



Shaping the future of farming
in the Irwell Catchment



ELM PARTNERSHIP IN THE IRWELL CATCHMENT

Collaboration Report – Milestone 2

Abstract

A summary of learning obtained regarding the conditions and mechanisms required for successful delivery of ELM Schemes, applicable at local and national level

Paula Pearson
Paula.pearson@groundwork.org.uk

Contents

Summary and Recommendations.....	2
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis	4
Baseline Focus Interviews.....	4
Collaboration Baseline Interviews	5
Facilitated Collaboration workshop	5
The Convening of a Project Board	5
A Collaborative Survey.....	5
A Spectrum of Collaboration	6
Conditions which encourage collaboration by, and with, farmers	7
Social Capital and Respectful Relationships.....	7
The right people – local, knowledgeable, organised, experts	8
Security of income.....	8
Clear and easy communication	9
Incentives for Collaboration.....	9
Geography – local approach in a wider spatial context and as part of a national framework.....	10
A Common Purpose	10
Mechanisms for Collaboration	11
Facilitation – bringing groups together to explore common issues / opportunities	11
One to one engagement.....	12
Partnership / Board / Steering Group / Forum	12
Collaboration and Spatial Prioritisation	13
Virtual ‘Hub’ – a managed web-space: communicate easily; access news, funding, information, data, advice	13
Membership Groups.....	14
Thematic Groups.....	14
The ‘Convenor’ Role – a coordinator / bringing together multiple people and work-streams	14
A combination of these - convening mechanism with a lead officer	15
The Convenor / Facilitator Person Specification	15
Required Skills	15
Required Knowledge and Understanding	15
Required Attributes / Qualities.....	15
Required Attitudes / Viewpoints	16
Who needs to work with farmers to help make ELM happen locally or to deliver local nature recovery as part of farming business?	16
Appendices	17
APPENDIX 1 – Baseline Survey Template:.....	17
APPENDIX 2 – Sample of Quotes	19
APPENDIX 3 - Collaboration Survey	20

Summary and Recommendations

Milestone 2 of the ELM Partnership in the Irwell Catchment (EPIC) Test and Trial Focused on the policy theme of Collaboration. Questions which we sought to address, and which we go some way to answering within this report include:

- What models of collaboration are available, how effective are they and can they be applied more widely?
- How can we use local conveners to engage with local stakeholders, to identify local priorities, whilst working alongside the LNRS local priority setting process?
- What tools and methods are most effective at communicating local priorities with farmers, for both their local area and for their holdings?
- How can local conveners develop new facilitation groups?
- How should local convener's best co-ordinate facilitators and advisors?
- What are the skills required of a local convener and who is most likely to have these skillsets?

Qualitative and quantitative information gathered in the course of this milestone of the EPIC Test and Trial has led to the following recommendations for local / national response:

- Consider the mechanisms and conditions required for collaboration with farmers and land managers within each of the ELM Schemes
- Consider the resources required in order to review, establish or maintain the mechanisms and conditions for collaboration with farmers and land managers under ELM
- Consider the current and anticipated landscape and capacity available in terms of 'local and trusted' facilitators, convenors or advisors
- Consider the viability and security of the various land owner / manager businesses - how can their resilience be supported to influence collaboration?
- Develop collaborative mechanisms and enterprise in the context of agreed spatial priorities
- Review, align, simplify as far as possible, and potentially centralise communications, information and data sharing
- Take steps to appreciate the experience and perspectives of each of the typical land manager 'types' that operate in your area
- Review and rebalance power distribution within collaborative mechanisms, so that land managers feel valued, and can be heard / consulted
- Continue to seek to understand the most effective mechanisms for collaboration, and the required conditions for collaboration, from the point of view of all stakeholders

We will continue to seek views on the conditions and mechanisms required for effective collaboration throughout our Test and Trial, in particular keeping our collaboration survey open and taking the opportunity to check and challenge the learning obtained thus far in future engagement, research and consultation activities.

We will also, through our project board, seek to translate learning from the GM LNRS Pilot, and the two local ELM Test and Trials (led by Lancashire Wildlife Trust and Groundwork Greater Manchester) into practical solutions that will lead to collaboration and delivery at scale under ELM and the LNRS.

Introduction

The need for collaboration is inherent in the ambitious aims of the 25 Year Plan for the Environment, and in the design and delivery of the emerging Environment Land Management Schemes. Whether people choose to act individually within their own sphere towards achieving these aims, or choose to collaborate by making use of various mechanisms or tools, the need for a groundswell of action in the face of the climate and biodiversity crises is clear.

The recent Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Local Convenor Pilot¹ championed the importance of involving farmers early and throughout, but conceded that more time was needed to explore how to engage with these stakeholders effectively. The Pilot went on to suggest that some form of Greater Manchester focused Farmer / Land Manager group should be established.

The EPIC Test and Trial is seeking to develop a greater understanding of whether and how this collaboration might work locally, with a focus on the Irwell Management Catchment.

How do we encourage collaboration?

Our intention under the EPIC Test and Trial was to test the appetite for convening a collaborative multisector Partnership, and to understand what 'conditions' and 'mechanisms' would be most conducive to collaboration between farmers, and between farmers and those wider stakeholders wanting to work with land managers to deliver environmental outcomes as part of ELM. In exploring these conditions and mechanisms, we hoped to inform answers to the following DEFRA Policy questions:

- What models of collaboration are available, how effective are they and can they be applied more widely?
- How can we use local conveners to engage with local stakeholders, to identify local priorities, whilst working alongside the LNRS local priority setting process?
- What tools and methods are most effective at communicating local priorities with farmers, for both their local area and for their holdings?
- How can local conveners develop new facilitation groups?
- How should local convener's best co-ordinate facilitators and advisors?
- What are the skills required of a local convener and who is most likely to have these skillsets?

We will continue to evolve our understanding of the collaboration theme during the lifetime of the EPIC Test and Trial, as we work through the DEFRA policy theme questions which are within scope, and test out the approaches agreed in the production of a number of case study Land Management Plans linked to evolving scheme themes and spatial priorities. Collaboration is a theme which intersects with all others, including advice and guidance, spatial prioritisation and land management planning. As such, we anticipate that we will continue to learn more about collaboration and potentially establish collaborative mechanisms and tools over time.

Nevertheless, we hope by the end of our Test and Trial to demonstrate that, with the support of some kind of a facilitator or convenor, locally based stakeholders and bodies are able to coordinate delivery of the end to end process for developing effective farm plans, in the right places, to deliver desired outcomes at scale. We also hope to show that making use of the existing mechanisms (such as CSFF Farm Clusters, NFU Membership), policy frameworks (e.g. the Catchment Based Approach), Laws (e.g. the evolving Environment Bill) and strategic activity (e.g. LNR Strategy Pilot, Catchment Systems Thinking) provides the conditions for success. These mechanisms, frameworks and activities provide a foundation of existing relationships and collaboration upon which a Partnership group or other collaborative mechanism can be convened, and which support 'nature network' and 'catchment systems' thinking.

