



FIXING & LINKING OUR WETLANDS FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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Resources
FOR CHANGE

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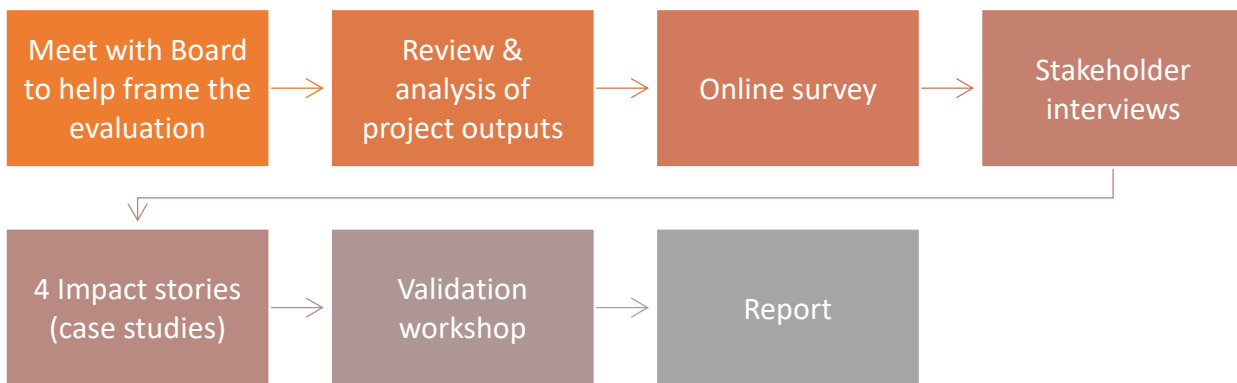
Resources for Change (R4C) is a socially responsible, employee-owned consultancy with an excellent reputation for innovatively involving people in their heritage and the places that matter to them. We work extensively to support organisations in receipt of NLHF funding to deliver heritage and environmental projects, including a considerable body of work relating to monitoring and evaluation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

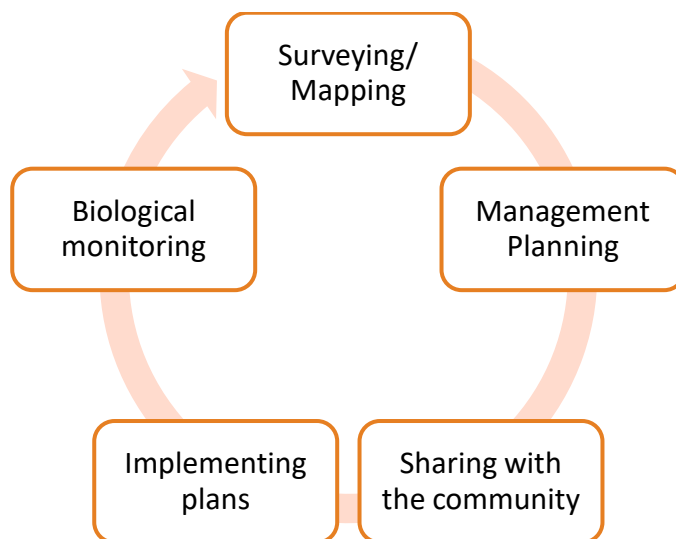
Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands (FLOW) is a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) project set up by the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group (MWHG) to survey and improve the condition of the wetlands network and to connect it up on the Manhood Peninsula, to prevent flooding and to improve and increase vital habitat for wildlife.

In 2017 Resources for Change were appointed to evaluate the performance of the project. This report describes the approach take to the evaluation, presents the findings from the delivery of that approach, and then provides an analysis of project performance and impact. It finishes up with the evaluators' conclusions.

The evaluation was undertaken using the following methodology.



By the end of the project, people were talking about the ‘FLOW model’, as illustrated below, a particular way of working that had developed over the life of the project and had proved to work successfully in the context of the Manhood Peninsula.



The model could be replicated in other locations to address different environmental and heritage issues. The key element in the model that is perhaps a bit different from more traditional approaches in the 'sharing with the community', creating a sense of local ownership that is going to be so important if the improvements made are going to be maintained and hopefully enhanced.

The findings from this methodology have shown that the FLOW project has been successful, achieving, and regularly exceeding, its desired outputs and outcomes and having a real impact on the heritage, people, and communities of the Manhood Peninsula.

