee:
- Broads Authority: Andrea Kelly, Erica Murray, Sue Stephenson
- Natural England: Alex Prendergast

Citation

Harding, M. (2017) Development of Fen Monitoring, Research and Management in the Broads. Report 3 - A Future Fen Management Partnership Project - Scope and Structure. Report for Broads Authority, Norwich and Natural England.

Published by

Broads Authority

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SUMMARY

This report forms part of a series of reports examining monitoring, research and management of the Broadland fens. The aim here is to recommend models for undertaking fen management projects. The focus is on partnership bids of considerable size, as this is a relatively new area of conservation activity, and has the greatest complexity.

We review potential models which could be adopted in the Broads, and the kinds of work they can support.

The funding environment is changing rapidly with fluidity, not stability, being the defining condition. Government funding continues to be unpredictable, but the trend toward tight budgets will continue for the short to medium term at least. It is likely that more than one funding model will be needed, scaling from large partnership programmes through to small single-theme schemes. The main focus for future development will probably be on the former, as partners are already well placed to manage “traditional” projects.

Eight core themes for work in the Broads are identified, which provide common ground between the conservation organisations operating in the area. The themes are often inter-linked. A large programme is likely to involve more than one core theme, with audience engagement likely to be a component of any such project.

Most projects fit within one of the three structures described in Figure 1a-c. They are:

Direct Delivery – projects that have a narrow focus and are most efficiently delivered by a single organisation with a core interest.

Programme Delivery. Large partnerships involving multiple partners and multiple sites, and projects where integration and “joined-up” thinking is needed. They include themes where exchanges of experience and techniques can benefit the partners. They also provide the best opportunity for audience engagement. They tend to have large budgets and be quite heavy on management time among the Partners. There is likely to be capacity in the Broads for only one such large programme at a time.

Restricted Partnership Delivery. This is a third type of project, which is between the two extremes. These are modest in scale and scope but involve 2-3 partners with differing remits (e.g. RSPB, EA, IDB) to resolve a particular issue for one or a small group of sites.

The eight core themes are tabulated against the three management models and potential major funders. It shows which combinations of themes model and funders are best matched. It should help in the development of conservation projects of all sizes.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report forms part of a series of reports examining monitoring, research and management of the Broadland fens. The aim here is to recommend models for undertaking fen management projects. While the whole scope of fen management will be considered, the focus will be on partnership bids of considerable size, as this is a relatively new area of conservation activity and has the greatest complexity.

There has been a growth recently in conservation partnerships. Partnership activity has grown in the last few decades, with conservation organisations working more with non-traditional partners to achieve conservation work – water companies or other land owning enterprises, more direct working with land owners or statutory organisations, and sometimes with audience-facing partners such as arts organisations. These partnerships were usually small and based around one or a few sites where the partners had a common interest.

In the last 10-15 years, larger and complex partnerships have started to evolve, often in response to changes in the funding environment. Big partnerships were often funded by Heritage Lottery Fund – such as Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage or the Landscape Partnership Scheme. They involved big budgets, many partners and a wide range of sites.

The EU LIFE programme also often involved partnerships (e.g. Bittern and Bittern II schemes) and sometimes these could involve other countries. They were also complex and had significant budgets. Other EU funding streams such as Leader were often partnership-based.

More recently, Natural England has started to put together large programmes focussed on species and habitats for HLF funding. *Back from the Brink*, a large and very complex national programme to conserve around 120 rare or declining species is an example. NE is preparing further large programme bids for coastal and wet grassland habitats, and undoubtedly more will follow.

In the following we review potential models which could be adopted in the Broads, and the kinds of work they can support. The report does not consider monitoring and research which is addressed by other components of this contract – although all programme bids may include monitoring of the work undertaken.

2. FUNDING AND ITS IMPACT ON SCOPE OF PROGRAMMES

The funding environment is changing rapidly with fluidity, not stability, being the defining condition. This is only likely to worsen as we enter the uncertainty of a “hard” Brexit. EU funding streams, and the possibility of forming lasting international relationships, are both highly uncertain.