¹ Greater Manchester Local Convenor Report Jan to Feb 2021

Methodology

A number of steps have led to the conclusions arrived at in this report, with outputs from these providing a continuing reference point throughout the EPIC Test and Trial. These steps were:

- i) Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis
- ii) Baseline Focus Interviews
- iii) Collaboration Baseline Interviews
- iv) A facilitated Collaboration Workshop
- v) The convening of a Project Board
- vi) A Collaboration survey

Stakeholder Mapping and Analysis

120 stakeholders were identified in the initial stakeholder mapping exercise, although it is anticipated that this list will grow and then be refined during the process. All the stakeholders were identified because their area of operation, their roles or their organisations intersected with the Test and Trial policy themes or area of geographic focus. Many stakeholders often already worked with, or saw a need to work with, farmers and land managers. It was hoped that some of these stakeholders would be able to promote the engagement activities of the Test and Trial more widely through the farming community, thanks to their existing relationships.

63 individuals involved in farming were also identified initially, with a number having links to other farmers through groups such as Commoners Associations. Support from sought from the Natural England Future Schemes Convenor to reach out to farmers in schemes; these were added to our existing contacts list with permission. It should be noted that at this point in the Test and Trial we do not feel that we have reached representatives from all relevant land owner / managers groups within the Irwell footprint. Many of the farmers who have actively engaged in the activities of the Test and Trial are already involved in schemes of some form, and many have existing relationships with the project team. We will continue to take steps to reach different groups of land owners / managers, for example on estates or equestrian businesses.

Baseline Focus Interviews

Structured Baseline Focus Interviews were conducted by telephone or over Teams with 31 individuals during milestone one, and included a number of questions relevant to the Collaboration theme and to the review or development of collaborative mechanisms. These were:

Who should be involved in the T and T? Organisation and / or individual; Why? What contribution can they make to the T and T? What 'area' do they cover? What interests do they have?

What groups or collaborative activity already exists between farmer / land managers and strategic or environmental organisations? What do these groups do? What is working well here? What geographical area do they cover?

Governance – we want to set up a group to co-design and test the elements of this ELM. How do you think the group could operate? What should the group members sign up to (ToR content)? Are there links to, or ways we could look to work with, other groups?

Do you envisage any challenges in engaging with stakeholders with this ELM T and T? Or in obtaining learning in relation to the policy question themes of collaboration, spatial prioritisation, advice and guidance and land management planning? Have you any suggestions?

The responses were written up, and shared with the interviewees to provide an opportunity for any amendments.

Collaboration Baseline Interviews

Focus interviews were undertaken with 8 members of the farming community from across the catchment area. These questions can be seen in Appendix X. The questions asked in this activity were also utilised during the facilitated collaboration workshop.

Facilitated Collaboration workshop

A workshop was held on 21st October 2021, with 28 attendees, including one NFU representative and 4 people from United Utilities' Catchment Management team. The workshop:

- Set the local and national context, providing updates on scheme development and on local strategic activity
- Outlined the EPIC Test and Trial
- Defined the terms collaboration and convening
- Proposed the concept of a partnership mechanism
- Involved participants in responding to a number of activities designed to extract their views on the conditions and mechanisms for collaboration in the delivery of ELM and Local Nature Recovery Strategy objectives

The Convening of a Project Board

We made use of our stakeholder mapping and analysis to approach people whose interests and experiences we felt would be conducive to taking a steering role in the activities of the EPIC Test and Trial, but also help to shape the membership, remit, governance and positioning of the proposed 'Partnership', potentially being members themselves.

A first meeting was held on 4th October, with most invited individuals attending. It quickly became apparent that Spatial Prioritisation was a 'hot topic' for many of the members, and it was universally recognised that a mechanism (or mechanisms) needed to be established that would provide the platform for engaging with the farming and land management community.

A Collaborative Survey

In order to double check and provide some more qualitative and quantitative detail, we launched a Collaboration Survey on 8th October. The survey questions can be seen in Appendix 3, and raw results received to date have been provided.

As we map out routes to reach under-represented groups we will specifically approach these for their input on these survey questions. The future schemes convenor has also undertaken to contact some individuals in order to increase response rates in the short term.

This survey will remain live until we start to deliver our case studies in Summer 2022 and current learning from this milestone phase will be fed into the next Project Board in January, to support discussion around the best collaborative mechanism(s) to establish for the test purposes, and how this might be achieved.

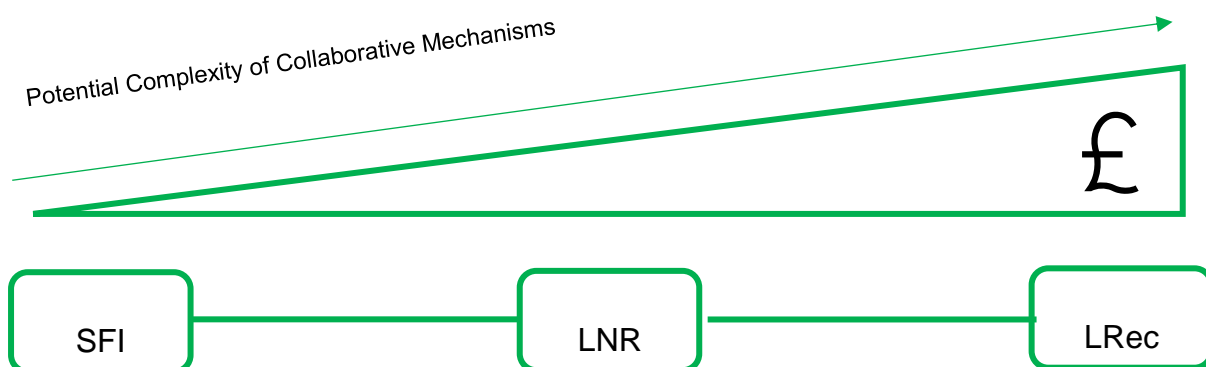
To do this we will undertake stakeholder analysis and consultation about how this might work, considering existing groups, mechanisms and activity within the study area, before establishing the governance required to undertake the case study activities. We hope that the governance we establish and learning we obtain will support continued collaboration within Greater Manchester / the Irwell.

A Spectrum of Collaboration

Throughout the various Test and Trial activities outlined in the Methodology section, the importance of achieving the conditions for and mechanisms through which to achieve collaboration was clear, and responses indicated that the establishment of effective collaboration mechanisms and conditions needs to be considered within each of the three ELM schemes, and in relation to each DEFRA policy theme (i.e. throughout our Test and Trial). However, it was anticipated that the design of collaboration within the different ELM schemes and policy themes is likely to differ, and it is difficult to envisage a single collaboration solution for each scheme or theme, especially when one imagines local differences and existing relationships. Would, for example, collaboration to understand and agree spatial prioritisation in a specific area look different to collaboration in the realm of advice and guidance; would collaboration for SFI applicants to deliver their LMPs look different to collaboration for those involved at Landscape scale? The 'who, what, how, where and why' of effective collaboration will need to be closely considered.