The foundation for this success has been an effectively led and well-managed project. Two elements of the project's delivery come out of the evaluation as particularly important.

- Building good relationships, particularly with those who have influence over land, are critical as the 'FLOW model' requires the co-operation of lots of other people. Having personnel who have the skills to develop and maintaining these relationships is, therefore, an important success factor.
- The importance of the volunteering aspects of the project. FLOW could have been delivered by a staff team, consultants, and contractors but it would have lost a direct link with the community which has been so important and would not have derived the value of getting local people involved, in respect to pride of place, health & wellbeing, and local support. Volunteering is at the core of the successful model that the FLOW project has developed.

Community resilience has emerged through the life of the project as the key lasting impact and perhaps the most important legacy of the project. FLOW has demonstrated how communities can engage with issues such as flooding and be empowered to seek solutions themselves. This type of resilience thinking, and action is going to be important in going to be increasingly important for the Manhood Peninsula.

In terms of how the legacy is taken forward, the idea of embedding both the maintenance of the improvements and the way of working seems to have traction with the communities and organisations involved. The project has produced invaluable information in the form of reports, maps, and data. A future project could build on these tools and MWHG seeks to support communities to implement these excellent results. The evaluation findings suggest that there will be a need for ongoing facilitation of the FLOW model if it is going to apply to other communities on the peninsula, thereby completing the network of ponds, ditches, people, and communities that will lie at the heart of a more resilient Manhood Peninsula.

INTRODUCTION

Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands (FLOW) is a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) project set up by the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group (MWHG) to survey and improve the condition of the wetlands network and to connect it up on the Manhood Peninsula, to prevent flooding and to improve and increase vital habitat for wildlife.

Ditches and waterways form a large, linked habitat on the Manhood Peninsula and their care and upkeep are not just of benefit to wildlife but also for local communities. Well-maintained ditches, rifes, ponds, and saline lagoons allow excess water to be stored or flow away to the sea, lowering the risk of flooding and providing a stable and important home to many species, one of England's most threatened mammals, the water vole.

The project encouraged local people to get involved and interested in the ditches and ponds in their parishes, recruiting and training local parish volunteers to carry out condition assessments alongside a FLOW Wetlands Field Officer. They also organise information workshops for ditch and pond owners and managers about wetlands and how they should look and function; providing information on rare species, legislation, management options. The project then works with partners to source grants and resources to carry out the physical restoration work prioritised in costed management plans.

The FLOW project started in 2016, is run by the Manhood Wildlife & Heritage Group (MWHG), a volunteer group that aims to protect nature on the peninsula.

In 2017, MWHG appointed Resources for Change (R4C) www.r4c.org.uk to provide a range of evaluation services, in part to meet the requirements of the NLHF and to enable MWHG to reflect upon and learn from the range of activities the project was designed to undertake. This report is the final part of that evaluation process coming towards the end of the delivery phase. The report describes the approach take to the evaluation, presents the findings from the delivery of that approach, and then provides an analysis of project performance and impact. It finishes up with the evaluators' conclusions

In March 2020, the UK went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This had a significant impact on the last year of the delivery phase, curtailing some activities whilst enabling a greater focus on others. And prompting others to become involved as a greater need to engage with local open spaces became apparent.

The restrictions also impacted the design of the evaluation which had to be conducted wholly online. This represents a change in context that needs to be taken into account when assessing the performance and impact of the FLOW project.

FLOW PROJECT DESIGN

The FLOW project was established to address the following heritage need:

The Manhood Peninsula’s current environmental condition outside the protected area was badly degraded. The network of wetlands, a key local habitat, needed enhancement, bringing into good condition and linking up to improve habitat connectivity for wildlife, and to strengthen the area’s resilience to increased flood risk and Sea Level Rise which is a key issue for local people.

To address this need, the FLOW project was designed with the following aims (Figure 1) which would be delivered through a series of activities (Figure 2).

Figure 1: FLOW project aims.