Government funding continues to be unpredictable, but the trend toward tight budgets will continue for the short to medium term at least.

The Heritage Lottery Fund seems to be one of the few funders with money, but the diversity of organisations chasing their resources is diversifying and increasing in number. Competition is tightening.

HLF appear to be more favourable to funding areas which were deemed to be core government responsibility in the past. This means well-resourced Departments are likely to be competing for funding. Those projects with best outcomes for natural heritage and with best value for money, and with better developed partnerships, are likely to win out.

Other funders – Trust’s, sponsorship and even crowd funding – are increasingly audience-focused and less willing to back what appears to be obscure, expert-driven initiatives.

Consequently, the main focus of fen projects should be broadly based, accepting that other, audience-facing activities, may absorb some of the available budgets. There is still scope for some core nature conservation projects without this element, but the current funding climate suggests these will need to be relatively small, well focussed projects suitable for more modest grant and funding sources.

It is likely that more than one funding model will be needed, scaling from large partnership programmes through to small single-theme schemes. The main focus for future development will probably be on the former, as partners are already well placed to manage “traditional” projects. The proposals will need to take cognisance of the competitive nature of conservation, the high cost of developing and running partnership bids and the variable existing capacity across the sector. The work needs to be realistic.

3. CORE THEMES

The following are considered core themes for work in the Broads, providing common ground between the conservation organisations operating in the area.

- **Land acquisition** – either as a main element with associated activities, or as a smaller element which facilitates work on other core themes. Projects where land acquisition is a dominant part of the budget tend to be single-theme projects. Large partnership programmes tend to have modest land acquisition.
- **Restoration of species or habitats** – management to restore site condition or to recreate habitats are likely to be an important element of projects of all types.
- **Landscape Scale Conservation projects.** Schemes which progress large area conservation are a high priority, both at national strategy level and the local level where many organisations are pursuing Living Landscape style projects. Such projects would include elements of other core themes.
- **Improving connectivity** – these are also a high priority at policy and local levels. Often integral to landscape scale working, they can also be important at a functional level – for instance improving hydrological connectivity regardless of land ownerships.
- **Economically sustainable management of the fens** – developing and implementing fen management which is financially self-sustaining and removes or reduces dependence on grant funding. These would include developing markets for fen products and developing suitable harvesting techniques.
- **Restoration of the Broads Hydrosere** – practical projects which restore the historic hydrosere from open water to dry hillslope habitats on a significant scale. This would include early successional habitats such as turf ponds and broad marginal swamps.
- **Water quality and nutrient management:** The wrong kind of hydrochemistry - including nutrients, salinity and products of acid drainage – is increasingly seen as a barrier to maintaining key habitat features in the Broads. Implementing management strategies to put in place the right hydrochemistry could have widespread benefits, but would be a very large, complex and expensive partnership programme for a large area such as the Broads.
- **Audience engagement** – fens and wetlands are not especially well appreciated even by the most local audiences, and their conservation needs are not well understood. The value of fens and the wetlands to local communities – their ecosystem services – has not been thoroughly advocated. The important role that individuals and local communities can play in their conservation is also poorly appreciated. The engagement of local people in the conservation of Broads habitats is modest compared to the potential. Access to the fens is poor, most fens being hidden and unwelcoming. A great deal of audience-facing work is needed to reverse this situation. A good audience analysis is required which identifies key messages we need to advocate for particular audiences.

Note that the above core themes are often interlinked. A large programme is likely to involve more than one core theme, with audience engagement likely to be a component of any such project in some form. The temptation to include a bit of everything should be avoided; any successful project should have a strong and focussed central narrative.