During our Collaboration workshop, one farmer stood out as unwilling to engage with the concept of collaboration at all, believing that it was neither likely to be achieved, or valuable to do. Their intention under the new schemes was to consider their own business in the light of the payments and measures available, and apply for appropriate SFI standards they deemed of greatest value. However, even if they, and other farmers, take this solitary position, it would still be valuable to ensure they have access to an information, advice and guidance offer that would help them deliver the standard in the context of a wider environmental ambition, and that this advice and guidance was connected back to collaborative mechanisms operating on wider geographical or thematic contexts.

As farmers move along the 'scheme continuum' towards Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery schemes, responses in our activities recognised that greater degrees of collaboration and more formalised or structured mechanisms would likely be required, and that these mechanisms would likely require greater degrees of revenue resourcing. For example, more or different advice and guidance or facilitation, different communication mechanisms or personnel might feature in the SFI scheme as opposed to the LNR or LR schemes. If collaboration does look different in each scheme, it will be important to ensure that applicants understand who they should be collaborating with, how to reach them, what information, advice and guidance or other support is necessary, and how to access this. Collaboration mechanisms needs to be clear to landowners and managers at local and at national scale, or there is a risk that participation will be affected.



Conditions which encourage collaboration by, and with, farmers

The following section, which takes its evidence from our Test and Trial activities to date, looks at what conditions are valued, need to be in place and may need revision in order to support collaboration by, and with farmers and other land managers.

Social Capital and Respectful Relationships

One of the most important conditions for collaboration which participants in our Test and Trial activities, particularly farmers themselves, pointed out, is the need for social capital, or respectful relationships. Social Capital is the value derived from positive connections between people. Robust social capital based on trust, civic engagement and effective institutions goes hand-in-hand with economic wellbeing and economic growth.

A number of comments received during focus interviews and at the Collaboration Workshop indicated that trust is an important consideration for collaboration. Farmers often do not trust co-creation processes and, especially based on their experiences of previous DEFRA led workshops, are sceptical as to whether their views are being heard, will influence any change in scheme design, or at local or national level. A perceived power imbalance and lack of respect was also recognised within current scheme design; farmers shared a number of poor experiences of working with the Countryside Stewardship system, where administrative arrangements had led to delayed payments, lack of cash flow or punitive measures taken (sometimes before contractual arrangements were confirmed). The processes they described were indicative to them of a power imbalance; they did not feel valued and trusted within the system, and described experiences which they would not expect of a respectful business or transactional relationship.

This lack of trust was also apparent in comments made about more local 'authorities' and 'organisations', where a perceived lack of relationships and dialogue has resulted in mistrust, with some citing doubts that the evolving LNRS will consider the needs of farmers and farm businesses. Relationships between land lords and tenants were also mentioned, with concern that the former would be 'unfairly favoured' in scheme design / payment. Those engaged wanted to be involved in decision making, be consulted or have influence; they wanted to be listened to. Hierarchical relationships or barriers to communication were viewed unfavourably. The responses indicated a desire for equality and to have their business needs and environmental contributions valued.

Trust between farmers was also a consideration raised, with delegates indicating concern that not all members of collaborative arrangements, for example at landscape or LNR scale, would necessarily 'pull their weight' and a recognition that this could lead to conflict which would have to be managed by some kind of mediator or facilitator. Initial responses to our activities indicate that farmers would rather not have to manage conflict or relationships themselves, but would want to look to a third party; however, the role, knowledge, skills, understanding and positioning of this person or persons would need careful considerations, especially given the comments on trust.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of farmers engaged could see benefits of collaboration, particularly where the agenda was led by or influenced by the farming community or through trusted (often local) facilitators or representatives. Social Capital and respectful relationships had clearly been experienced in the past, and there is the opportunity to explore and build on these. Farmers engaged noted positive experiences as part of facilitation or membership groups, some of which had led to access to funding, training, capacity building, knowledge exchange or changes in perspective through the sharing of good practice. One of the main features of these successful groups was when the farmers felt heard, felt as if their views and business needs were being championed and that those they were working in had the willingness, the skill, knowledge and understanding to appreciate and value their work.

The right people – local, knowledgeable, organised, experts

Linked to the ideas explored above, farmers engaged around the theme of collaboration made a number of comments which indicated the sort of people that would be required to make collaboration work, citing requirements in terms of skills, knowledge, understanding and perspectives.

From the point of view of organisations or roles seeking to bring farmers together to collaborate, good leadership was cited as an important skillset, although leadership style was not exemplified. Other attributes required of facilitators included: a lack of bias / impartiality, local knowledge, the ability to reach and influence decisions makers (and translate 'strategy speak' into 'farmer speak') and manage relationships. The latter was mentioned most frequently, with farmers clearly concerned that their views would not be heard, or that individuals or organisations not 'doing their bit' would not be held to account. Therefore, skills including the ability to communicate effectively with different stakeholders, and to manage conflict and reach resolutions will be required alongside people skills of empathy, courtesy/consideration and active listening / validation will be required alongside organisational skills, in order facilitate successful collaboration

There was a recognition that a collaborative group would benefit from involving a range of different types of farmers and land managers, but that there would be times when facilitating organisations or roles would need to hone in on specific sectors or geographies in the delivery of environmental priorities.

We anticipate that further thoughts on collaboration will emerge when we look at the Advice and Guidance theme. The 'right people' and effective mechanism(s) for accessing information, advice and guidance will need to be in place as part of the collaborative process, in order to support farmers to deliver standards effectively, and run their businesses sustainably and profitably. Informally, comments have been heard to the effect that some kind of 'super-person' would be required to undertake the necessary facilitation or convening roles under ELM; there was some doubt expressed that any one person could fulfil all the requirements of these sorts of roles, and that local solutions and structures would need to be carefully considered, mapped and understood in order to help farmers, land owners and managers work effectively, work together or work with others to deliver against environmental priorities, especially at scale.

Security of income

Another condition which - although not essential to collaboration - was cited as making collaboration easier and more possible, was business security. Business security reduces stress and anxiety and frees up time; without business security, the need to focus more on 'what pays the bills' is heightened. Therefore, scheme design and collaborative mechanisms need to limited the hassle factor which might increase time commitments and stresses, and decrease willingness to collaborate. The farmers who participated in our workshop and focus interviews perceived farming as a low income, high risk profession; this is borne out by the fact that many farmers of the predominant type engaged (upland sheep and livestock farmers) are currently heavily or entirely reliant on the Basic Payment Scheme for their income, despite the fact that the majority are committed to food production as a way of life.