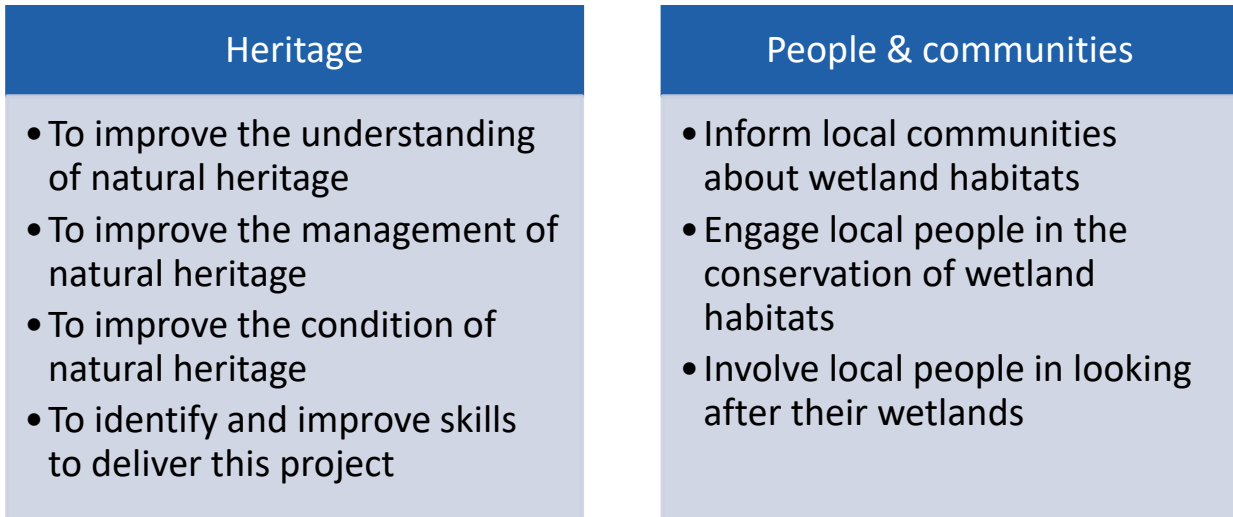
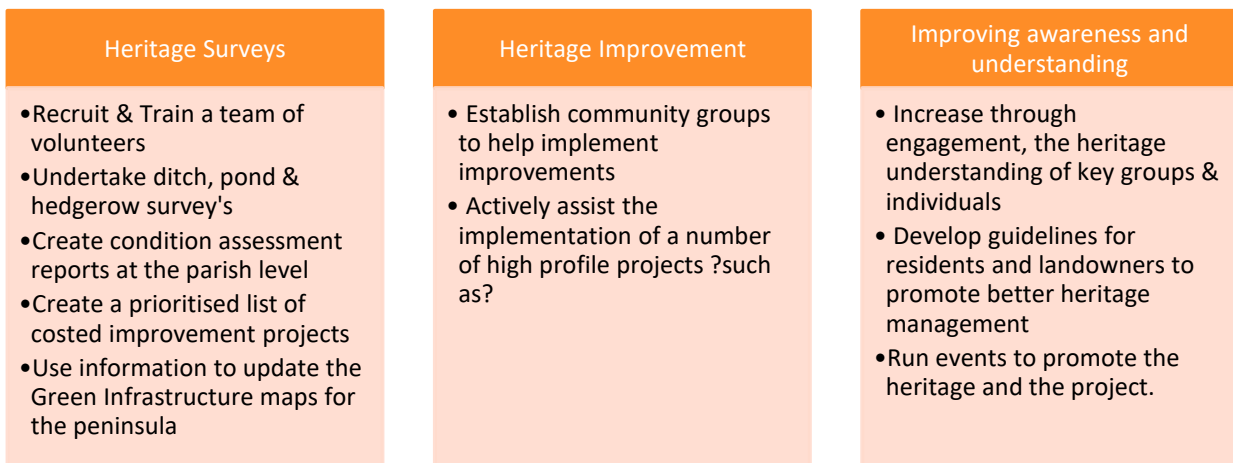


Figure 2: Flow project activities



EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION PLAN

In 2016 R4C produced an Evaluation Plan for the Flow project that set an evaluation process designed to:

- Meet evaluation requirements of the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and project partners.
- Understand what difference the project has made, in particular in terms of tangible ecological and heritage impacts, and community engagement.
- Provide information as the project is being delivered, to inform its ongoing management and delivery, suggesting adaptations if required and building on what is working well.
- Enable the project to demonstrate accountability to the community, by showing that the money is being spent well and the project is being delivered effectively.
- Build up a body of evidence to demonstrate to partners, funders, and others what works, to inform future work.