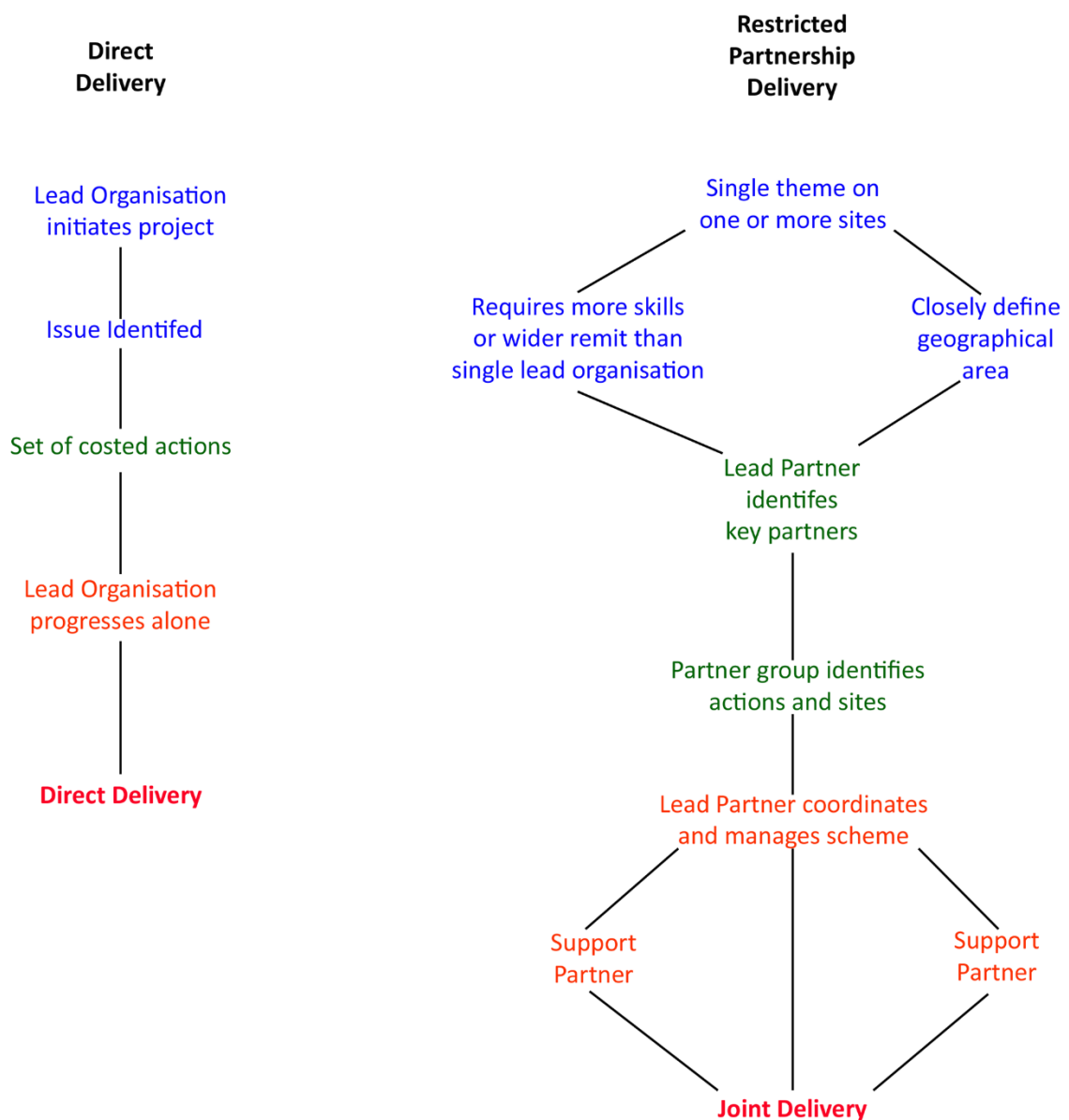
4. MODELS FOR PROJECT STRUCTURES

4.1 Project Structures

Most projects fit within one of the three structures described below, although of course there are intermediates. Figure 1a-c summarises these models.

Direct Delivery (Figure 1a). Some projects have a narrow focus and are most efficiently delivered by a single organisation with a core interest – the project takes place on their land only or involves a subject which is of particular interest to them, such as recovering a particular species or habitat.

Figures 1a and 1b: Direct Delivery and Restricted Partnership Delivery Models.