Business security as a condition of collaboration was referred to in a number of ways. Some farmers looked to the national and global market, influenced by food security factors and supply chain factors, to make the point. Others spoke of the need for long-term business forecasting with reference to scheme design and the need for maintenance payments to ensure long-term success of environmental measures. Mention was also made of the recipient for schemes payments, with many expressing views that payments to landlords, or to administrators or facilitators, not working to farmers' agendas would negate collaboration with farmers.

The overwhelming message with regards to Business Security was that ELM scheme design needed to provide a workable and realistic payment option for the long term in order to secure farmers' collaboration en-masse; a payment which would complement food production or other diversified income streams and - whilst being focused on payment for public goods - support the consideration of business benefit, rather than purely environmental goods. Farmers engaged saw food production as a key omission as a referenced public good; even if ELM payments would not cover payments for this service they saw it as a necessary

condition to encourage farmers to deliver complementary environmental public goods in collaboration with others. Schemes therefore need to support or deliver security in cash flow through the appropriate design of administrative and contractual mechanisms, and reflect true – and often fluctuating / increasing – costs over (preferably longer term) contract periods. Scheme design and / or advice also needs, in the view of many engaged, to offer access to wider support for farm business, for example in terms of capital grants for machinery and infrastructure, or with navigating green finance mechanisms and markets, where available.

Helping farmers achieve business security will support the ease and likelihood of broad levels of collaboration, and collaboration at scale.

Clear and easy communication

Being time-poor with complex businesses, the farmers we engaged on the theme of collaboration pointed to the need to ensure that communication was simple and easy to navigate, and some indicated that they would welcome a more proactive approach from those who wanted to work with them, although did not want to be inundated with multiple approaches; the farmers could usually cite a couple of key points of contact. Because of this, a stream-lined integrated mechanism for communication would likely be received favourably, and result in greater commitment to and success in collaboration.

From the point of view of those wishing to work with farmers, one of the greatest barriers to collaboration was access to a database of contact details. There are a number of organisations who, for varying reasons, hold farmer contacts, but it is only the RPA who have access to all. These personal details are obviously subject to GDPR, so to achieve collaboration in the numbers required to deliver the degree of change required against Local Nature Recovery Strategies or Landscape scale change opportunities, would require farmers to give permission to be contacted. Although local collaboration is required, it is likely that securing willingness to collaborate with local stakeholders (for example via the local convenor as a gatekeeper) would need to be done centrally and devolved regionally or by area.

In terms of types of communication to aid collaboration, farmers engaged mentioned the usefulness of succinct yet comprehensive business-focused newsletters and news updates, saving them time in finding our new information; these had been previously received through a number of groups or relationships, but not always consistently, impartially or sector related. To our knowledge, apart from e-NGO project or facilitation group updates, no communication was being received locally about delivery of environmental priorities, or how to get involved with this.

Although some farmers do struggle with rural broadband or with technological skills, a central repository for information about local opportunities to collaborate and through which to access the advice and guidance offer and information to help them understand their farm in the context of the wider area was viewed favourably, but would require careful design.

Incentives for Collaboration

Some of the farmers engaged through our Collaboration activities identified the need for financial incentives for involvement in collaboration. As one farmer said, 'it takes up time and it takes time to do', which detracts from the focus on business needs. Certainly, the number of claims for participation funding received as part of this phase of our Test and Trial indicates that farmers appreciate having their time valued, and require that recompense in order to secure a commitment to collaboration. However, many indicated that they do not feel that their time or their work is often ascribed a value, and this leads to the development of mistrust which is counter to willingness to collaborate.

However, incentives for collaboration need not necessarily be direct payments for action such as attending meetings etc. Incentives to collaborate can be derived from the ability to access support which provides demonstrable business benefit. Some farmers also referred to social capital (as mentioned in an earlier section) with reference to incentives, expressing a recognition that: speaking with one voice would achieve more for their individual and collective businesses, and indeed for the environment; that collaborative

experiences can boost morale and reduce isolation; that there would more likely be opportunities to access additional investment in their business e.g. (green) market mechanisms or project / capital funding, in collaboration with others and; that collaboration can support learning through engagement with organised activities, knowledgeable peers and conservation, finance or productivity experts, which in turn can lead to better business practice and income. A track record of success in leveraging funding or other business benefit was also seen as an incentive to collaborate with a particular role or organisation, with a local facilitated group's ability to shape and benefit from a Water Environment Grant application, cited as an example.

Geography – local approach in a wider spatial context and as part of a national framework

Geography was a concept touched on during the collaboration workshop and interviews, but not explored in any depth. There was a recognition that locally based collaborative groups were useful, because they could involve stakeholders with local knowledge and interests, but that at times, thematic collaborative activity would necessitate the involvement of stakeholders covering a wider geographic spread (examples being given included hedgerow networks, NFM and clean water) or at least working towards wider spatial priorities and environmental outcomes. The golden thread from landscape scale prioritisation to local level action and delivery was recognised.

Another reason for keeping groups small and local could be the impact that larger groups can have on the ability to make decisions, act responsively, and ensure that everyone is heard. This relates to the commentary on social capital, above. However, if delivery of spatial priorities and environmental outcomes is to happen at scale, an overall picture of these collaborative groups, their coverage and remit, needs to be held and understood, potentially by the convenor role/ organisation.

Wider geographical scales for collaboration can be considered where more centralised mechanisms for this are established, with farmers commenting on the usefulness of a central point from which to access information, advice and guidance, and how a centralised forum for communication could have the potential to support collaboration at different scales. It was not clear whether these comments were made in relation to national or sub-national scale however; there is potentially room for both.

The need to maintain the space for flexibility or responsiveness of any collaborative mechanisms was seen to be important, with the recognition that there would be the need to respond to different priorities, themes, opportunities or markets/funding at different times. The freedom to get together proactively and in response to needs and opportunities needs to be maintained, necessitating having a straightforward way to bring people together, communicate and create a 'call to action'. A central point for this overall network would therefore be useful.

A Common Purpose

The final condition necessary for collaboration which was picked up through the test and Trail activities in this milestone was that of a common purpose. In relation to collaboration under ELM, this means that a high level of agreement needs to be in place amongst collaborating stakeholders as to the reason for collaboration and the intent (i.e. what it is that the collaborators collectively want to achieve and how they will set out to achieve it).

The suggestion that collaboration requires a common purpose indicates the need for a degree of formal articulation of this, which might be in the form of a set of rules, vision, mission statement, memorandum of understanding or terms of reference. Moreover, the mechanisms for agreeing actions, making decisions and holding people to account were seen as useful in achieving progress.

Conversely, there were some comments made in the Test and Trial activities that indicated that becoming over-burdened or constrained by concerns of governance could be counterproductive to achieving collaborative action, and that the more formal the structures, the more likely that dedicated resources would be required, and that some collaborators would be 'put off' engaging. Therefore, any formal structures would

need to be co-designed / agreed, fit for the intended purpose and flexible enough to respond to the needs of the activity. Most of the farmer / land managers engaged agreed that focus on action and business was most important in ELM collaboration.