The Evaluation Plan focussed on gathering data to better understand how the project was performing in delivering the outputs and outcomes, that it planned to achieve through the successful delivery of its activities. A full list of outputs and outcomes can be found in Appendix 1 of this report. The Plan also identified a series of **Key Evaluation Topics** that the project team and partners had identified as things that they wanted to explore through the evaluation process. These were as follows:

- Achieving NLHF intended outcomes
 - Heritage will be – better managed, in better condition, identified/recorded.
 - People will have – developed skills, learned about heritage, volunteered time.
 - For communities, environmental impacts will be reduced; more people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage; the local area/community will be a better place to live, work, or visit.
- How elements of the project's governance and ways of working contribute to achieving outcomes
- Wider benefits have come from the collaborative approach to delivering the FLOW project
- A better understanding of what the barriers are to change, in how people view, interact, and manage wetlands.
- What messages and activities contribute to achieving a greater level of community engagement?
- Landowners, managers, and communities being able to sustain the wildlife and flood risk improvements beyond the life of the project.
- Achieving influence beyond the project area.

These Key Evaluation Topics provide the framework for analysing and reporting the results of the Evaluation.

INTERIM EVALUATION

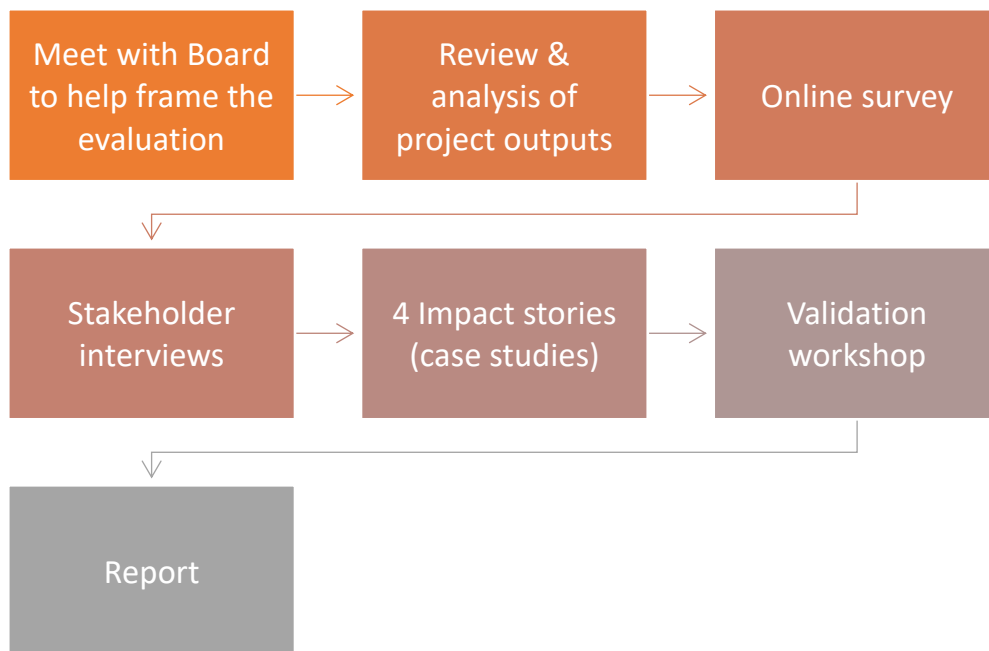
The interim evaluation was undertaken in the autumn of 2018 and reported the following.

- So far so good – all output targets were being met and the feedback from stakeholders was largely positive.
- Relationships are key to success – a lot of time had been invested in creating good relationships with landowners and community representatives, often going the ‘extra mile’ to help address problems they might be facing. This was starting to pay dividends in terms of cooperation and support.
- Success also depends on a strong project team and volunteers – The Project Manager provided effective leadership to the project and building a competent team around her. Volunteer involvement was going well and was seen as an early project success.
- Connections – the ‘Linking’ element of the project name, which had originally been applied to wetlands was now seen as having wider applicability; that is, linking people to wetlands and linking people and communities together to help restore these wetlands.
- Embedding seems to be the key to the future – legacy discussions focussed on embedding the process of better wetland management into the work of local community bodies such as Parish Councils.

FINAL EVALUATION

Figure 3 provides a summary of the methodology deployed to undertake a comprehensive final evaluation.