Programme Delivery. Other programmes benefit from large partnerships involving multiple partners and multiple sites (Figure 1c). Such programmes can provide economies of scale – core team management, large tenders for contracts covering a range of sites, synergies between themes such as monitoring or water level management, projects where integration and “joined-up” thinking is needed, and themes where exchanges of experience and techniques can benefit the partners. They provide the best frameworks for audience engagement, because their wider scope provides a greater diversity and volume of opportunity. They also often require working with a diverse community of landowners. To realise these benefits, such projects need a wide scope and range of component projects. Hence, they tend to have large budgets and be heavy on management time among the Partners. They also require significant fund raising effort. They are more challenging to plan and deliver, and have higher risk in terms of securing funding. There is likely to be capacity in the Broads for only one such large programme at a time.

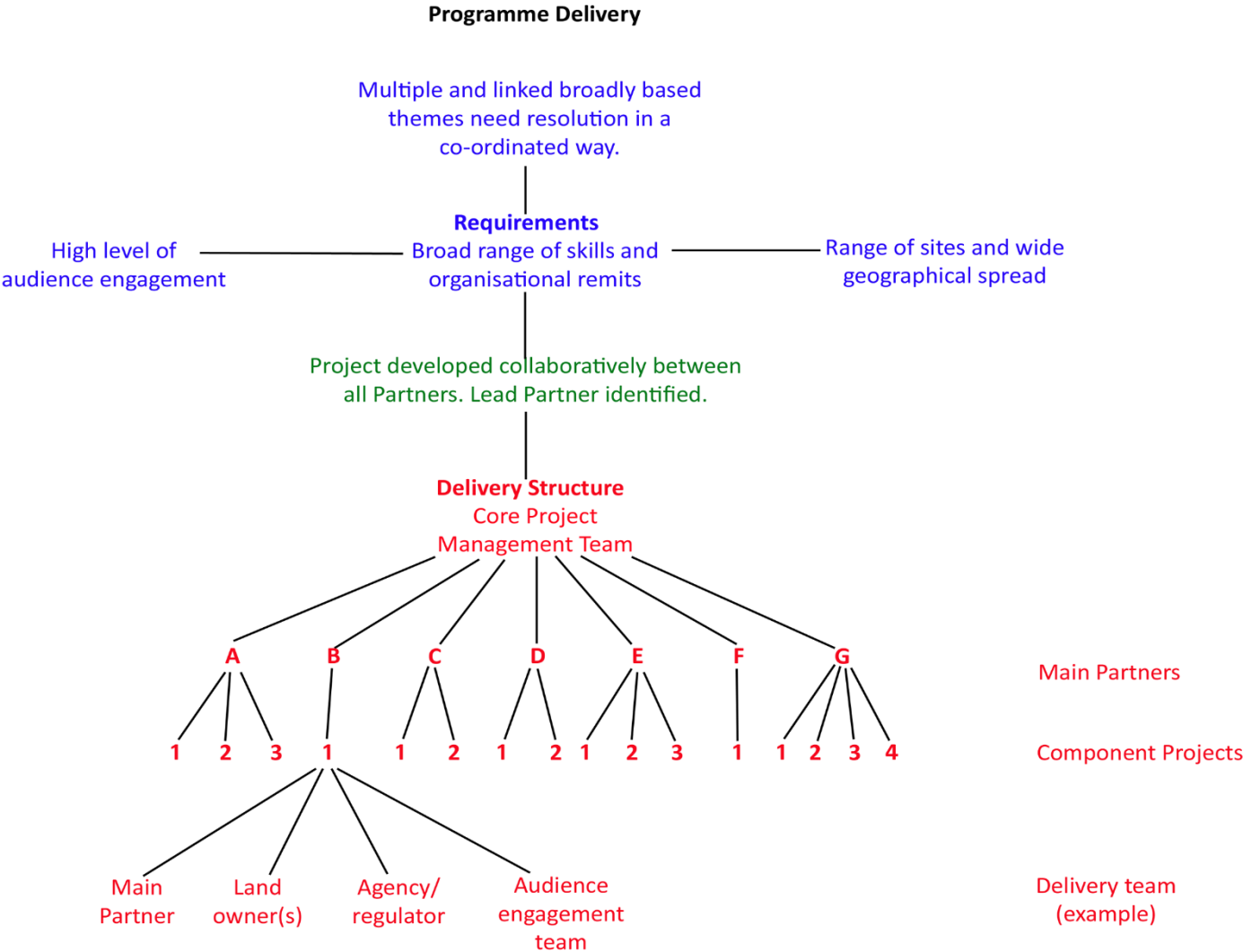
Programme delivery requires a core team to manage the overall scheme, the scheme finance, liaise with funders, oversee audience engagement and ensure partners adhere to the scheme vision, programme and budgets. The scheme needs a lead partner willing to host the programme including managing the direct risk. They also need a strong Partnership Agreement.

