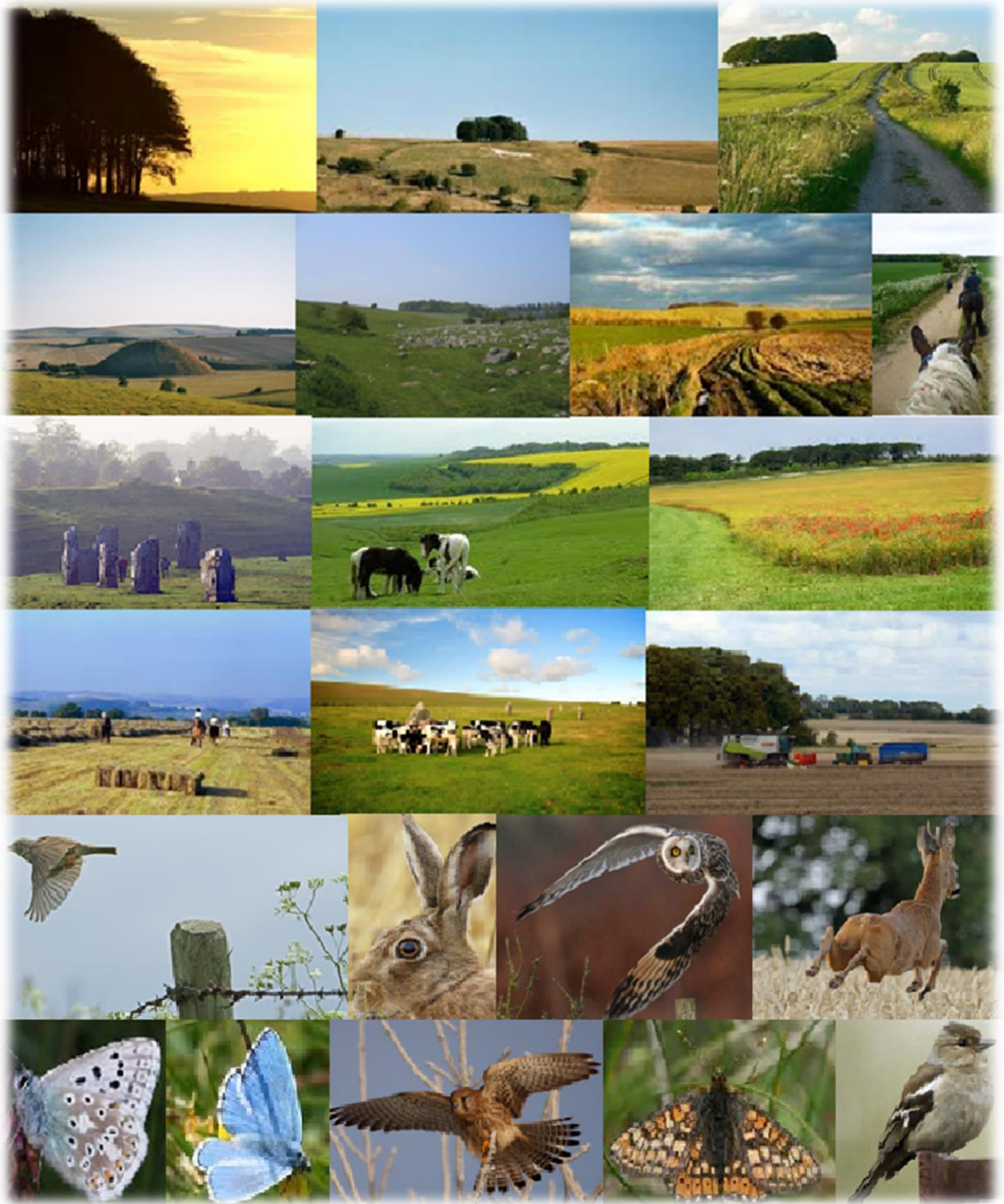
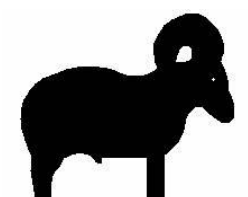


The Marlborough Downs: Space for Nature



Fourth Annual Report



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The Marlborough Downs Nature Enhancement Partnership