Nevertheless, it was recognised by many responders that the ability to influence both strategically and operationally is necessary in order to deliver ELM schemes collaboratively or in the light of agreed spatial priorities. Because of this, the makeup of the collaborative group or groups and how they connect with other groups where more operation or strategic decisions are made needs to be mapped out and understood.

Mechanisms for Collaboration

It is clear that Defra view collaboration as being important to delivery of effective environmental outcomes at scale. It is also apparent, for example from the GM LNRS and Convenor Pilot, that delivery partners are keen to explore collaboration in terms of forming a partnership to engage with farmers and land managers. The farmers and land managers engaged understand these drivers and have explored conditions (existing or required) to encourage effective collaboration.

Farmers engaged shared experiences of collaboration. A number of farmers were members of the NFU, and had benefited from web-based resources, regional e-communication and local meetings / workshops, sometimes focused on particular farming sector (e.g. dairy). Many had experienced being part of a facilitated group, which featured benefits including financial benefit, social capital and knowledge exchange. Many farmers engaged also shared experience of 1:1 advice or support with a local, trusted advisor – perhaps a land agent, arm length body advisor, Water Company (landlord) representative or project worker from an environmental e-NGO, which they had often received as part of a wider piece of work which involved a number of farmers working to a common aim. Some had also experienced more informal peer to peer support. It was recognised that a number of collaborative mechanisms, project and roles experienced by the farmers have been subject to short term funding, and there was a feeling that this impacted the likelihood or effectiveness of ongoing collaboration, interrupting development of relationships and losing momentum against the aims of the project. There was an awareness that national mechanisms to support collaboration are also in play, although these tended to be spoken about from a dis-benefit perspective (sometimes because there was a feeling that staffing was not ‘local’ or ‘trusted’).

Clearly there are a range of different collaborative mechanisms available, some of which are already in existence within the footprint, some which have existed previously, and some which may be in development. It is unlikely that the scale of delivery required under ELM in order to contribute to the ambitions of the 25 Year Plan for the Environment will be achieved through a reliance on one approach; different mechanisms are likely to be suitable for different purposes and reach different types and numbers of stakeholders. For this reason, it is unlikely that the recommendation from the GM LNRS and Convenor Pilot to establish a GM Farmers’ Group will address all needs.

The following section outlines the feedback received in our Test and Trial Activities about a number of different collaborative approaches.

Facilitation – bringing groups together to explore common issues / opportunities

Facilitation groups offer a mechanism through which collaboration between and with farmers / land owners and managers can be achieved, and a significant percentage of those engaged had experience of being a member of a locally facilitated group, and had a largely positive view of their experience, although cited some frustrations as the difficulty of making their voice heard strategically. This overall positive perception relates to some of the conditions mentioned in the previous section, such as having local, trusted facilitators, seeing business benefit, feeling ‘heard’ and being able to have at least some sense of strategic influence. The farmers involved also welcomed the coordinating, organisational and translational skills of the facilitators, as these enabled the group to respond to wider activity, maintain momentum, communicate effectively and understand different drivers and perspectives.

In some areas of the country, collaborative groups of farmers have been able to establish themselves; often due to occupying a shared space with common issues (such as arable farmers in flood plains). Farmers and land managers in the Irwell Catchment, being quite dispersed and following disparate livestock systems, are less likely to form such groups. A facilitating mechanism is therefore seen by many to be necessary in order to bring farmers together to collaborate on environmental action, especially at scale or in response to spatial prioritisation.

Discussions indicate that the size and remit of any facilitated group will depend upon the purpose for which it was established, and on the ability to reach relevant land owners / managers. Facilitated groups, like other mechanisms, may struggle to recruit all the necessary protagonists for a stated purpose or reason for collaboration; it is common for there to be a sense of 'preaching to the converted' and, although many members may have knowledge of local farmers in the patch, reaching them, engaging them or convincing them to collaborate is a challenge.

It may be that farmers can be encouraged, required or incentivised to engage in such facilitated collaborative groups; however, at this point in time there is no imperative to ensure participation. Whether and how this imperative arises will need to be considered at local and national scale in order to create a large enough groundswell of action.

One to one engagement

Of all the mechanisms explored at this stage of the Test and Trial, the greatest degree of support amongst farmers / land managers was for one to one support. There may be a number of reasons for this, but it is clear that many farmers value social capital and welcome the opportunity to build relationships with those who cannot only understand and will take an interest in their holdings and businesses, but can think strategically as well. Moreover, the ability to respond to the availability of time poor farmers, and engage at a time and a place which is convenient for them (such as a kitchen table or field-based meeting) is appreciated; with the requirement to schedule jobs in response to the weather, time of year and regular sector-related events such as auctions or markets, it is difficult to find appropriate times, venues and incentives to get good attendance at more formal meetings.

Linked to collaboration, there is strong support for 'one to one' advice to be delivered on farm by locally-based knowledgeable and trusted advisers. This view has been almost universally supported during discussions during this and previous work with the Irwell Catchment NFM Group. So, whatever collaboratively agreed measures and mechanisms for delivery may be, there is a feeling that every farm and farm business is different, and that issues can only be explored or understood in a one to one setting, even if spatial prioritisation makes the case for certain types of measures.

Partnership / Board / Steering Group / Forum

There are some significant issues of trust when it comes to the formation of a managing body such as a board/steering group; or a partnership where it is perceived that powerful interests may dominate (e.g. a major landowner or strategic organisation). Power-sharing is one of the conditions valued by farmers in our Test and Trial, and therefore a hierarchical governance structure would likely be viewed with a degree of suspicion.

A forum for the sharing of views is supported, with many farmers supportive of the various approaches and programmes of face-to-face events held over the years. It is felt unlikely however that a majority of farmers in this area would meaningfully support an 'online' version of a forum, perhaps due to poor infrastructure or facility with technology. Nevertheless, it was recognised that having one place in which to find out information and contact collaborators (whether this is a virtual web-based hub, a named contact or other approach) is useful, and many farmers have demonstrated the ability to utilise devices such as email, text, WhatsApp and to access websites, including the ability to download information. However, it seems that it is important to have a local, trusted presence behind any communications technology.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, many mechanisms for collaboration exist, have been experienced and may be in development. Some kind of overarching way to make sense of all of this, and to simplify or clarify the bringing together of stakeholders in relation to common aims and objectives, is lacking. It is possible that the role of the Convenor, along with an associated web-based tool or resource (including contact database) could start to bring this together, but essential mapping of the current and emerging landscape will be required in order to have a holistic view of collaboration across a catchment, county or other landscape footprint.