Restricted Partnership Delivery. This is a third type of project (Figure 1b) which is between the two extremes. Such schemes are modest in scale and scope but involve 2-3 partners with differing remits (e.g. RSPB, EA, IDB) to resolve a particular issue for one or a small group of sites. The Lead Partner tends to be the one with the greatest stake in resolving the issue, the others fulfil secondary objectives or provide support. This model can be very effective at delivering local conservation work, but tends to have less opportunity for audience engagement work.

4.2 Geographical Scope

While Direct and Restricted Partnership models tend to have very focussed geographical scope – one or a few sites – while the Programme model tends to have a much wider focus. It would be possible therefore to include valley and floodplain fens from Norfolk and Suffolk in any Broads-based bid, if it provided synergies to the Programme. It is possible to expand to UK fens or even abroad if suitable funding were available, but the wider the scope, the more partners are involved and international work in particular all make schemes increasingly unwieldy and demanding of staff project management time. The right geographical scope will depend on the themes addressed and the mix of constraints and opportunity for each scheme.

Figure 1c: Programme Delivery Model



5. POSSIBLE FUNDERS AND PROGRAMMES

Table 1 shows core themes, management models and potential funders.

All themes could be delivered by any of the three management models, but addressing some themes are much more effective with Programme Delivery because of the geographical scope, cooperative nature or size of the fund required. Hence the appropriateness of each model for a theme is rated 1-3, with 3 being most effective.

Only major project funders are considered. All of the funders would entertain projects from any of the three project management models. Availability of European funding is somewhat difficult to predict. If Brexit proceeds, funding will still be available for a short time meaning projects almost ready to go could be submitted. Developing entirely new projects with long lead-in times before submission may be considered risky. Landfill operators provide grants for a wide range of themes, but the cap on single grants means that for Programme projects they would be component funders, rather than main funders.

Clearly, the Heritage Lottery Fund provides the best opportunities for the widest range of themes and at all scales, closely followed by Esmée Fairburn, which is very strong on linking with audiences, the arts and sciences, and EU Life, although this is less concerned with audience engagement. Note that audience engagement is a mandatory part of all Heritage Lottery Funded projects, regardless of size, with the level of such activities expected to be scaled to the conservation spend.

The larger the project cost (i.e. more towards the Programme model), the more onerous the application process and the more intense the competition. Hence if it is feasible to undertake a project with Direct or Restricted Partnership models, this is both an easier and lower risk route. However, it is clear from the table that for ambitious projects aimed at achieving big outcomes, only a Programme model will do.

Table 1 : Conservation Theme, Management Model and Funder. 1 = least appropriate, 3 = most appropriate

Theme	Project Management Model			Funder					
	Direct	Restricted Partnership	Programme	Heritage Lottery Fund	Esmee Fairburn	EU Life	EU Leader	EU Interreg	Landfill Operator
Land Acquisition	3	3	3	3	2	3	1	1	2
Restoration of species or habitats	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	3
Landscape scale conservation	1	2	3	3	3	3	1	1	2
Improved Connectivity	1	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
Economically sustainable management of the fens		2	3	2	2	3	3	3	3
Restoration of the Broads Hydrosere	1	2	3	3	3	3	1	1	2
Water Quality and Nutrient Management	1	2	3	2	3	3	1	1	3
Audience Engagement	2	2	3	3	3	1	3	3	2

6. ACTION PLAN OR NEXT STEPS

Projects development to be determined by the Broads Biodiversity Partnership.