Summary of achievements October 2015 to September 2016

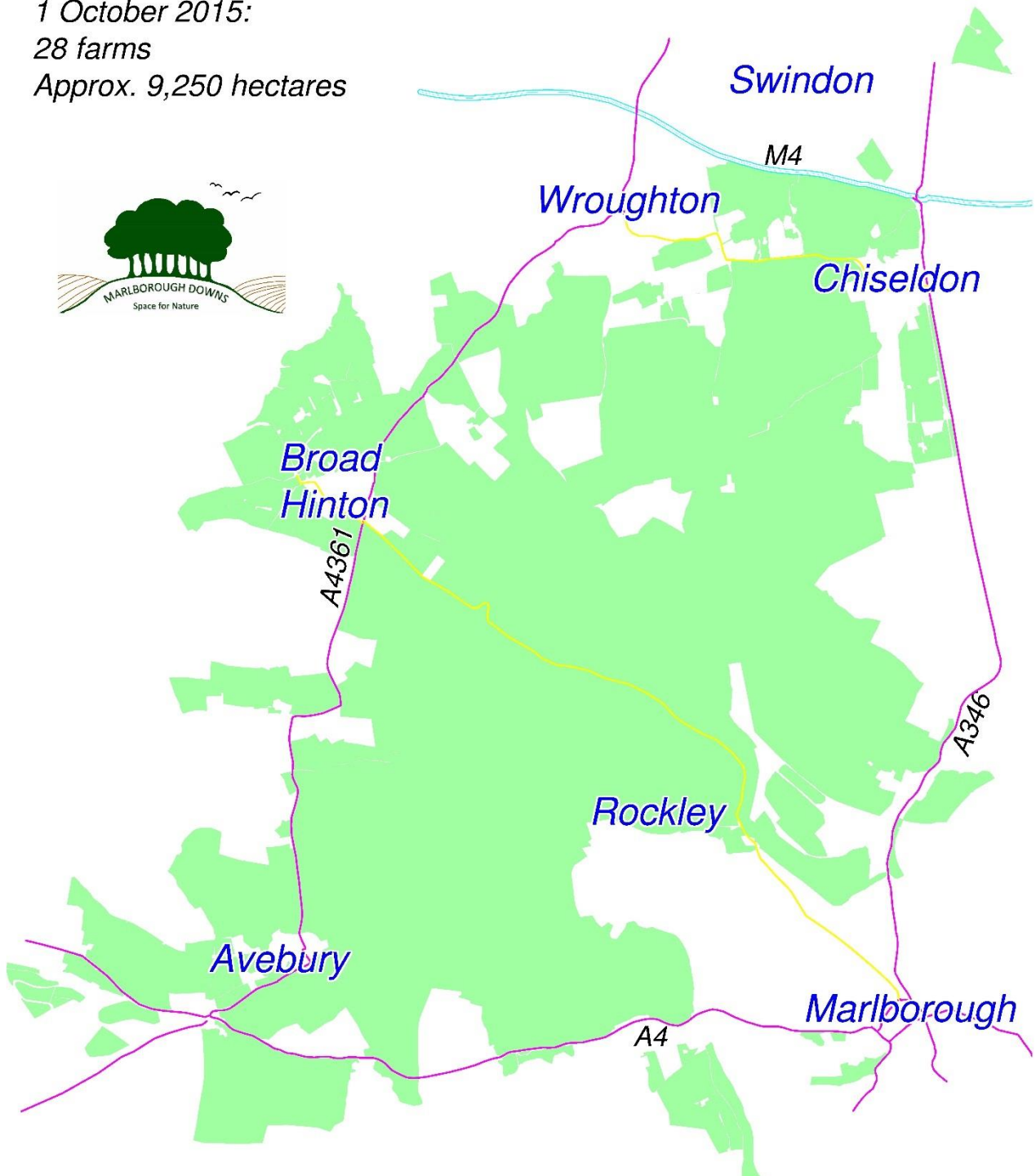
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Marlborough Downs: Space for Nature

 Space for Nature farms

1 October 2015:
28 farms
Approx. 9,250 hectares





MARLBOROUGH DOWNS

NATURE ENHANCEMENT PARTNERSHIP

SUMMARY OF SPACE FOR NATURE PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS 2015-16

INTRODUCTION

After a summer of ticking over and taking stock, the Marlborough Downs farmers and supporters re-branded ourselves as a Nature Enhancement Partnership and launched a new project – Space for Nature – on 1 October 2015. 56 farmers and land managers representing 28 agricultural holdings have now signed up to deliver it, along with a whole range of supporters too numerous to list. A full description of the scope of our ambition can be found at the end of this report, which is a summary of some of the achievements this new Partnership has enjoyed during its first year of activity.

A five-year grant from the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund has supported the delivery of some elements of the project while others continue to rely on love and a shoestring (volunteers and donations!).

OBJECTIVE 1 – To deliver evidence-based conservation activities on a landscape scale

1.1 Biodiversity tailoring

The pilot has shown how detailed knowledge of what's happening beyond individual farm boundaries has enabled us to deliver on a landscape scale.

1.1.1 Existing Stewardship agreements

In the first year, we have concentrated on supporting our farmland bird project (see objective 3) by reviewing existing Higher Level Stewardship agreements to identify whether they could be amended to include the HF24 option – Supplementary Feeding in Winter for Farmland Birds. This provides a grant to farmers who are prepared to purchase and distribute winter feed for birds during the 'hungry gap', something our pilot project supported to great effect.

To date we have agreed with Natural England that four agreements will be amended from 1 January 2017 to include this option, resulting in a further 12.5 tonnes of food for our birds each year between 2017 and the end of the Stewardship agreements (typically 2020 or 2021). A further two agreements are also eligible for amendment and approval has been given for one of these, with the other still under discussion. Combined with the 9 tonnes already being delivered via existing agreements, this could bring the total amount of seed available for hand feeding to a whopping 25 tonnes each year, without the need to spend our hard-earned charitable funds on high energy seed to supplement grain donated by farmers.

1.1.2 New Stewardship agreements

Defra launched the latest agri-environment scheme in 2015 and we've now seen two rounds of applications. We have supported applications from one member in 2015 (Higher Tier) and four in 2016 (1 x Higher Tier and 3 x Mid-Tier) with the aim of ensuring that the resulting agreements complement our efforts to improve wildlife habitats and species, water quality, the historic environment, etc.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing this report we have yet to actually achieve an agreement on the Marlborough Downs. The 2015 application was withdrawn because Natural England required too much land to be taken out of production which would have impacted on the viability of the farm. The Scheme appears to allow for no compromise and sadly, because of a single sticking point, everything in this application was lost, including proposals to create and manage chalk grassland; protect historic features; provide habitat and foraging areas for farmland birds and pollinators; and buffer watercourses.

Similarly, the 2016 Higher Tier application was withdrawn because of inflexible rules on transferring directly from the Higher Level Environmental Stewardship agreement to a new

Countryside Stewardship one. Happily, however, we expect to re-submit this application next year, when the existing HLS will have expired.

We are still waiting to hear whether the Mid-Tier applications have been successful.