Collaboration and Spatial Prioritisation

One implied benefit of spatial prioritisation is that it may create some of the conditions to encourage collaboration at whatever spatial scale is used; so that neighbouring farmers either side of a valley targeted for woodland planting may perceive a benefit in collaborating on a woodland planning/implementation process, for example. In reality, however, there does not appear much appetite for this kind of collaboration in the absence of other incentives (such perhaps as economies of scale) or the establishment of other conditions.

Collaboration around delivering against a spatial priority is more likely to occur where, for example:

- Facilitation / negotiation is done by local, trusted people with good farm business knowledge
- Environmental advice supports the success of measure implementation (so that risk, for example of repayment) and time commitments may be reduced
- There is support from, the group is valued by, and there is proactive communication with strategic (non-farming/land manager) partners
- Payment rates for delivering measures are favourable
- There are no-cross compliance complications
- Social capital already exists between stakeholders

Collaboration in engaging in the process of prioritisation is, however, more likely to be supported, with many farmers expressing the need for mutual support in understanding what 'spatial prioritisation' will mean for them. There was a general willingness to support action for environmental benefit, but the conditions for this collaboration will still need to be in place.

Virtual 'Hub' – a managed web-space: communicate easily; access news, funding, information, data, advice

Experience of dealing with the farming community in this area has shown that it can be challenging to communicate through electronic means; with even direct emails often not receiving attention. For this reason, it is felt unlikely that a virtual hub would be significantly supported, especially initially. Having said this, there is precedent of web-based communication between farmers (for example a Facebook farmer network) and much information has been previously engaged with or extracted from websites.

A virtual hub could, as indicated in the 'Partnership' section above, fill a gap in terms of a 'one stop shop' for information, advice and guidance, news and funding updates etc, but (apart from initial funding) is likely to require, for example:

- Design resource – including consultation on farmer needs and likely usage; and to agree design and branding
- Communications resource – to promote, build a community of interest around and make use of automated or integrated communications tools (e.g. automated e-newsletters)
- A mechanism to establish / drive or collect information content; connectivity with stakeholders who can provide this

The Rivers Trust are currently developing a web-based Agricultural Advice Hub. Roll out is in progress, and stakeholders in local areas will be encouraged to add information about advisors and funding on a WIKI

basis. It may be that use can be made of this tool to help support collaboration in the Irwell catchment or other local footprint. It is also technically possible to draw data or functionality from this tool via API into a more locally driven 'virtual hub'.

Membership Groups

'Membership Groups', including facilitation groups, have received support in our area; meetings of the previous CSFF Group were consistently well attended and there has been vocal support for the continuation of such a structure. Reasons given for the valuing of such a structure are that it is an opportunity to socialize; to share experience and knowledge; to attract key speakers; to better engage with statutory and other bodies; to better attract funding opportunities and to amplify the lobbying power of the farming community.

The perception of having one's voice heard in a Group setting is valuable; so, size is important. The previous Irwell CSFF Group had a maximum attendance of around 25 – 30, which worked well. Anecdotally - and from experience of a neighbouring Group - numbers up to 40 – 50 in a room are just sustainable. Group settings favour those confident in public speaking, so organisation of group activities would need careful management to support the collection of representative views. Also, with several hundred farmers (726 in Greater Manchester according to CEH figures) within the catchment, facilitation might need to be carefully targeted in order to reach the right numbers, in the right places.

The scale of this Test and Trial, being set at a Catchment level, could potentially lead to much larger numbers in a successful Group, although as mentioned logistically, consideration might need to be given to location and geographic scale / theme of coverage. Because of these reasons, smaller task or farming sector specific groups could become advantageous.

In other areas of the country, and nationally, membership groups requiring a fee have been successfully established, the most notable being the NFU. On a local basis, paid membership could be seen to deliver exclusivity, although a constituted group bringing in an income would have powers, for example to choose its own facilitator, that an informal membership group would not.

Membership groups which require payment did not receive a high degree of support in our area; although as mentioned elsewhere, the dairy sector in our area, who are less well represented as a sector, do value their NFU subscriptions and local NFU relationships.

Thematic Groups

The perception of workable scales of engagement in effective collaboration leads to a potential need to focus around tasks, such as woodland planting, or sector-specific issues, such as those experienced by dairy farmers.

A variety of models of scale are likely: In quite under-represented sectors such as dairy in this area, it is a view of farmers that a wider supporting mechanism as represented by the NFU is more appropriate to their needs; in well-represented sectors such as 'beef and sheep' and, given quite locally-specific models of management, a local approach is thought appropriate; other themes, such as woodland planting, would be dependent on factors such as attractiveness of funding mechanisms to define need for focussed sub-groups; or conversely the need for groups covering a wider geographical area.

The 'Convenor' Role – a coordinator / bringing together multiple people and work-streams

Current thinking, as embodied by the piloted Convenor roles, is that a county-level Convenor may act to facilitate collaboration at scale, using existing and encouraging new mechanisms; such as new facilitated Groups. The hosting of the role by Natural England was viewed positively by farmers engaged, who thought this gave it the weight needed. It is uncertain, however, how these roles will be supported in future; as it is also uncertain what role Natural England will have in ELM delivery.

Locally, the recent GM LNRS and Convenor Pilot experienced challenge in reaching farmers in significant numbers, and whilst recently the role has succeeded in reaching more local farmers, this has taken place

with the support of a number of officers, organisations and existing relationships and in the context of two local Test and Trials.

Collaborating with farmers is clearly complex, and the sense in our area is that – national responses and opportunities notwithstanding – a more coordinated, mapped out approach, in response to existing and planned initiatives, would be beneficial, and that collaboration at scale is unlikely to be achieved via a single mechanism. Therefore, an approach to consider within the Irwell catchment or county area would be to:

- Map out the existing, planned and valued mechanisms
- Review and make efforts to put in place, the conditions identified as important

A combination of these - convening mechanism with a lead officer

Feedback regarding mechanisms needed for collaboration has been consistent amongst farmers and land managers involved in this work. A 'Group' with clear purpose and effective leadership is seen as valuable; and one-to-one engagement at farm level is seen as essential.

The Convenor / Facilitator Person Specification

With such a high proportion of the people engaged through our Test and Trial activities expounding the importance of 'local' and 'trusted' people, we tried to explore what was meant by this in more detail. The following are the headlines from our Collaboration Survey at the end of the milestone in relation to facilitators or convenors.

Required Skills

- Communication – clear – both strategic and operational, with all stakeholders
- Ecological / habitat / species / field surveying
- Organisation
- Facilitation
- IT skills
- Time management
- Multi-tasking

Required Knowledge and Understanding

- Both farming / land management and the environment
- The needs of land owners
- farming cycles and systems
- finances
- priority habitats and species
- Issues, pressures and causes
- Of big picture – policy, targets, crises
- Forestry, ecology, hydrology, ecosystem services
- Systems - regulatory processes, agri-environment schemes

Required Attributes / Qualities

- Efficiency
- Constructive
- Good listeners / easy to talk to
- Integrity
- Emotional Intelligence
- Respectful
- Open-minded

- Persuasive
- Impartial / balanced
- Patient
- Authentic
- Enthusiastic
- Diplomatic
- Non-judgemental
- Confident
- Professional
- Pragmatic
- Sympathetic

Required Attitudes / Viewpoints

- Working 'for' farmers
- Working 'for' those who want to see environmental services and benefits delivered
- Long term view
- Value farming, value nature

Who needs to work with farmers to help make ELM happen locally or to deliver local nature recovery as part of farming business?

