



# **INSPIRING AND ENABLING LOCAL COMMUNITIES: An integrated delivery model for Localism and the Environment**

## **Final Report**

**By  
The Countryside and Community Research Institute**



## Summary of Project

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Project Manager (Research Team)  
Christopher Short

Research Team:  
Christopher Short and Rebecca Griffiths (both CCRI),  
Jenny Phelps (FWAG)

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Dunholme Villa  
The Park  
Cheltenham  
Gloucestershire  
GL50 2RH  
[www.ccri.ac.uk](http://www.ccri.ac.uk)

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## **Executive Summary**

### ***Introduction & Context***

There is widespread recognition that there have been dramatic changes across the countryside in the UK over the past 70 years. Currently, environmental land management initiatives tend to be top-down, driven by large institutions citing national legislation, policy obligations and international Directives and Conventions. Local communities, including farmers, who may nevertheless feel protective of the natural assets within their vicinity (that may also make a considerable contribution to a local sense of identity), may feel alienated from the imposition of targets relating to these same assets from whose formulation they have been excluded. However, such communities frequently have essential knowledge, experience and a sense of pride and commitment to the future survival of such areas. Furthermore the range of national organisations, strategies and policy frameworks can sometimes end up working against each other in a particular area. This is particularly true of complex sites and issues that contain a wide range of legal obligations and other interests. In such multi-objective areas there is a real need for greater connectivity at all levels, local, regional and national, to enable a synergy to be possible on the ground. This lack of co-ordination, coherence and integration at the national (and even regional) level results in a series of confusing, disjointed and contradictory signals and mechanisms for those who live and work close to these areas and, most importantly, have the capacity to assist in their management and governance.

While it is possible to see how these tensions have developed, largely through the shift in power away from productivist agriculture and towards measures aimed at halting environmental decline, the need to embrace a holistic multi-objective approach that inspires and enables farmers and local communities is pressing. The perception that external goals, however worthy and legally upheld, are being imposed by national or international institutions without the engagement of local people, who feel distanced and even disenfranchised from their own land as a result, undermines the environmental imperative. Within Gloucestershire, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) have been developing an integrated local delivery (ILD) model, implemented in a range of situations that utilises and enables those with local skills and environmental land management knowledge that contributes to the management of sensitive and key environmental sites.

The Countryside & Community Research Institute (CCRI) was commissioned by the FWAG to evaluate the ILD model that has been developed in Gloucestershire. The project therefore has two key aims:

- Determine and outline the nature of the delivery model in order to identify the potential for it to be replicated in other areas and by other individuals;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the approach within a case study by interviewing a cross section of the local community, land managers and government agency staff.

### ***Outline of the Integrated Delivery Model Approach***

There are 8 key themes to the ILD model that run through all the examples where the approach has been used, including the Walmore case study evaluated in this report. The approach:

- looks to work within the lowest appropriate National and European administrative structure (i.e. parish or ward, town, county, district, region, country);
- clarifies which statutory and non-statutory partners have an interest in the area so that they can be involved and their strategic aims and objectives identified and delivered within that administrative area;
- seeks to deliver a wide range of strategic objectives within the defined area in order to maximise the wider landscape scale potential effective use of public funds;

- seeks to strongly support and value the role and knowledge of the farming community;
- promotes the use of facilitation through an independent third party to develop a local management group that acts as the collective discussion forum for the area, with clear lines of communication to those public agencies with legal responsibilities;
- incorporates the Parish Council (or other local government framework) into the communication structure of the local management group to ensure continuity beyond project timescales;
- provides a forum for all those within the defined area to take action and offer knowledge and resource to achieve multi objective delivery with an inclusive list of partners;
- identifies funding opportunities, particularly through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), and match funding through joined up partnership working.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Once invited begin initial scoping to determine the area, individuals and statutory frameworks involved	Map the management tasks and verify these in an inclusive and open format	Develop a management group around key local and statutory stakeholders	Encourage linkages and opportunities for local contribution and adoption of responsibilities	Establish capacity and role of local management group; identify and prioritise tasks	Implement proposals and embed management group and support