1.2 Supporting local conservation businesses

The project continues to act as a central communication point for members and those involved in conservation management, contracting, supply, research, etc. Examples of how we have supported the development of mutually beneficial relationships include:

- Prepared management details for a grazing licence for the owner of a grassland Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) taking on a new grazier
- Recommended known contractors to make hay and put up new fencing
- Contacted members on behalf of a new grazier with experience of grazing chalk grassland on the Chilterns
- Secured free and reduced price seed for conservation mixes



Annual flower mixes for pollinators



Bees 'n' Seeds mixes

OBJECTIVE 2 – To enable appropriate management of semi-natural wildlife habitat

2.1 Better woodland management

The pilot focussed on chalk grassland and while this will continue to be a priority habitat on the Downs, members agreed that it would be good to bring neglected woodland back into management, and to enhance the wildlife value of woodland planted for shooting.

Oliver Cripps (North Wessex Downs AONB) applied to the Plunkett Foundation (<https://www.plunkett.co.uk/woodlands>) for a “Making Local Woods Work” grant to set up a social forestry group to undertake woodland work across members’ holdings. Unfortunately, the application was unsuccessful as it was initially felt by the panel that our proposals did not fit the grant criteria. However, the MLWW project is now more established and, we believe, prepared to consider a wider remit, so we are planning to re-apply in 2017.

We also have a pest and predator control workshop planned for the winter of 2016/17 which will include information about how to undertake effective squirrel and deer control in established and newly planted woodlands.

2.2 Better pond management

In the late spring of 2015, after leaving all 18 dew ponds that were created/restored to colonise naturally, we introduced a selection of floating and marginal aquatic plants to each of them. Over the following months we have visited most of the ponds to see what has established, what does well and what has become invasive with the aim of producing a planting do’s and don’ts list for the Marlborough Downs.



In addition, the following activities are planned/underway:

- The new website (www.mdnep.org.uk, currently under construction) has a section dedicated to pond management
- A talk on pond management and planting will be delivered as part of our annual autumn meeting in October 2016
- A workshop on the same will be offered in the spring of 2017

2.3 *Wildlife corridors and stepping stones*

2.3.1 *Tree sparrow corridor*

We have completed approximately 400 m of a proposed 730 m tree sparrow corridor along the boundary between Temple Farm and Rockley Manor Estate. The corridor is made up of a strip of scrub comprising the same species used to create our tree sparrow villages, i.e. hawthorn, blackthorn and buckthorn for cover and protection from avian predators; and spindle, wayfaring tree, guelder rose, hazel, crab apple, dog rose, and dogwood to provide year-round flowers, fruit and berries. The aim is to link an existing tree sparrow village on Rockley Estate with a nectar mix (insects for chick feeding) on Temple Farm, a dew pond on Rockley Estate and a tree belt between Rockley Estate and Manton Estate.

The plants for the initial 150 m of this corridor were provided by the owner of the Rockley Estate and planted by students from the Royal Agricultural University. The remainder were paid for by Cardwave, a local company, as a carbon offsetting initiative, and planted by Cardwave staff.

As well as providing a corridor for tree sparrows and other wildlife to move safely around the area, this strip of scrub will also contribute to reducing the rate of climate change through carbon storage, and help regulate run-off and thus prevent flooding of the adjacent road.

2.3.2 *Chalk grassland*

As part of the Marlborough Downs NIA pilot project we undertook to create and restore several grassland sites, including four parcels around the village of Rockley. These parcels were key in creating areas of species rich grassland within a network of sites that include some which were already sufficiently diverse to warrant Local Wildlife Site status.

In the spring of 2016 the owners of these sites were invited to review and compare results on the four sites:

Site	Site name	Action	Year
1	Rockley Sloping Field East	Enhance existing species poor sward by introducing wildflower seed	2013
2	Rockley Sloping Field West	Enhance existing species poor sward by introducing wildflower seed	2015
3	Compound	Enhance existing species poor sward by introducing wildflower seed	2015
4	Maisey Meadow	Sow species rich grass and wildflower mix into bare ground	2015



Rockley Sloping Field East – area of floristically poor grassland sown with wildflower mix (left) compared with untreated margin (right)

We found that while sites 2 and 3 were still very much in the early stages of restoration, site 1 (see photos above) and site 4 both support a good diversity of wildflowers. Appropriate management was discussed and subsequently undertaken. It is our intention to survey each of these sites on an annual basis.

OBJECTIVE 3 – To consolidate populations of species of national and local importance

3.1 Space for Birds: Marlborough Downs farmland bird project

This continues to be one of our flagship projects, with more farmers getting involved each year. Our approach is threefold:

1. Year-round feeding opportunities for adults and spring/summer insect food for chicks
2. Nesting habitat
3. Protection from predators where predation significantly threatens breeding success

Delivery on-the-ground is co-ordinated by Matt Prior of Wiltshire Ornithological Society, and farmers and other volunteers generally contribute either by participating in a voluntary supplementary feeding programme, and/or via existing Environmental Stewardship or new Countryside Stewardship agreements. All Higher Level Stewardship agreements and proposed Countryside Stewardship agreements (to start January 2017) fully meet Natural England's targets for minimum areas of winter feeding, summer feeding and shelter/nesting habitat.

3.1.1 Feeding and foraging habitat

Most of our members provide overwinter stubbles, sown wild bird mixes and/or nectar mix plots via existing ELS or HLS agreements, and/or do so on a voluntary basis. We are currently in the process of compiling a database of all grant supported and voluntary farmland bird activities on member farms, a summary of which will be published in the 2016-17 report.

3.1.2 Supplementary feeding

In addition to the sown mixes, existing Stewardship agreements provide 9 tonnes of seed to three farms to be fed to farmland birds over the winter and spring. This was supplemented during the 2015-16 season by an additional 9 tonnes of donated farm-saved grain (barley, wheat, linseed and rape) and 2 tonnes of high energy bird mix (paid for by donations made to our charitable fund).

