



Review of the Effectiveness of Partnership Working in the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area



Report of the Meeting held at Broad Hinton Village Hall on 29 January 2014

Cathy Williams, February 2014

Introduction

The Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area is a farmer led project with two strategic aims:

- To improve the condition and connectivity of the ecological network of the Marlborough Downs NIA
- To connect people to the landscape of the Marlborough Downs

This report is a record of the Review of the Effectiveness of Partnership Working for the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area Meeting on 29 January 2014. The meeting was convened by MDNIA Ltd, who invited representation from local farmers and a wide range of partner organisations with an interest in the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area. It was not the intention at this stage to try and include all possible stakeholders. The idea was to focus on some key organisations that have advised and helped with the delivery of the project. Many of their representatives are also local residents in the NIA. Wider local representation was invited through the parish and town councils. A participants list can be found at the end of the report. Other organisational representatives were invited who could not make the meeting.

The report contains all the wall writing produced by the facilitators and the participants including those made on post-it notes and written directly onto flip-charts. This method of working was chosen to ensure that the meeting participants had a range of opportunities to contribute their thoughts and ideas and to debate with each other. It also meant that the meeting outputs and records were generated by all present and visible to everyone taking part.

The author does not summarise, or draw conclusions; it is simply a record of the process and of what emerged.

Explanatory text about the process is at the start of each section in italic text Arial font (*like this*). Anything which is transcribed from the wall writing or the post-its written by the participants is in text boxes.

Flip chart health check!

Meeting flipchart notes can be a vital record of a meeting and a great aid memoir for those who were present. They can be most helpful to those who were not present if they have some proper interpretation and explanation by someone who attended.

Getting Started – welcome, aims, agenda

The Welcome and Background

At the beginning of the meeting the participants were welcomed by Teresa Dent, CEO of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and Chair of the “formal” Marlborough Downs Partnership which comprises, MDNIA Ltd (representing the farmer interest), Wiltshire Council, and GWCT.

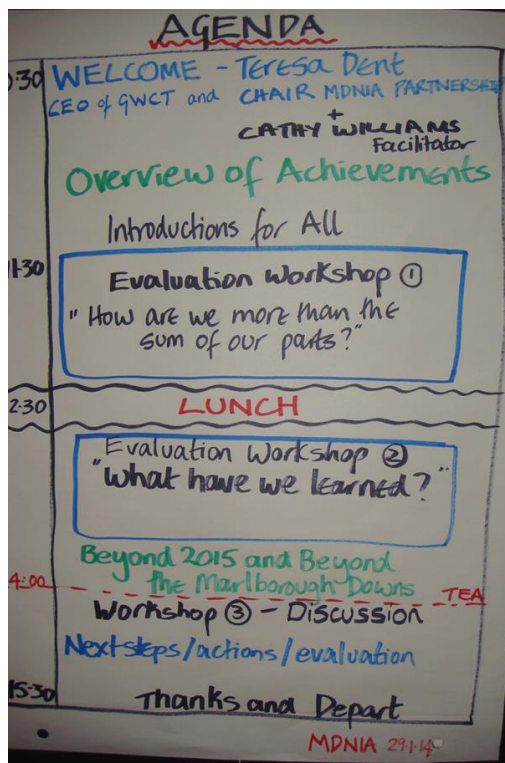
Teresa outlined how the project came into being, the aims of the day and the requirement to monitor and review the “Effectiveness of Partnership Working” which is one of the performance indicators chosen to assess the success of the project.

Cathy Williams then outlined the broad agenda for the day and introduced the facilitation team and the project team. Some guidelines for making the meeting run smoothly (ground rules) were agreed by all.