Figure 3: Final Evaluation methodology



FINAL EVALUATION FINDINGS

In this section we set out the findings from the evaluation research, largely following the methodology process set out above. However, the outputs from the initial discussions with the Board have been amalgamated with the Stakeholder interviews as the questions were similar and it makes sense to consider them together.

FLOW OUTPUTS

The FLOW project was not required to set many quantitative targets upon which ongoing performance could be judged. However, the team has been very good at collecting numerical data across the range of activities, the headlines for which are presented in Table 1 below. From this information, it is possible to get a sense of the scale of activity that is being delivered to achieve each of the aims of the project. Experience from other projects of a similar type suggests that the level of activity, when set against the resources deployed, is considerable and that the FLOW project has achieved a lot in five years of delivery.

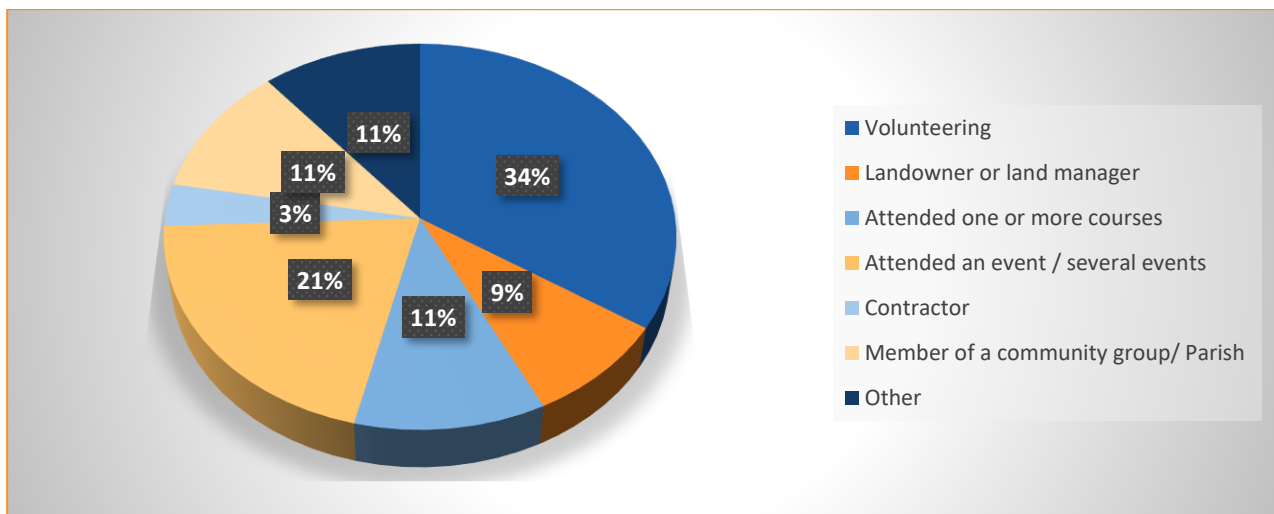
Table 1: Headline outputs

Aim	Output
Improve understanding of natural heritage	350 habitat and wildlife surveying sessions were undertaken.
Improve awareness and management of the natural heritage	25 separate guidance and information documents and videos. E.g. 'Introduction to wetlands and wildlife' - FLOW work sites film https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3PkzCUzQi8
Identify and improve skills to deliver this project	40 training events attended by 227 staff and volunteers
Improve the condition of the natural heritage	Over 400 habitat improvement sessions were undertaken by volunteers or local contractors on 69 sites.
Inform local communities about wetland habitats	46 Press releases, articles, interviews produced/undertaken. 140 Outreach events attended by the project team to promote FLOW and Wetlands.
Engage local people in the conservation of wetland habitats	51 Community events held by the project which were attended by over 6500 people.
Involve local people in looking after their wetlands	517 volunteers were involved in the project, contributing 11,441 hours restoring the wetlands of the Manhood Peninsula.

PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS

The survey was run during May and June 2020. It was circulated by the project team to everyone one who had been involved in the project. As figure 4 shows of the 58 people who responded 34% were volunteers and 21% were members of a Parish or community group, whilst the rest were from a variety of project roles.