- A local DEFRA department
- NGOs (WTs, Groundwork, TCV, CFTs...) alongside Local Government Organisations (country or district) policy makers
- Arm's length bodies (EA, NE, FC) and their initiatives (CSF etc)
- Peer to peer – the converted preaching to the unconverted
- Local land agents / advisors
- Private sector experts (esp. funding)
- Those with existing relationships
- Ecologists and Conservationists
- Beneficiaries / funders

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – Baseline Survey Template:

The purpose of this project is to test whether it is possible to bring together a collaborative multi-sector 'partnership' (involving farmers and land manager and other organisations) to help decision making around spatial prioritisation, advise farmers and help design of Land Management Plans as required to support ELMS agreements under the:

- *Sustainable Farming Incentive OR*
- *Local Nature Recovery*

One of the first things we are looking at is collaboration between farmers, or between farmers and others. How could the various stakeholders be brought together? Who should do this and how? How is it best to contact farmers and communicate local environmental priorities which could be addressed on farm holdings?

The following questions are designed so that you can have your say.

(1) The first set of questions asks about the different models of collaboration are available, how effective are they and can they be applied more widely
<p>What examples of farmers working together are you aware of or been involved in?</p> <p>What's worked well / been difficult? How could this be built on or developed?</p>
<p>Going forward, would you be willing to work together with other farmers under the new schemes</p> <p>Yes / No? Why/ Why not? Who with? How?</p>
<p>What examples of Farmers working with 'others' (e.g. environmental NGOs, Land Agents, Landlords, Local Authority...) are aware of or been involved in?</p> <p>What has worked well/ been difficult? How could this be built on or developed?</p>
<p>Going forward, would you be willing to work with other organisations under the new schemes?</p> <p>Yes / No? Why/ Why not? Who with? How?</p>

(2) The second set of questions explores the mechanisms (tools / processes) out there which could help to encourage collaboration between farmers and land managers.
How easy is it to get farmers working together under current schemes? Why is that?
Are there any useful tools, groups, services etc already available, which could help to get farmers to work together under the new environment land management schemes? Who provides these? How do farmers access them?
What tools, groups, services etc are needed to help farmers work together under the new schemes? Why are these needed? How could these work in practice?

(3) Thirdly, we want to understand how we encourage collaboration / partnership working:
What would help to get farmers working together as part of future schemes delivery? Who or what would be needed?
How about working with other organisations under the new schemes? Who or what would be needed to make this happen?

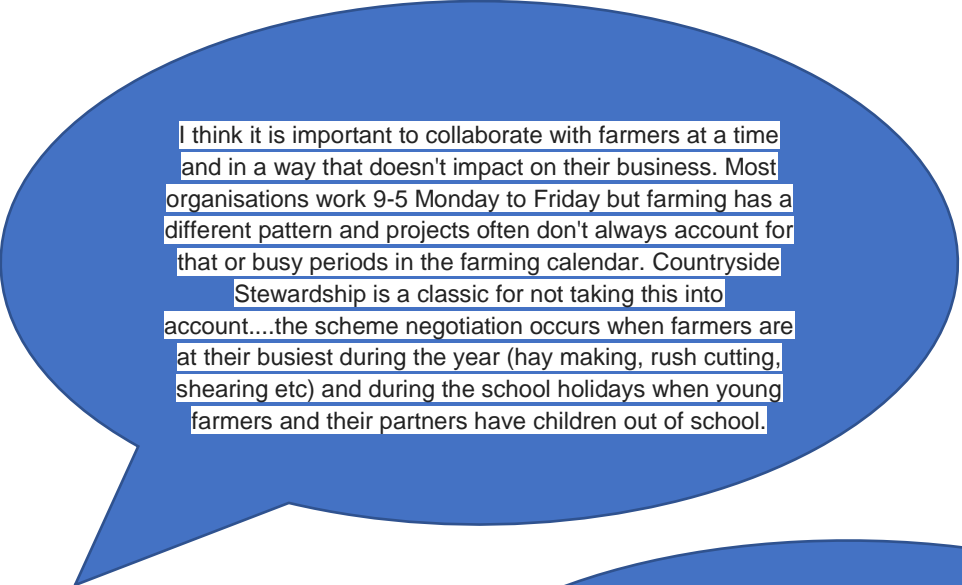
(4) What are the most effective ways to communicate local priorities with farmers, for both their local area and for their holdings? - tools and methods
What is the best way to reach the farming community? Where and how can we get information to farmers or have conversations with them?
How can we help farmers to understand the (often mapped) environmental priorities being set for their area and what these mean for their holdings / schemes?

Many thanks for your help in answering these questions.

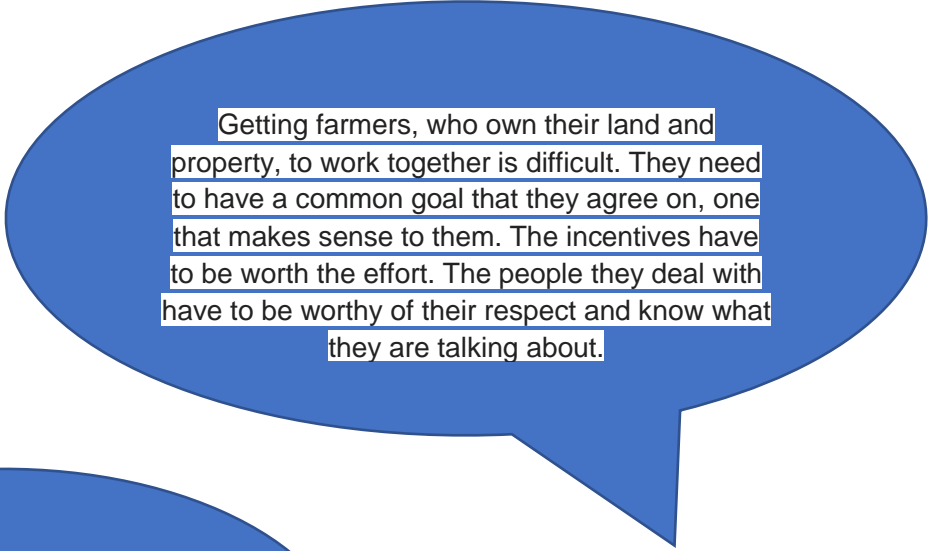
We'd be grateful if you would allow us to contact you again as we move onto gathering views about other elements of future scheme design. Would it be OK to contact you about this?
Yes / No
Contact details:

Your answers will be used anonymously in reporting back to DEFRA.