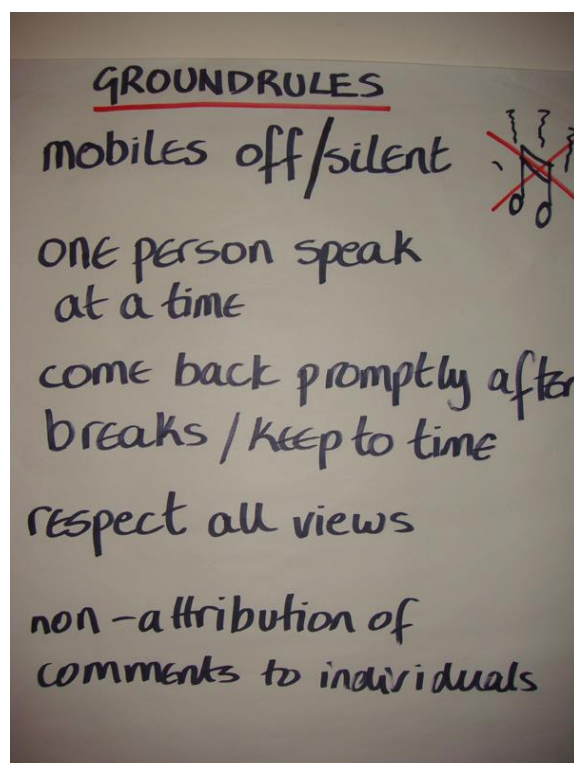
The Aim

The aim of the day was to review the experience of the wider partnership in working together, and learn what the added value has been of working together in this way. Added value includes enabling us to deliver our goals better and finding out what else has been achieved over and above the objectives stated in the business plan. The meeting was also intended to show and celebrate the achievements of the work to date and to capture some of the really fascinating stories and narrative about what distinguishes the project from other Nature improvement Areas.

Agenda



Groundrules



Presentations from the Delivery Groups

Each delivery group is made up of farmers and members of the non-farming community who offer specialist advice, assistance and resources to the work of the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area partnership.

There were brief presentations on:

Downland Species, including updates on arable flora, butterflies, tree sparrows, kestrel boxes, farmland birds, supplementary feeding, wild bird seed mixes, pollen and nectar mixes, and dew pond creation / restoration.

Access, including updates on the creation of circular walks and rides. The presentation also highlighted improvements such as the installation of gates and stiles, clearance of overgrown paths and introduction of way markers. There is a very successful initiative with the Kennet Valley Driving Group which provides carriage driving for the disabled, and is working with wounded veterans to allow them to access and enjoy the countryside. Plans for significant upgrading of tracks to allow better countryside access for walkers and riders are in hand.

Wildlife Sites, including the surveying of wildlife sites, production of Site Management Statements and practical management work e.g. scrub clearance, fencing to allow stock grazing and selective removal of invasive weeds to restore wildlife interest and ensure that sites are in good condition.

Community Outreach, including an update on walks, talks and educational events which have taken place and promotion and publicity through the MDNIA website, Facebook page and various media.



Evaluation Workshop 1

What has this project produced through partnership working (e.g. results on the ground, ways of working, new habits / behaviour, communication methods and good relations) ***that we wouldn't have had anyway?***

Participants worked around tables in small groups and each was given one of the project objectives as their starting point for discussion and then asked to broaden out from this to any aspect they wanted to talk about. They made a list of points and then shortlisted the most important ones to feed back to the whole meeting. The points were broken down into the activity or contributing factor, the beneficial outcome or result, and the key partners involved.

Access

Activity or contributing factor(s):

- Linking access routes together for carriage drivers, equestrians, walkers, and cyclists
- The NIA, access authorities and path users are all working together
- The existing extensive bridleway and byway network within the NIA is a contributing factor
- The combination of small and large land holdings and the fact that larger landowners have the resources and time to lead the project

Beneficial Outcome / Result

- People who may have known each other pre-NIA now have a common cause and reason to work together for a universal aim
- Creation of a greater sense of community
- Well managed access and responsible use by the public makes life easier for farmers

Partners / Key People

Landowners, driving / riding for the disabled (Jilly Carter),
Wiltshire and Swindon Rights of Way staff and the Project
Manager (Jemma Batten)

The NIA is unique with a relatively high number of larger landowners, and the question of how to engage and involve smaller farmers and landowners was raised.