Donated and purchased seed was fed across several farms, including those without Stewardship agreements who do not have grant money for seed. Because of the high cost of purchased seed, two farms have experimented with growing millet to harvest for bird seed. In total, 3.5 acres were sown and at the time of writing 1.5 acres have been harvested yielding approximately 1 tonne per acre of seed which has been distributed to farms across the Downs.



Having experimented during the Marlborough Downs NIA pilot project and prior to that, we believe that the best way to deliver seed to wild birds (rather than gamebirds, rodents, squirrels, deer and other mammals) is to put at least a proportion of it into hanging feeders. To this end the project purchased 55 giant feeders which have been distributed to ten farms.

In addition, we have achieved amendments to four existing Environmental Stewardship agreements (see 1.1.1 above) which means that, as a direct result of our actions, over £40k of additional grant payments will come to the Downs over the next few years to fund a significant increase in the amount of food being delivered.

3.1.3 Dawn chorus walk

In May, farmers and friends joined one of our members on his farm on a walk led by local ornithologists to identify some of the birds that make their home on the Downs.

3.2 Pest and predator control

3.2.1 Rodent control

Both conservation mixes and bird feeding stations unfortunately attract non-target species including rodents. To understand how these can be legally and effectively controlled four of our members attended a rodent control workshop organised by our partner the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

3.2.2 Woodland pest control

A workshop covering all aspects of pest control in woodland is to be held in spring 2017, with input from Wessex Woodland, a local forestry contracting company.

3.3 Widespread species

3.3.1 Pollinators

In our first year, we have concentrated on pollinators. It is well documented that wild pollinators have been in decline for some time and a continuation of this trend would mean disaster for insect pollinated wild flowers and blossom, and for agricultural crops such as oilseed rape and linseed that rely on insect pollination.

To create more habitat for wild pollinators, all farmers who have Higher Level Environmental Stewardship agreements and those who have applied for Countryside Stewardship agreements (to start January 2017) have included at least the minimum area of pollen and nectar rich habitat recommended by Natural England and other conservation organisations.

To supplement our native pollinator populations on the Downs we have also undertaken to develop a network of honey bee apiaries with the expectation that these will augment the pollination impact of wild species. While there has been some speculation that high densities of

honey bees might have a negative impact on wild pollinator populations, we are working with hobby beekeepers (rather than commercial ones) and keeping the numbers of hives low to supplement rather than compete with wild pollinators. We hope in 2017 to work with a post-graduate student to monitor the impact of honey bee apiaries on wild pollinator populations on member farms.

3.3.2 Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs are also in decline and though not strictly a farmland species will utilise farmhouse gardens and land around buildings and yards to forage, nest and hibernate. We held a workshop on the ecology, habits and habitats of hedgehogs to encourage members to support this species on the Downs.



3.3.3 Butterflies

We held a butterfly workshop in July, which was led by members of the Wiltshire branch of Butterfly Conservation. Participants were given tips on how to identify the different chalkland species and information about their ecology and life histories. The importance of an abundant supply of larval food plants is of particular importance and is something to which all farmers can contribute.

3.3.4 Bats

September found a group of farmers and other local supporters of the project armed with bat detectors and following a representative of the South Wiltshire Bat Group around Rockley Manor learning about how to identify bats from their calls, habitat and flight. We also discussed how to improve the environment for bats both on farms and in gardens.



OBJECTIVE 4 – To offer a range of opportunities for people to engage with the landscape of the Marlborough Downs

4.1 *Marlborough Downs SfN events*

During the period 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016 we organised a range of meetings, events, talks, walks, workshops, visits and multi-media material to promote best practice amongst our members, to inform the public about our work, and to educate everyone on wildlife, countryside and farming subjects. A few of these have already been mentioned, but in total we co-ordinated 66 events, activities and publications, including:

Best practice activities:

Project planning workshops x 2
ES/CS options timing tool for farmers
Farmland bird feeding demonstration
Farm walk
Visit to GWCT Allerton Project
SfN pollinator project
SfN farmland bird project
Grassland restoration surveys
ES amendments x 4
CS applications x 5
Bat walk

Best practice talks:

Future Farming and the Environment
Dew Ponds: managing and planting
GWCT Allerton Project
Restoring field margin habitats for pollinators

Technical workshops:

Rodent control
Hedgehog habits and habitats
Countryside Stewardship Scheme x 2
Butterfly walk
Hen harriers

Engagement activities:

Heritage walks x 2
Willow wreath workshop
Information panel
Stakeholder meetings (many)
Newsletters x 2
Magazine article
Facebook page
Radio interviews x 2
Partner seed offer
Stakeholder sponsorship
Facilitators' group telecons
Spring Celebration
Wildlife Champion award
Dawn Chorus walk
Cycle the Downs
School visit
Open Farm Sunday
GWCT farm walk
Kennet Valley Carriage Driving Group
New website
Volunteer work days x 3
4x4 safaris x 2

In addition, the project manager carried out 31 farm visits during which the project, its aims, delivery and/or achievements were the subject of at least part of the conversation.

4.2 *Health and wellbeing*

While it is our aim to establish links with local organisations offering specialist care and support for a range of people such as the elderly, young people, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, the long term unemployed, etc., unfortunately we do not yet have the funding to undertake this aspect of our project proposal.

4.2 *Schools and education*

We had also hoped to forge stronger links with local schools but again, do not currently have the funding to take this forward.