Figure 4: Online survey respondents

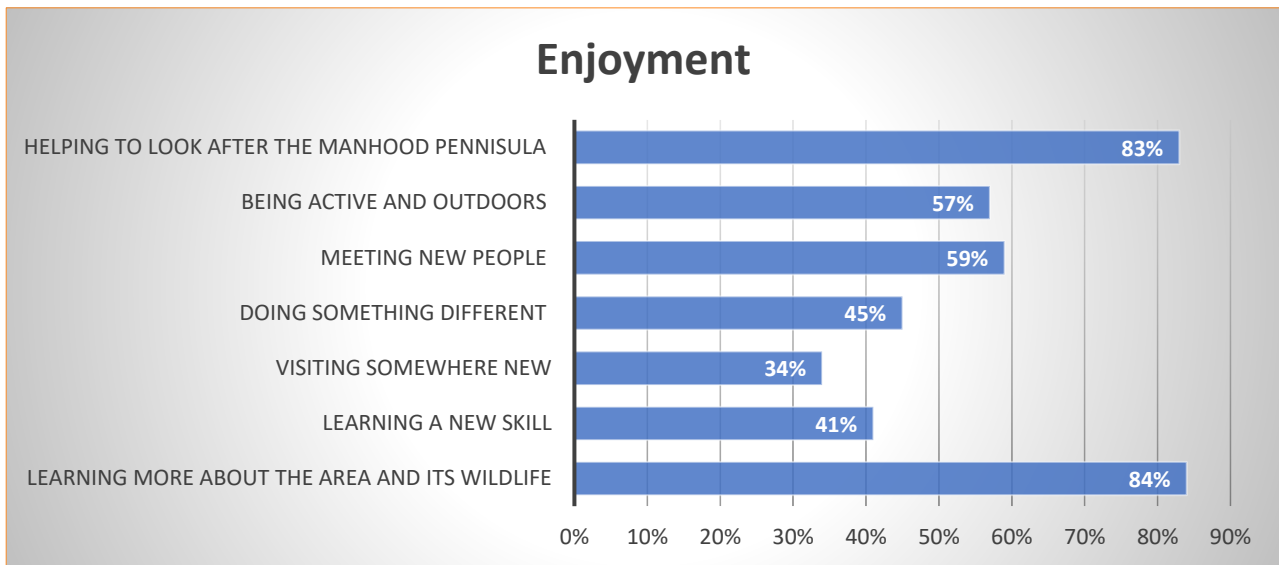


The online survey respondents were asked about their own experience of the project, how they had benefited and their views on how the project was run. They were then asked about their views on the impact the FLOW project has had on Heritage, People, and the Community.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE FLOW PROJECT

In terms of people's enjoyment of the project (Figure 5), the opportunity to learn more about the area and its wildlife was the most important consideration closely followed by a sense of satisfaction that comes from being involved in looking after the area that they are learning more about. Being active and out of doors and meeting new people was also important for over 50% of the respondents. Considering the focus on 'learning about the area' it is interesting to note that visiting new places did not feature highly perhaps suggesting that most of the people who undertook the survey were local to the Manhood Peninsula and therefore little was new.

Figure 5: Which aspects of the project did you most enjoy?



When asked what they got out of their involvement with the FLOW project (Figure 6) there was a close correlation with the 'enjoyment' question as 'contributing' and 'learning new things' were the most important elements. Also important was 'feeling more connected to the area' and feeling 'more part of my local community' through their involvement.

Figure 6: What did you get out of your involvement?