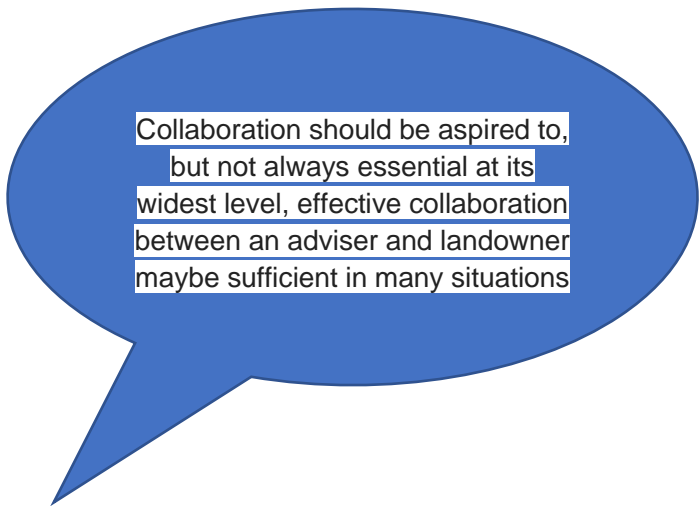
APPENDIX 2 – Sample of Quotes



I think it is important to collaborate with farmers at a time and in a way that doesn't impact on their business. Most organisations work 9-5 Monday to Friday but farming has a different pattern and projects often don't always account for that or busy periods in the farming calendar. Countryside Stewardship is a classic for not taking this into account....the scheme negotiation occurs when farmers are at their busiest during the year (hay making, rush cutting, shearing etc) and during the school holidays when young farmers and their partners have children out of school.



Getting farmers, who own their land and property, to work together is difficult. They need to have a common goal that they agree on, one that makes sense to them. The incentives have to be worth the effort. The people they deal with have to be worthy of their respect and know what they are talking about.



Collaboration should be aspired to, but not always essential at its widest level, effective collaboration between an adviser and landowner maybe sufficient in many situations

APPENDIX 3 - Collaboration Survey



ELM and LNR - Collaboration Questionnaire

1. Introduction to the survey

The importance of working together is inherent in the ambitious aims of the 25 Year Plan for the Environment, and the design of the emerging Environmental Land Management Schemes. Whether people choose to act individually towards these aims, or collaborate via various mechanisms, the need for a groundswell of action in the face of the climate and biodiversity crises is clear.

The recent Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Convenor Pilot concluded that farmers and land managers need to be involved early and throughout, but conceded that more time was needed to explore how to engage with these stakeholders effectively. The Pilot suggested that there was a need for some form of GM focused Farmer/Land Manager group to be established.

The EPIC Test and Trial is testing how best to bring together interested stakeholders – including farmers – in the Irwell catchment, to help inform local delivery of and support for ELM in the future. We are interested in your views on the issue of collaboration – between wider stakeholders and farmers, and between farmers or land managers – to deliver environmental targets and priorities.

Please help us to develop our approach by completing this short questionnaire. The survey includes 5 main multiple-choice questions, with the opportunity to add comments.

If you are a farmer, your participation will be logged and we will be in touch to recompense you for your time. We anticipate the questionnaire will take no more than 15-20 minutes.

1. I am (*check all that apply*): *

- ☐ a) A tenant farmer
- ☐ b) A farmer / land owner
- ☐ c) A land owner / landlord
- ☐ d) From an organisation (please state organisation and role in the comments box)

Comments:

2. My email address (or contact telephone number if you do not have one): *

3. What type of collaborator are you? How would you prefer to work to deliver environmental measures or help nature across an area?
Choose all that apply. Please comment further if you wish to.

- ☐ I prefer to work alone
- ☐ I prefer to work alone but towards common aims
- ☐ I prefer to work together with my peers
- ☐ I prefer to work with experts
- ☐ I prefer to work with decision makers
- ☐ I prefer to work with people who take action
- ☐ Other (please specify):

Comments:

4. On a scale of 1 - 5 (with 5 being the highest), how important do you think each of these conditions in making it easier and more likely for all the stakeholders to work together around Local Nature Recovery and ELM delivery?

*Expand on your thinking in the comments box if you wish to **

	1	2	3	4	5
Respectful relationships (e.g. trust, active listening, 2 way dialogue, power sharing, involvement in decision making, building on existing and successful mechanisms and people)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Business Security (e.g. market security, food security, level of scheme payments, payments for maintenance, farm business support)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ELM scheme design (e.g. limited hassle factor, ease of administration, application and evidence / monitoring)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clear and easy communication (e.g. through a contacts database, sign up, newsletter/ news updates, proactive, connected, simple)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to financial incentives (e.g. payment for collaborative delivery, access to additional (e.g. green) markets and market mechanisms, access to project funding)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The right people involved (e.g. local, knowledgeable, skilled)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to information, advice and guidance (e.g. data, maps, agronomists, ecologists, business experts, resources etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geography / Scale (i.e. choosing the right geographical focus for the purpose)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A successful track record (i.e. clear impact on the environment or business)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunity for learning (e.g. peer to peer, from experts, access to courses or training)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexibility (e.g. to respond to different priorities or themes, to get together as decided, to reach people easily)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Valuing Time (the time to develop mechanisms and to participate, keeping to time, using time well, time is resourced, recompensed or incentivised)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Not constrained by governance (i.e. being action focused)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

The Ability to Influence (i.e. the ability to influence both strategically and operationally)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Clear purpose/ focus (e.g. terms of reference, decision making process)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Comments:

5. Which of the following types of Collaborative Mechanisms are needed or would be most useful in helping farmers to deliver environmental outcomes and priorities Choose all that apply. *

- ☐ Facilitation – someone to help farmers to come together to explore common issues / opportunities
- ☐ One to one engagement (e.g. farmer to advisor)
- ☐ A Partnership / Board / Steering Group
- ☐ A Virtual 'Hub' or Forum – a place to find news, funding, information and data, advice; to communicate through
- ☐ Existing Groups
- ☐ A NEW collaborative group
- ☐ The 'Convenor' Role – a coordinator / someone bringing together multiple people and workstreams
- ☐ A combination of these – a convening mechanism with a lead officer 'conducting' and shaping collaboration
- ☐ A fee paying membership group
- ☐ Other (please specify):

6. Which organisations or roles should be involved in these collaborative mechanisms?

Who needs to work with farmers to help make ELM happen locally or to deliver local nature recovery as part of farming business? *

7. What sort of people make effective facilitators / coordinators? *

What Skills do they need?

What Knowledge do they need?

What personal attributes / qualities do they need?

What attitudes / viewpoints do they need?

8. Many thanks for your responses. Is there anything else you wish to say about Collaboration in relation to the delivery of Environmental Land Management Schemes?