However, we have a strong relationship with the Dorcan Academy in Swindon and have worked with students on several occasions:

- Advised on setting up the Dorcan Nature Project and suggested a variety of ways to make school grounds more attractive to wildlife
- Offered a 4x4 safari across the Downs as the prize for the “Best Bug Hotel” competition
- Involved students in Open Farm Sunday
- Visited the Academy on several occasions to meet students and discuss the work they’ve done

4.3 *Volunteer Group*

Again, due to lack of funding we have been unable to fully launch our volunteer group. We have had conversations with several other groups such as Friends of the Railway Path, the Fyfield Down National Nature Reserve team, and Involve, to explore the possibility of a collaborative effort but are frustrated by lack of funds to pay a co-ordinator.

This year we have concentrated on one-off events that are eligible under our CS FF agreement rather than attempting to set up a group that meets regularly. Volunteer workdays undertaken include:

- Planting tree sparrow corridor (Rockley Estate/Temple Farm) – one day with Royal Agricultural University students and one day with staff from local company Cardwave
- Installation of bridle gate – RAU students



OBJECTIVE 5 – To provide high quality access for all

Having been unable to secure funding to pay someone to co-ordinate this aspect of the project we have been forced to postpone our access programme. However, a few activities have been undertaken on a voluntary basis:

- Marlborough Downs Walking Group – monthly guided walk. After four months with very limited uptake despite widespread advertising we felt we needed to review our approach/target audience.
- Joined forces with a local archaeologist to organise two 'Heritage Walks' around Avebury.
- Upgraded a stile to kissing gate with Royal Agricultural University students.
- Maintained strong links with Kennet Valley Carriage Driving Group and supported them in applying to landowners for permissive access.
- *Ad hoc* interaction with other groups – geocaching, long distance riders.

Marlborough Downs Walking Group



On the 3rd Sunday of every month join us on a walk on or around the Marlborough Downs. All are welcome including well behaved children and dogs. Because of the terrible ground conditions in most places as a result of the recent persistent rain this month's walk will be a relatively short one, and hopefully not too wet! We'll cover about a mile and a half but should see some interesting things on the way, including some of the habitat restoration work we've been doing as part of the project.

- ✓ Booking essential
- ✓ Please wear sturdy boots/shoes and appropriate clothing - the forecast is for cold but thankfully dry weather though it's likely to be wet underfoot!

When: Sunday 17 January 2016, meeting at 10:45 am
Where: Chiseldon, meeting location will be given on booking
Cost: All Space for Nature events are free to attend but as we no longer receive Defra funding we hope that you will consider making a donation to enable us to continue our work

**For more information and booking please call 01380 871012
or email mdnep@btinternet.com**

Children and dogs welcome if accompanied by a responsible adult; not suitable for pushchairs

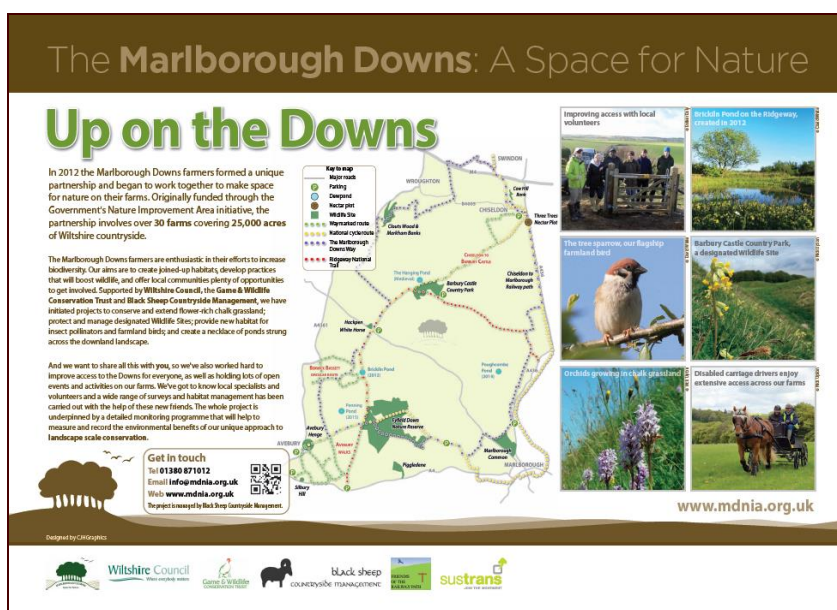
Space for Nature is a partnership project led by the farmers of the Marlborough Downs



OBJECTIVE 6 – To increase local and national awareness of the work, achievements and impact of the Space for Nature Project

Lack of suitably qualified volunteers or funds to pay professionals has also thwarted our efforts in this aspect of our proposals. However, once again we can report some achievements in this area, including:

- Networking – everyone involved promotes the project in whatever context possible and to a wide audience including politicians, civil servants, local and national NGOs, charities and other organisations, businesses, the media, local special interest groups, etc.
- Media engagement – the project was the subject of a Radio 4 Farming Today programme and has also featured in several other broadcasts and articles.
- Events programme – our public events are well attended showing that we are engaging with our target audience.
- Information panel – we commissioned an additional information panel, with contributions from Sustrans and Friends of the Railway Path.
- Membership – we have widened our membership to include farm workers, gamekeepers, and others with land management responsibilities.
- New website – to be launched by the end of 2016
- Social media – our facebook page has over 700 followers and posts regularly reach over 1000 people.
- Presence at partner events – we have contributed leaflets, posters, banners etc. to several partner events.



FINANCIAL STATEMENT – MDNEP PROFIT AND LOSS FOR YEAR 1 OCTOBER 2015 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2017

The Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund has been the primary source of income for project management and overheads associated with support for the delivery of CS priorities for the area ('Best Practice').