Best Practice

Activity or contributing factor(s):

Peer to peer communication plus

- Farm visits and management plans
- Introducing people to each other
- “Bossy” Jemma (Project Manager) and support from others
- (Friendly) competition e.g. farmers with “lapwing envy”!
- Building relationships, credibility and trust
- Engagement and developing confidence

Beneficial Outcome / Result

- Has led to greater outcomes on the ground
- Better communication and collaboration
- Advice is more welcome and respected
- Being proud of the project and its achievements. Passionate!
- Getting to know neighbours and the local community

Lending expertise from the farming community to other “non-farming” landowners; other landowners are learning from farmers

Partners / Key People

Jemma Batten (Project Manager), Matt Prior (Wiltshire Ornithological Society), Cathy Williams (Community Outreach and Engagement Manager), Ali Rasey (Wiltshire Council Countryside Officer), Rob Large (Wildlife Sites Officer)

Chris Musgrave’s leadership has been crucial and having the support of the Wildlife Sites Project and Wiltshire Ornithological Society has been an integral part of the NIA.

Community Involvement

Activity or contributing factor(s):

- Workshops, walks and talks including: Owl Prowl, Bat Walk, Open Farm Sunday (800+ visitors), Dawn Chorus Walk, talks by farmers to the Avebury Society, old people in care homes, local societies and groups, local naturalists

Beneficial Outcome / Result

- Mixes up farmers and general public and local experts
- Changes perception of farmers and their care for nature
- Demand for repeat events and new events
- Opened people's eyes to the amount of local wildlife
- Opportunity to educate people about dog walking etc.
- Learned about the realities of wildlife conservation, habitat management including (necessary) intervention

Partners / Key People

- Parish councils through their newsletters and flyers
- Farmers
- Wilshire Council

Outreach

Activity or contributing factor(s):

1. A unique, non-prescriptive approach, which enabled the setting of own targets
2. Shared awareness (and time and effort shared)
 - community / parish council / learning together
3. Collective approach (no blueprint)
 - important to recognize the role of key people and an iterative approach

Beneficial Outcome / Result

1. Feel-good factor; tangible benefits have been realised. This can be distributed more widely and one area not fully explored is health and wellbeing
2. Collective working / enhanced community, based around new partnerships as well as enhancing existing ones
3. The key factors were the experts, leadership, facilitation and fun

Partners / Key People

Farmer/landowner to farmer/landowner partnerships develop trust. Linking to experts and helping them link to a wider range of people.

See local communities as partners. No boundaries as new people are joining all the time.

Need to determine how to engage with schools, what can we offer them that is attractive?

Link to national, but need to be clear that this is a bottom-up approach.

Activity or contributing factor(s):

The key factors were working at landscape scale, knowledge and working together. Building trust meant that more people were invited in / onto farms because the farmers had a positive experience of working with non-farmers.

- Landscape scale – gives the ability to link individual sites with the co-operation of neighbouring farmers.
- Discussions / conversations
- Access to a broad range of help / advice
- Having a project manager to bring it all together
- Co-ordination of survey work

Beneficial Outcome / Result

- Learning from others
- Best practice guidance in habitat management
- Realising the importance of your sites and their management in the context of the (wider) landscape
- Motivation and encouragement, team working
- Improved condition of wildlife sites
- Identification of new County Wildlife Sites
- Improved links and wildlife corridors

Partners / Key People

- National Trust
- Subject specialists
- Wildlife Sites Project
- Local Authority
- Farmers
- Natural England
- The MDNIA Board
- Project Manager
- Volunteers

Species

Activity or contributing factor(s):

- Trust
- Expertise
- Knowledge / enthusiasm

Beneficial Outcome / Result

- Opened doors
- Greater appreciation of what we have
- Better understanding of how to manage our land
- Emotion – pride for the area

Partners / Key People

NIA – Leader and motivator and able to influence

Lunch was provided by local farmer and caterer Heather Shears.