### ***The Case Study: Walmore***

Walmore Common is part of the floodplain of the River Severn in Gloucestershire, part of a network of small catchments that are low lying and close to the main river and drain into it through a series of ditches. The area has multiple designations at international (Ramsar and SPA) and national level (SSSI) due their geology (lowland submerged peat) and ecology (overwintering of Berwick Swans and nesting of wading birds). The two areas of registered common land are owned by the Crown and managed through appointed local Trustees while the surrounding area is productive agricultural land. The wider area bordering the Severn has been inhabited for many centuries suggesting that there is archaeological interest, as well established public access. Consequently, there are two clear national interests in terms of flood prevention and environmental protection and that consideration towards the impact on historic, recreation and landscape aspects would also have to be taken into account meaning that ‘the State’ does not speak with a single voice on Walmore.

The interviews with stakeholders confirmed that both local and agency interests viewed the governance over the past 20-25 years as being fragmented. In terms of the governance it was clear that there were two main strands both pursuing their own objectives, with one agency (the Internal Drainage Board (IDB)) pursuing an objective of land drainage, largely for agriculture, while another agency was concerned with land management for biodiversity conservation (Natural England (NE) and its predecessors). This combination led to a fragmented management of ditches and an overall deterioration of the site to the extent that in recent years the access to some properties flooded increasing the local community voice that something needed to change. Everyone agreed that there was no shared vision for Walmore during this time. However, the area around Walmore and the common itself meant a great deal to local farmers, the local community and other users.

In 2008, a series of 1-to-1 discussions, open meetings, site walks and other examples of ‘direct communication’ between the FWAG officer, the NGOs/agencies and the local farmers were introduced. This established the full range of assets on the wider Walmore area. Further site visits and subsequent discussions resulted in the development of the Walmore Common Management group, which identified a number and

range of tasks, of which the most straight forward have already been implemented. This is a clear contrast to the high level of inactivity over previous years. It is also clear that different types of knowledge, for example surrounding the hydrology, are now more widely recognised by a wider range of interests, although this is not always the case. Crucially, most people feel listened to, or at least taken seriously.

Overall, there is agreement that the current situation around Walmore is now closer to a shared vision than it has been in the past. Both locals and agency staff agree that communication is clearer and the management group is seen as a source of accurate information on what is actually happening, thus replacing 'hearsay'. The actions of the group and the transparent, accountable and effective nature of the meetings mean that the agencies are more confident that their legal requirements and obligations can be met locally. Conversely, the local community is beginning to take collective responsibility for management that will meet national targets and obligations as well as meeting other concerns such as flooding and access provision.

One of the major changes that the approach has brought about is the number of surrounding landowners who have entered into Environmental Stewardship, mostly into the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme that will deliver greater environmental benefits to the area. The availability of funding through the RDPE (Defra 2007) has been crucial in this regard, particularly in resourcing infrastructure improvement in the area. The in-depth nature of the management decisions has meant that local members of the management group have experienced a dramatic increase in their understanding of what the environmental agencies are expecting on the site and this has led to an increased awareness of the uniqueness and complexities of this wet lowland area with its combination of both high biological and productive diversity. This heightened awareness has led to a greater desire to learn more about the ecology and hydrology in the area, something that the agencies and other specific interest groups need to build on.

### **Discussion & conclusions**

Comparing the Walmore case study against the 6 step process, that is used widely by FWAG, highlights that the initial scoping of the area's assets and direct communication with the local community are key activities. The comprehensive trawl of information was critical in developing relationships and in understanding how the community functioned in terms of the various areas of decision making and the related objectives. By starting at a point that recognises the existence of multi-objective delivery it is easier to develop the scope of the arrangements and interactions. The openness of feeding back the findings from the scoping of assets in Step 1 is also evident through open meetings and site visits with members of the community and agency staff. One of the reasons behind the surrounding farmers entering their land into HLS schemes was the mapping of the management tasks, which highlighted the interconnected issues. The end result is a landscape scale process in Walmore that is delivering far more than just the management of designated areas. The surrounding areas provide a significant buffer, a key recommendation of Lawton *et al* (2010) termed as 'ecological restoration zones'. However, this task requires high skills of facilitation and linking up various strategic frameworks.