The equivalent of £7,131.10 in *pro bono* and in-kind contributions was recorded which, along with cash donations of £2,433.81, allowed us to deliver a small part of our community and outreach ambitions.

Further donations were received for specific activities:

- a. £50,000 from the Kilcreggan Trust for the development of a nature reserve to demonstrate best practice in wildlife management, and to support the farmland bird programme
- b. £250 from Thames Water for bird seed
- c. £50 from CB Cooper Partnership for bird seed
- d. £61.32 from Trustees towards insurance costs

Marlborough Downs Nature Enhancement Partnership Profit and Loss October 1 2015 to September 30 2016

	Best Practice	Community Involvement	Downland Species	Management / Overhead	TOTAL
Income					
Gifts and Donations Income					
CS Facilitation Fund	13,444.08	0.00	0.00	7,058.93	20,503.01
Restricted	40,000.00	0.00	10,300.00	61.32	50,361.32
Unrestricted	0.00	1,998.81	0.00	435.00	2,433.81
Total Gifts and Donations Income	53,444.08	1,998.81	10,300.00	7,555.25	73,298.14
Gifts In Kind					
Pro bono	0.00	6,536.50	0.00	0.00	6,536.50
Gifts In Kind - Other	0.00	0.00	594.60	0.00	594.60
Total Gifts In Kind	0.00	6,536.50	594.60	0.00	7,131.10
Total Income	54,444.08	8,535.31	10,894.60	7,555.25	80,429.24
Gross Profit	54,444.08	8,374.73	10,894.60	7,555.25	80,429.24

	Best Practice	Community Involvement	Downland Species	Management / Overhead	TOTAL
Expense					
Fundraising	0.00	0.00	0.00	43.35	43.35
Project Expenses					
Office Expense					
Postage and Delivery	0.00	5.32	0.00	13.30	18.62
Stationery	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.49	1.49
Total Office Expense	0.00	5.32	0.00	14.79	20.11
Total Project Expenses	0.00	5.32	0.00	14.79	20.11
Bank Charge	0.00	0.00	0.00	32.00	32.00
Communication					
Community Events	72.90	503.81	0.00	0.00	576.71
Outreach	0.00	486.00	0.00	0.00	486.00
Promotion					
Online	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Total Promotion	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Total Communication	72.90	1,089.81	0.00	0.00	1,162.71
Professional Fees					
Accountancy	0.00	0.00	0.00	200.00	200.00
Insurance Expense	0.00	0.00	0.00	234.55	234.55
Legal	0.00	0.00	0.00	23.00	23.00
Total Professional Fees	0.00	0.00	0.00	457.55	457.55
Project Costs					
Donated items and services	13,444.08	6,536.50	0.00	7,058.93	27,039.51
Farmland Birds					
Tree sparrow villages	0.00	0.00	594.60	0.00	594.60
Feeding stations					
Bird feed	0.00	0.00	1,078.00	0.00	1,078.00
Total Feeding stations	0.00	0.00	1,078.00	0.00	1,078.00
Total Farmland Birds	0.00	0.00	1,672.60	0.00	1,672.60
Total Project Costs	13,444.08	6,536.50	1,672.60	7,058.93	28,712.11
Sub contract / Consultants	0.00	65.00	0.00	0.00	65.00
Total Expense	13,516.98	7,696.63	1,672.60	7,606.62	30,492.83
Net Ordinary Income	39,927.10	838.68	9,222.00	-51.37	49,936.41

It is clear from these figures that while we have funding to support our best practice and downland species activities, the majority of our community and outreach work has been done on a *pro bono* basis. As such, we have run a very limited programme this year compared with previous years, and there is little unrestricted reserve for next year.

Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund grant detail

		Expenditure per quarter ¹				Total for year	Annual budget	Under/ overspend*
		OND	JFM	AMJ	JAS			
Facilitation fees	Project delivery: delivering advice and facilitating action - farm visits; biodiversity tailoring; review and amendments to agreements; facilitation of collaborative effort between neighbours; arranging/leading workshops, best practice activities	2950.00	1630.00	2870.00	2808.00	10258.00	16780.00	-1921.20 ⁴
	Project management and development: Record-keeping; mapping; reporting; new members; outreach & promotion; sourcing additional funding; developing stakeholder relationships; supporting partner activity; organising meetings; consultation, liaison, planning, strategic development	1750.80	1300.00	790.00	760.00	4600.80		
	Meetings: attendance at quarterly board and delivery group meetings to plan and review activities	407.20	657.20	337.43	355.00	1756.83	1620.00	136.83 ⁶
Additional workshop costs	Training events: fees for training providers; venue costs; materials; expenses	248.02	177.00	771.83	232.40	1429.25	2500.00	-1070.75 ⁴
	Partnership working: evaluation of progress and mechanisms (with CCRI), feedback to improve	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1000.00	-1000.00 ⁵
Admin	Admin support: Work required to support group activities (eg developing materials, printing, mailing, attendance sheets, feedback forms, post evaluation reporting, book-keeping, etc.)	177.20	248.44	348.76	643.75	1418.15	1340.00	78.15 ⁷
Expenses	Expenses: travel, office consumables, postage, printing, etc.	261.91	127.91	466.38	183.78	1039.98	760.00	279.98 ⁷
Total Facilitation Fund claim		5795.13	4140.55 ²	5584.40	4982.93 ³	20503.01	24000.00	-3496.99 ⁸

* Negative figures indicate underspend

Notes on Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund figures:

1. OND – October/November/December; JFM – January/February/March; etc.
2. Because the first claim (October to December) was not paid until mid-March, activity level in the second quarter (January to March) was restricted until there was more clarity about what was and was not eligible for funding via CS FF. This resulted in a reduced claim at the end of this quarter.
3. The fourth quarter (July to September) claim was low because the project manager (facilitator) was injured.
4. Targets for project delivery, project management, and training events were achieved significantly under-budget.
5. It had been intended that a review of partnership working would be held at the end of the year but because of the aforementioned injury this did not happen.
6. Because of the need to plan the new project there were two more meetings than planned in the first half of the year, leading to an overspend of £136.83.
7. There was also a slight overspend on admin and expenses.
8. Overall, there was a total underspend of £3496.99 for the year.

SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME FACILITATION PLAN TARGETS

Facilitation Plan targets have been consistently achieved or exceeded throughout the year:

2015-16	Oct - Dec		Jan - Mar	
	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
Meetings (Partnership)	1	1	1	1
Meetings (Delivery Groups)	2	2	2	3
Best practice activities	1	2	1	1
Farm visits	4	5	4	7
Technical workshops	1	2	1	1
Engagement activities	3	11	2	5
Other	3	4	3	3

2016-17	Apr - Jun		Jul - Sep	
	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
Meetings (Partnership)	1	1	1	1
Meetings (Delivery Groups)	2	2	2	2
Best practice activities	2	2	2	4
Farm visits	4	10	0	9
Technical workshops	1	1	1	2
Engagement activities	4	5	3	4
Other	3	3	3	3

Annex 1: Marlborough Downs Nature Enhancement Partnership Space for Nature Project 2015-2020

Aim 1: To improve the condition and connectivity of the ecological network of the Marlborough Downs

Objective 1: To deliver evidence-based conservation activities on a landscape scale

Outputs	Background	Actions
Biodiversity tailoring	The pilot has shown how detailed knowledge of what's happening beyond individual farm boundaries has enabled us to deliver on a landscape scale.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review every agri-environment agreement in the Marlborough Downs to ensure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most appropriate habitat management in a landscape context Optimum combination and location of options that support widespread species Deliver best possible environmental benefits via Ecological Focus Areas Dissemination of best practice for farmers, advisers, special interest groups
Support for local businesses involved in conservation management	While the project area is too small to support a full scale local grazing scheme we have been involved in brokering grazing agreements between landowners and graziers and will continue to develop this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web-based service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matching graziers with grazing land Machinery ring Bulk purchasing, egg seed Supply chain, egg local butchers, markets, pubs, etc.

Objective 2: To enable appropriate management of semi-natural wildlife habitat

Outputs	Background	Actions
Better woodland management	The pilot focussed on chalk grassland and while this will continue to be a priority habitat on the Downs going forward, it would be good to bring neglected woodland back into management, and to enhance the wildlife value of woodland planted for shooting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify markets for e.g. biomass and firewood, and consider collective projects – most farms don't have enough woodland for management to be economically viable, but if we consider the Marlborough Downs woodland resource as a whole it looks more feasible • Social forestry group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management by volunteers - Demonstrations/training – coppicing, charcoal, woodcraft, etc. - National Association of AONBs toolkit • Management statement for individual woodlands/whole resource
Better pond management	By the end of the pilot we will doubled the number of ponds on the Downs and surveyed the vegetation of most of the more established ones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice guide to cover pond and surrounding area • Recommendations re seed/plants, potential opportunities to purchase at reduced rates
Improved connectivity between habitats	We have started to establish wildlife corridors and stepping stones re chalk grassland and tree sparrow habitat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracks and verges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved management - Enhance species diversity by introducing seed where appropriate • Grassland/grass margins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share experience/ experiment to find best management options - Restoration – stepping stones • Corridors – strips

Objective 3: To consolidate populations of species of national and local importance

Outputs	Background	Actions
Marlborough Downs farmland bird package	We have had great success with tree sparrows and corn buntings and while we want to continue supporting our original flagship species we'd like to add others to the list.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter feeding – 3 tonnes per year • Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PIT tagging - House martin tagging - Ringing demos - Webcam: nest boxes in summer (kestrel, barn owl); feeders in winter • Nest boxes for swifts and little owls • Reed beds along the edge of the project area • Tree sparrows <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rolling programme of new nest boxes (20 per year) to replace old ones • Long term nest sites
Systematic approach to predator control	We are aware that ground nesting birds are vulnerable to predators and that to reverse the decline in these species we must make a co-ordinated effort to control these where the law permits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish predator control demonstration pilots • Best practice workshops • One or two 'champions' – farmers/gamekeepers – to give advice to others, visit, etc.
Extensive uptake of measures to support widespread species	We have adopted various mechanisms to enable farmers to provide habitat for widespread species such as invertebrates and arable plants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nectar plots and bird mixes via agri-environment schemes, ecological focus areas, CSS • Deadwood habitat, especially as hibernation sites for bees • Hedgehog boxes, bee boxes, bat boxes • Garden ponds

Aim 2: To connect people to the landscape of the Marlborough Downs

Objective 4: To offer a range of opportunities for people to engage with the landscape of the Marlborough Downs

Outputs	Background	Actions
Marlborough Downs SfN events programme	We have developed a well-supported programme offering public and best practice events which will be continued and expanded to include farm visits, talks and other activities targeted at specific groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile and promote annual events programme • Use calendar of country sports meetings, rural interest groups (egg beekeepers), Marlborough Summer School, etc. to offer additional talks, walks, practical activities • Continue to develop links with other organisations active within and around the Downs to co-ordinate and collaborate on an integrated events programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Broader subject matter - Benefits of resource sharing - Access additional expertise/information • Resource packs/buddy system to encourage more people to lead walks, educational visits, give talks, etc.
Share the health and wellbeing benefits of the Marlborough Downs with all sectors of the local community	While the pilot very much focussed on events aimed at the public (particularly families) and best practice workshops we have become very aware of the value of access to green space and outdoor activities for improved health and wellbeing for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish links with organisations offering specialist care and support in our local communities • Offer tailored activities for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adults and young people with physical or mental impairments/learning difficulties - Young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) • Older people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Talks in residential/care homes/day centres - Minibus tours - Virtual farm visits - Reminiscence therapy