During the lunch break participants were encouraged to start inputting their thoughts to the second workshop of the evaluation to find out more about what had happened as a result of partnership working.

They added post-it notes with their observations and experiences to headed flip charts, and were then invited to elaborate and discuss the points generated.



Evaluation workshop 2 – What have we learned?

Participants were consulted on the following questions and contributed their thoughts on post it notes to answer:

1. What needs to change?
2. What would you do differently?
3. What has surprised you?
4. What has worked well?

What needs to change?

Reduce the bureaucracy
(Natural England)

Next time (if there is a next time) perhaps Natural England / Defra will be more flexible with budget / business plan and allow more "initiative" to do what NAI feels is best within it

(get) External funding – must be big opportunities (biodiversity offsetting? Corporate sponsorship?)

More publicity / awareness with media

School engagement

Not stop at (the) last year!

More school involvement

Keep it simple! Focused

Need to get more interest from smaller farmers – but how?

Further Discussion notes

- The first three months of the project were spent getting to grips with Defra (funder) requirements while also trying to do things on the ground
- There are rigid structures for spending public money
- There is an unacceptable amount of paperwork especially for a farmer-led project
- There's a need for a change from retrospective funding which assumes we have some money to begin with!
- The project effectively went broke in the 1st three months
- Smaller farmers need more help and support as they have less time available and less funds
- We are really good at doing things and less good at telling people about it
- We need to influence perceptions of the urban voter about farming

What would you do differently?

Longer term project

A more strategic approach. More work early on planning what we would like to achieve

Start with a longer project; three years seems to fly by

(Hold a) joint meeting of the delivery groups earlier in the process

Engaging with smaller landowners
More / better / earlier communications to the local community

Government must front load payments – not retrospective claims!

More of the funds used for the project rather than bureaucracy

Multiple funding?

Further Discussion notes

Ideally we would have had no targets for the first three months – just time to get to grips with all the planning and policy development and setting up the charity, etc.

What has surprised you?

The willingness that people have shown for working together

How well the whole project has worked and the goodwill engagement between all groups

How well everyone cooperated

How Jemma is still smiling

Public support and interest

How well farmers “got” landscape scale management

Smaller farmers found it enabled them to ask bigger farmers to cooperate

How much has happened in a short time

Community involvement – the quality of people that have come out of the woodwork to support the project

How quickly nature has reacted to the addition of ponds, tree sparrow villages and feed

Further Discussion notes

Health and wellbeing agenda is on the increase and we can provide for this through our project

What has gone well?

New partnerships have been developed and are delivering

Team working and information exchange

A single point for communications with local farmers

A central coordinator

The increase in interaction between landowners / farmers

Team work

Openness

Help

Evidence based approach (surveys, management plans and expertise)

Evaluation days etc. and social interaction has kept the project fun and enjoyable

Further Discussion notes

Having a central coordinator is absolutely critical – agreed by farmers and non-farmers alike

Having delivery groups with a mix of farmers, volunteers and specialists in each



Beyond April 2015?

There were brief presentations by Jemma Batten and Teresa Dent to give everyone ideas of what might be possible when the funding for this project runs out in April 2015 and to update participants on current joint working by farmers outside the MDNIA.

The following three statements were written up on different flip charts around the room and all participants were then asked to consider which one most closely matched their own view and to stand near the relevant statement. The points raised by advocates of each are written below the statements.

One

“I think we should finish the project in April next year. We’ll have done what we set out to and more, and I’m happy that the things that are enduring like new habits or practices, contacts made, working relationships established etc., will carry on.”

This option attracted the least support on the face of it though the points made below were agreed by many at the meeting.

Comments:

The project should end formally in April 2015. If we carry on we send the message to government that they get it all for free. We need more funding to stop it just petering out.

Although farmers do more than you think if approached in the right way, we can’t do this for nothing.

Two

“I wholeheartedly support continuing and am ready to lend my support and resources to making this happen and think we should at least look into getting some more / significant funding and draw up a new five-year business plan.”

