

Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames Facilitation Fund Collaborative Agreement

Upper Thames Catchment Partnership

Project Leads FWAG SW and the NFU

Aim:

The aim of the Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames is to continue a collaborative group of farmers and land managers to deliver integrated socio, economic and environmental benefits for the Upper Thames and Clay Vales. This will be done through supporting sustainable food production and natural capital recovery. It will include facilitating Countryside Stewardship and other developing funding support through the Environmental Land Management Scheme and blended finance through transition. It will enable the landscape options to be worked up collaboratively to deliver Food Provisioning, Biodiversity Recovery; Priority Habitats and Species Protection; Water Quality and reducing Flood Risk; Woodland Restoration; Riparian Management; Boundary restoration and Soil Management. This opportunity will continue to be open to all farmers and land managers in the Upper Thames Catchment and should aid group members with their eligibility to Countryside Stewardship, government grants and other schemes.

Structure

The Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames will continue to be chaired by a rotating Group Member and the National Farmers Union representative for the Upper Thames Catchment Partnership. The Group has agreed that it would like to be affiliated both to Upper Thames Catchment Partnership, chaired by Chris Short from Countryside and Community Research Institute. This will be done with the support of Jenny Phelps from FWAG SW as facilitator.

The Group have agreed for there to be an open invitation for all farmers in the Upper Thames to be part of the Group and share learning either in a formal or informal capacity with other farmers and land managers. It has been agreed with the Group that the farmers signed up to the Facilitation Fund will be able to steer the appropriate spend delivering a series of learning events that support farmers to become more resilient to climate change.

The learning events will include some technical information, some practical and some demonstration of success on each other's farms, and will involve locally sourced refreshments. The farmers are keen to involve other trainers and specialist that have been involved with the vision for the Upper Thames and Cotswolds for many decades. These trainers will include staff from the Cotswold Heritage Landscapes, Cotswold Water Park Trust, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Ecologists and other technical specialists as required.

The Group aims to extend across adjoining water bodies and it is hoped that it will build on the last 7 years extending over the existing 100 farms covering 23,000Has and meeting in partnership with the North East Cotswold Cluster to cover the whole of the Upper Thames, Windrush and Evenlode.

Delivering Countryside Stewardship Priorities

The Group have agreed to have a strong focus on surface and ground water protection through delivering the water framework directive, looking at soil health, organic matter, soil biology, water attenuation as contributory to sustainable farming and reducing diffuse water pollution from agriculture. This will help to deliver good ecological status of surface and ground waters and underpin ecological recovery. It will also focus on the practical learning of riparian management and improving the ecology for fish habitats and channel diversity for other target species. Woodland restoration and tree planting will be a key focus of the Group through woodland management plans and strategic woodland planting to reduce run off and flooding. There will also be a strong focus on restoration of hedges, ditches and wet woodlands.

The benefit of collaboration

The Farmer Guardians for the Upper Thames have agreed to demonstrate the benefit to both farm businesses and the environment on working collaboratively. The predicted improvements will aim to be an increase of the uptake of the new Mid and Higher Tier for the restoration of soil organic matter: sowing nectar flower mixes; increasing flowers on grassland, increasing habitat for breeding waders, sowing winter bird food mixes and managing woodlands and hedgerows, and restoring key farmland habitats like ponds, brook, streams, rivers and ditches.

Individual agreements working collaboratively across the landscape

The Group have agreed to have a better understanding of how their individual farms fit within the wider landscape and catchment and how through cooperation and support they could manage profitable sustainable farm businesses that produce quality food while protecting biodiversity, landscape and the historic environment. This would be achieved by locating CS options in their optimum locations across individual farms for wider collaborative benefit across the landscape.

Conflict resolution

It is unlikely that there will be conflict between the group as the farmers and landowners have a shared vision of protecting and enhancing the River Thames, its tributaries and flood plain to deliver CSS priorities. Should conflict arise, help will be sought from the facilitator from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, who has extensive experience in conflict resolution, particularly in relation to land management, and support from the NFU.

Linking to other initiatives

The Group agree where possible to support, link to and benefit from other initiatives in the Upper Thames catchment with support from FWAG SW's integrated local delivery framework that values farming and local knowledge and integrates partnership support at a local level. <https://www.fwagsw.org.uk/ild-integrated-local-delivery>

Member Signature

Date