Approaches such as 'community-based conservation' (Berkes 2003), 'co-management' (Carlsson and Berkes 2005) and 'adaptive management' (Jacobson et al 2009) start from the premise that conservation and community development can be simultaneously achieved. However, this requires shift in ecological thinking that recognises the social as part of the ecosystem and the need for participatory approaches to identify and integrate 'traditional' human activities into conservation management. The type of approach implement by FWAG reflects the principles and process of co-management, as outlined by Carlsson and Berkes (2005), who outline this as 'the result of extensive deliberation and negotiation' - meaning it is very much a process rather

than a fixed state. Consequently, there is significant overlap between this integrated delivery model and community-led planning (CLP) approaches, with the only difference being the focus on land management.

Finally, the ILD touches on important issues surrounding knowledge exchange. Crucially it avoids the trap of a wide range of people with different messages, all trying to reach a limited number of 'resource managers' in order to influence their behaviour, often without taking into account existing motivations or concerns. A key element within knowledge exchange is the development of 'co-learning communities' or 'communities of practice', and as such, building relationships and enhancing dialogue are fundamental to achieving mutually acceptable outcomes through the engaged of key stakeholders throughout the process. These approaches are currently being trialled within river catchment (Catchment Sensitive farming), as well as in, Parish Plans, market towns and sub-urban neighbourhood initiatives and the Transition Town movement.

The report shows that the FWAG ILD model is a viable and valuable process, which appears to have strong synergies with other similar approaches. The closest approach that is widely understood within the UK context is that of CLP, but this is largely absent in terms of its influence on the UK countryside. The experience within Gloucestershire suggests that a CLP type approach can inspire and enable communities to make a significant contribution towards the meeting of national environmental targets and obligations relating to the farmed environment. This appears at odds with the more regulatory and incentive driven approach preferred by some within the conservation movement where environmental management is determined externally and implemented using a business model rather than one more attuned to the existing custom within a landscape. Consequently, in order for this integrated delivery model to become more wide spread there may need to be a shift in both approach and delivering of environmental targets. In normal circumstances this would be a tall order, however the context outlined in this report appears to be more positive.

### **Next Steps**

The FWAG ILD model should be part of the wider discussion within national, regional and local fora so that it can be tested thoroughly and made available more widely. This should focus on five main areas.

- How the ILD model can be incorporated into existing CLP mechanisms, extending the scope of CLP approaches to include the physical and natural assets in and around communities.
- Reducing the acknowledged complexity in the national delivery framework and the lack of connection at the national, regional and local level between public agencies, NGOs, the private sector and landowners using the FWAG ILD model to offer an opportunity for local delivery.
- The development and training of independent facilitators and participatory professionals over and above the current existing resource. This will involve a number of agencies and organisations, adapting existing short courses and continuous professional practice (CPD) arrangements. The emphasis should be in delivering integrated landscape-scale change and enabling communities.
- Much responsibility for resourcing rests on the effective utilisation of funds through the RDPE, although this source will change and may reduce in 2012 meaning that new opportunities will need to be identified. One example might be the emerging discussions surrounding 'green credits' and 'biodiversity offsetting' as an alternative way of prioritising the Green spend.
- Wider use of the ILD model in a wide range of communities will further test its ability to inspire and enable them in the delivery of national environmental targets. All those involved with the environment want to see better outcomes for the effort and money invested. Embedding local ownership and participation and creating the opportunity to draw all interested parties together makes sense and should encourage more tangible outcomes through local evaluation, monitoring and ownership.

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