This option attracted the significant majority of people including those from statutory bodies such as local authorities, Natural England, the AONB partnership and conservation organisations as well as most of the farmers. There was debate about whether people could / should support the continuity of something unless there was guaranteed funding.

Comments:

I strongly support what we have done.

We support this and the wider contacts of GWCT.

We need to market what we have done.

There are other sources of funding to be explored – not just Natural England.

If we are seen to walk away now it will create an adverse perception for the future.

We could be helping others to learn the lessons that we've had / perhaps some sort of knowledge exchange.

Three

“I think we should (in principle) do more and think this needs more discussion. I’m happy to explore who can do what, perhaps with a little bit of extra funding.”

A small number (less than 20%) of voters supported this statement including some farmer board members.

Comments:

Some funding could be found through small actions – it doesn’t have to be / won’t be a full-scale project like the one we now have.

A Project Team is essential.

We have been seen to succeed with a high quality team.

We should not go bigger (in terms of geographic area), just keep to the Marlborough Downs and focus on our 10,000 ha.

We should look for funding from non-government sources.

Landscape-scale projects are going to be part of the Government’s new environmental land management scheme.

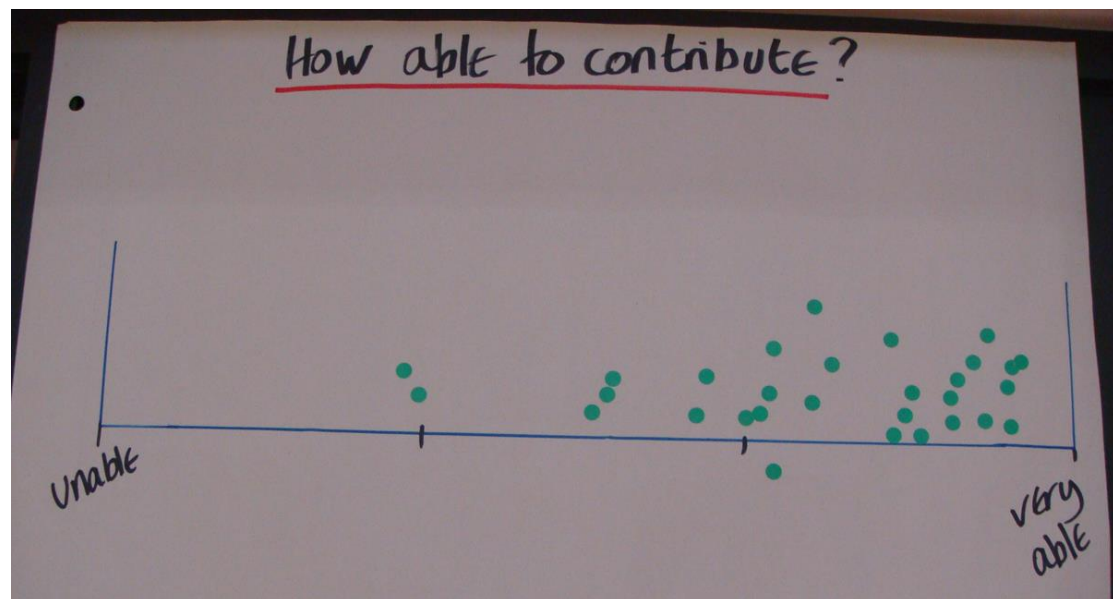
With a scaled down version we will still retain the added extras (i.e. those benefits identified by this meeting such as new / better working relationships, trust, ability to bring in outside advice expertise etc.)

If the monitoring and evaluation aspects of the project end (after 3 years) then we lose the learning. Many of our impacts are longer term than the project funding so how will they be captured if the project ends? Ecological benefits and trends take a very long time to become evident; we need to convey this to funders.