Outputs	Background	Actions
Greater understanding of Marlborough Downs landscape, wildlife and land use	We believe that, if we are to protect our wildlife, landscape, rural businesses and communities from changing Government policy we need widespread support from the general population and the best way to achieve this is to raise awareness of the value of our countryside and the ways in which our landscapes are shaped by current and past management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools and youth groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom visits to stimulate interest ideally leading to farm visits Downloadable resource packs, linked to curriculum Activities for inset days Programme of events tailored to individual schools/classes that support curriculum delivery Virtual learning resources via website
Volunteer group to undertake practical work	Except for the project management team the whole pilot has relied on volunteer and in-kind input. However, we have not been able to capture the full potential of practical conservation volunteers, largely due to the lack of resource to support a co-ordinator, equipment, tools, transport, qualified task leaders, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project management team to employ part time volunteer co-ordinator (potential funding through Area Boards) Volunteer tasks to include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conservation management of specific sites Access improvements Surveys of flora and fauna Collaborate with National Trust/Wiltshire Wildlife Trust/Natural England NNR (Fyfield Down) to share resources Link with volunteer agencies (Swindon Volunteer Centre, Volunteer Centre Wiltshire, Community Service Volunteers, BTCV etc.) to identify individual and corporate volunteers

Objective 5: To provide high quality access for all

Outputs	Background	Actions
More people out walking, cycling and riding horses on the Downs	During the pilot, we began to identify our favourite walks and rides to improve and promote them to encourage others to explore the downland landscape. We would like to continue this and to look at new ways to convince people of the joys and physical and mental benefits of being up on the Downs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to identify, upgrade and promote favourite walks and rides • Consult local groups to identify favourite routes for cyclists and horse riders and Parish Councils to establish community routes • Compilation of favourite walks, each graded according to ease, accessibility, distance, time • Offer guided walks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Led by Community Access Forum, Ramblers, volunteers, landowners - Educational – relaxed but informative - Dog walks – opportunity to educate owners about responsibilities • Set up a Marlborough Downs Walking for Health group • Collaborate with local groups, egg U3A Walking Group, Friends of the Railway Path, etc.
Better quality access	We are keen to ensure that people have a safe experience on the Downs and that they can get around without difficulty and have begun a programme of improvements which we would like to continue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain Public Rights of Way and permissive access in good condition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem areas beyond local Authority remit - Work undertaken by volunteer group/students supervised by Rights of Way officer • Upgrade all stiles to kissing gates • Identify parking areas for each favourite route with horsebox space where needed

Outputs	Background	Actions
Access for individuals and groups with specific requirements	During the pilot, we have worked with the local carriage driving for the disabled group and would like to share the Downs with others who may experience barriers to access because of physical or mental issues or because they have specific requirements that can only be met by a large-scale approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support Kennet Valley Driving Group (disabled carriage drivers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Permissive access on wider network of private farm tracks and field margins - Create links between land holdings - Track upgrades where these open up significant routes • Develop better access opportunities for the local Riding for the Disabled Group • Collaborate with local Pets As Therapy group to offer short walks with PAT dogs • Link with other specialist groups, egg geocaching, orienteering, endurance riders, to develop specific access strategies for the Downs

Objective 6: To increase local and national awareness of the work, achievements and impact of the Marlborough Downs Space for Nature Project

Outputs	Background	Actions
Cemented relationships with key decision makers, business contacts, partners and sponsors	It is important that the Marlborough Downs Project continues to receive and gain new support from local communities, businesses and decision makers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with key decision makers via meetings and invitations to visit the Downs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local MPs, local business networks, nature networks, young farmers Westminster – go and talk to Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs High Profile conservationists and country/wildlife experts Local dignitaries and personalities Develop partnerships and sponsorship opportunities with businesses
Better PR and publicity for the project	The results of an annual survey indicate that local people feel they are not sufficiently informed about the Marlborough Downs Partnership or our work. Our objective is therefore to increase awareness and tell the story of the project and its achievements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showcase the work of the project by focusing on specific good news stories and achievements of the group Develop and agree a news story time table of events across the calendar year to dovetail news stories with other calendar events and riding the current news agenda Focus should be targeted not a scatter gun approach to achieve maximum impact Engage with media – local and national, conservation and countryside – about these stories by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press Release Press Event Invitations to Marlborough Downs projects to individual journalists Promotion of events programme Information boards Contractors, farm workers, country sports people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farmers to get employees involved – put NIA leaflet in payslips, display events programme in farm office/workshop, etc.

Outputs	Background	Actions
Hard-working and innovative marketing plan	There appears to be a strong appetite from the public to support conservation and rural and agricultural initiatives and feedback indicates that most would welcome the opportunity to get involved or at least be better educated on the subject.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further development of mdnep.org.uk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incentivise re-visits to website via new engaging content - Additional data capture options (egg regular competitions) - Interacts with social media - Access to fast fact on what the project has achieved (short concise snappy downloads facts) • More regular Marlborough Downs e-newsletter • Social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage sharing of content from followers - Dovetail snappy facts by releasing these on social media - Run social media competition in conjunction with website - Digital video, egg YouTube, encourage people to submit their own videos from the Marlborough Downs • Offline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leafleting –general leaflet and favourite walks and rides – placement in relevant public areas/shops/cafes/B&Bs etc. - Leaflet drop to coincide with events - Posters – in local pubs, cafes, notice boards - Information panels/interpretation boards