Evaluation of the meeting

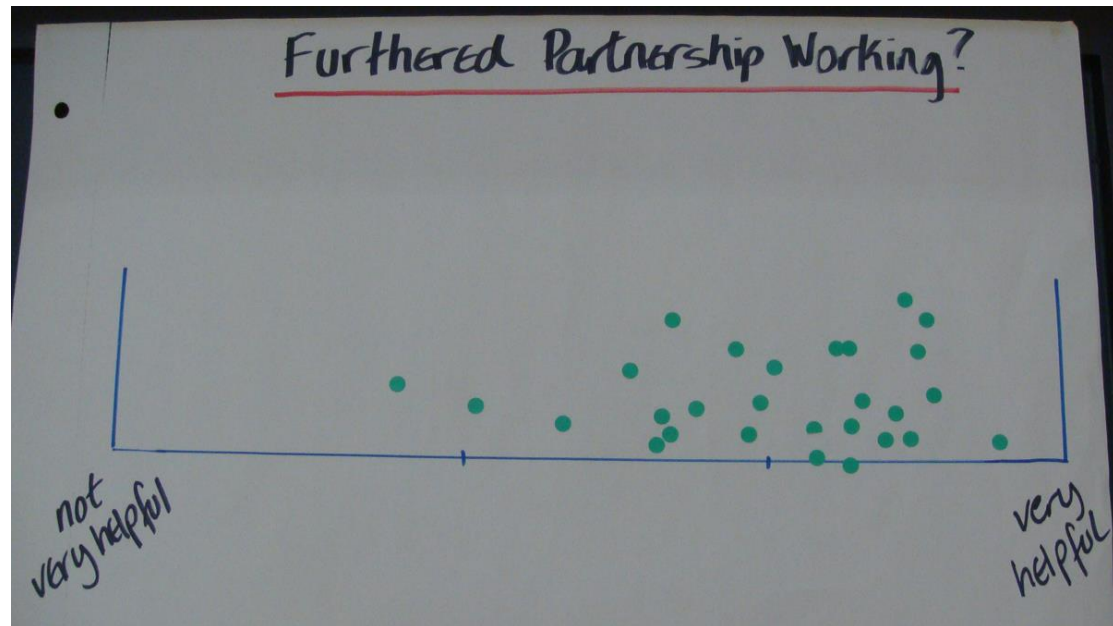
Finally the participants were asked three questions and given a sticky dot to put on scales to help evaluate the meeting. The results were then discussed to see what would help people to contribute participate more fully, learn more and further partnership working.

How able were you to contribute your thoughts and ideas to the meeting?



One person commented that they felt less able to contribute to discussion simply because it was the first time they had been to an MDNIA meeting. Others agreed that the format and the number of attendees and range of interests represented were good.

To what extent did the meeting contribute towards partnership working?



In terms of how much the meeting furthered partnership working, one participant commented that they put their dot lower on the scale because a lot of the partnership working was already in place. Another said that these kinds of meetings are important to enhance and maintain the partnership.

How much did the event help with learning?



One participant said that they put their dot lower on the scale because they have already been to a number of meetings and so knew quite a bit about the project. Another then added that this showed that the process is working “because we are all engaged”.

Other comments included:

- We were able to learn well
- The NIA actually seems to DO something rather than just chat (I go to lots of meeting where all people do is talk)
- We do things for the environment

Action List

What?	Who?	When?
Write up (draft) report and send to key stakeholders for checking	Cathy Williams	15.2.14
Distribute final report by posting on MDNIA website	Jemma Batten	28.2.14

Final comments and thanks: Teresa Dent

Teresa Dent finished the meeting by thanking all of the team who delivered the event, particularly Cathy Williams and Chris Short for planning and facilitating the day, and Jemma Batten the Project Manager.

She went on to thank everyone who gave their time to attend, and said that it was a terrific turnout which in itself demonstrated how we are working in partnership. She added that she had counted up 17 farmers and 18 organisations represented in the room, and that she had not seen anything *quite* like this in the farming world before.

Some key observations were that we are not yet doing enough to promote the project and that further thinking is needed about how to integrate the things that are unique i.e. the ability to choose targets and projects, into a new style agri-environment scheme.

Teresa summarised some of the key findings from this way of partnership working including being able to explain the benefits of this approach upwards i.e. to government and decision makers. This has given farmers a voice and influence upwards. Farmers encouraged her in her role as CEO of GWCT to join them in this, and the project has provided a safe place for farmers to walk and talk the conservation story. It has been really wonderful for farmers to have a sense of being valued in this initiative.

In addition we have learned that there is more to do on helping smaller farmers engage with the bigger ones.

The project still has much to accomplish between now and April 2015. We want to be the best Nature Improvement Area in the country and we need to think hard about the future.

Reporting

Participants are asked to tell others in their community about the meeting and its results and to encourage them to stay informed and get involved by looking at the information on the website and Facebook page and by joining the email list for updates. Contact for further information:

Email: info@mdnia.org.uk

Phone: 01380 871012

Website: mdnia.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MarlboroughDownsNIA

Appendix 1 – Delivery Group Members

Downland Species Group

Vikki Lowes, Farmer

Chris Musgrave, Farmer

Matt Prior, Wiltshire Ornithological Society

Jemma Batten, Black Sheep Countryside Management

Peter Thompson, Project Management Team

Access Group

Jilly Carter, Farmer

Gerald Long, University of the Third Age

Annie Ellis, Swindon Rights of Way

Stephen Leonard, Wiltshire Rights of Way

Jemma Batten, Project Management Team

Wildlife Sites

Catherine Burrell, Farmer

John White, Farmer

Richard Aisbitt, Wiltshire Botanical Society

Rob Large, Wildlife Sites Project

Simon Smart, Project Management Team

Community Outreach Group

Laura Corbett, Farmer

Suzie Swanton, Farmer

Gill Hussey, Farmer

Oliver Cripps, North Wessex Downs AONB

Ali Rasey, Wiltshire Council

Cathy Williams, Project Management Team

Appendix 2 - Participant List

Name		Role / Organisation
Ali	Rasey	Countryside Officer, Wilts Council
Ali	Stewart	Rights of Way (RoW) Officer, Wilts Council
Anne	Tew	MDNIA Company Secretary
Catherine	Burrell	Farmer
Cathy	Williams	Consultant / MDNIA Project Management Team
Charlotte	Bruce-White	Farmland Bird Initiative Officer
Charlotte	Hitchmough	Action for the River Kennet
Chris	Musgrave	Estate Manager / MDNIA board member
Chris	Short	University of Gloucester
David	White	Farmer
Gerry	Eyles	Wroughton Parish Council
Gill	Hussey	Farmer / MDNIA board member
James	Hussey	Farmer
Jemma	Batten	Consultant / MDNIA Project Management Team
Jilly	Carter	Farmer
Judith	Farthing	Farmer
Katie	Guest	Farmer
Louise	Batchelor	Student, Royal Agricultural University
Maggie	Lewis	KVDG and Avebury Parish Council
Martin	Northmore-Ball	Fyfield and West Overton Parish Council
Matt	Moore	Estate manager, Science Museum
Natalie	Makin	Landowner
Nigel	Bunter	Farmer
Peter	Makin	Landowner
Peter	Thompson	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust / MDNIA Project Management Team
Oliver	Cripps	North Wessex Downs AONB
Richard	Aisbitt	Chair, Wiltshire Botanical Society
Richard	Broadhead	Rights of Way & Countryside Manager, Wiltshire Council / MDNIA board member
Rob	Large	County Wildlife Sites Officer
Robert	Cooper	Farmer / MDNIA board member
Sian	Creagh-Osborne	Volunteer
Simon	Smart	Consultant / MDNIA Project Management Team
Stephen	Davis	Wiltshire Wildlife Trust / Link2Nature
Stephen	Leonard	Senior Rights of Way Warden, Wiltshire Council
Stuart	Hales	Natural England
Sue	Everett	Flora Locale
Teresa	Dent	Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust / MDNIA board member
Tim	Carson	Farmer
Tim	Wade	Farmer
Tony	Farthing	Farmer
Vicki	Lowes	Landowner