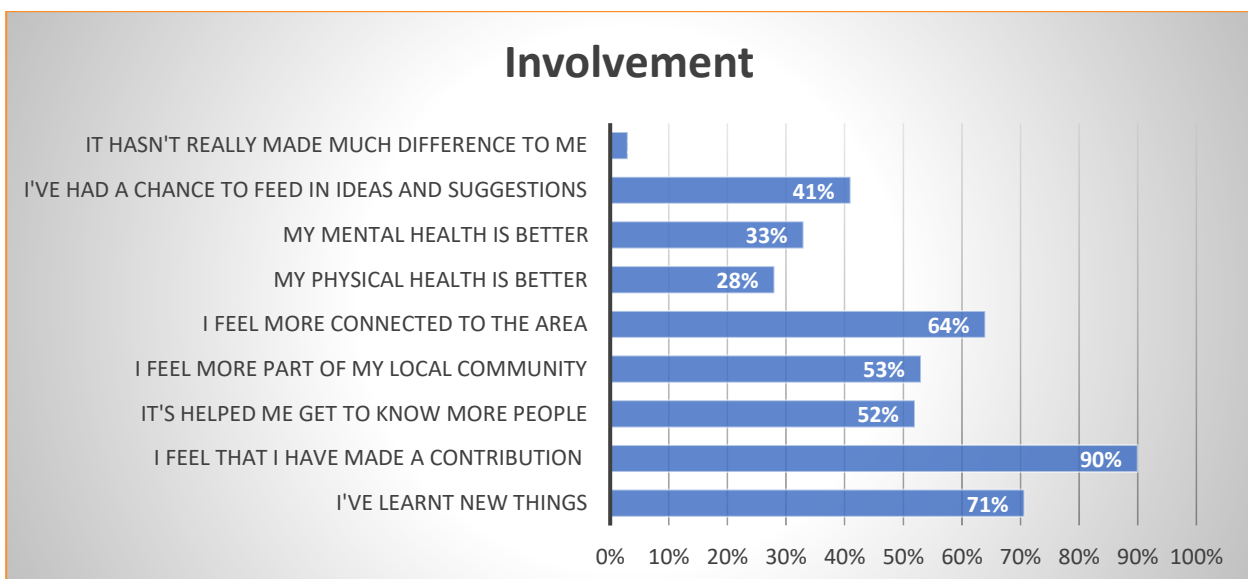
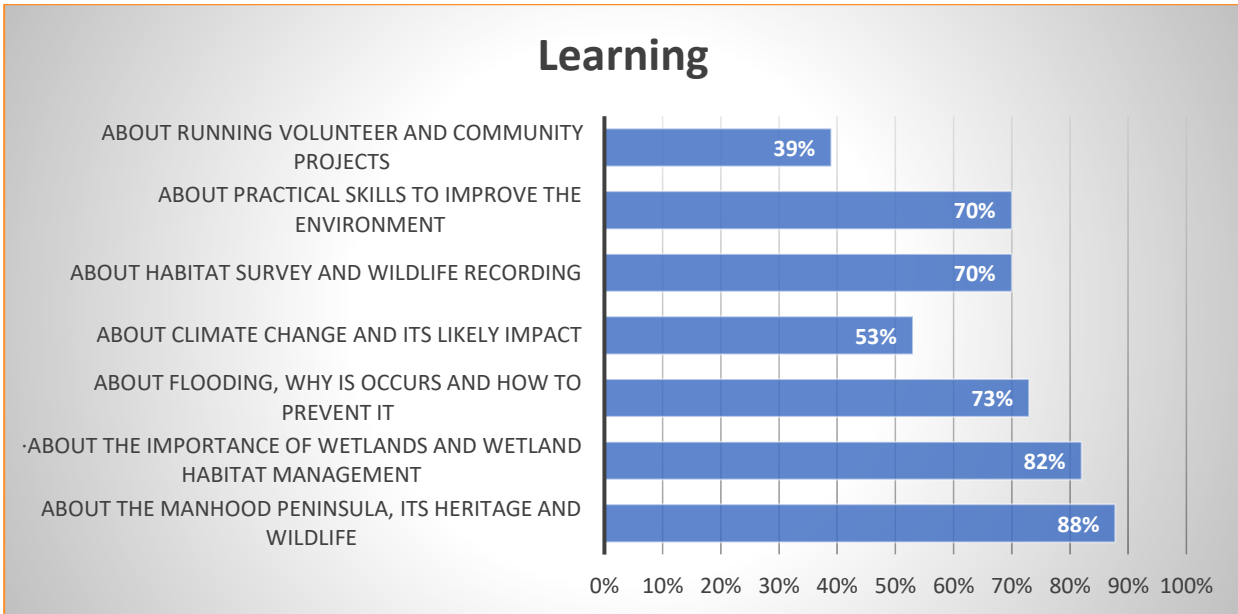


Figure 6 shows that the learning aspects of the project were important to the participants and when asked about what aspects of the learning experience they most valued (Figure 7) again the local focus of

the project came through strongly. People valued learning more about the Manhood Peninsula, its habitats, and wildlife. They also valued learning new skills, both in terms of habitat management but also surveying skills.

Figure 7: Learning



THE IMPACT OF THE FLOW PROJECT

FLOW project participants were asked to think about the impact that they felt that the FLOW project was having on the three key outcome areas for the NLHF; heritage, people, and communities. The results are shown in the three graphs below, Figures 8, 9 & 10.

Figure 8. Heritage Impact

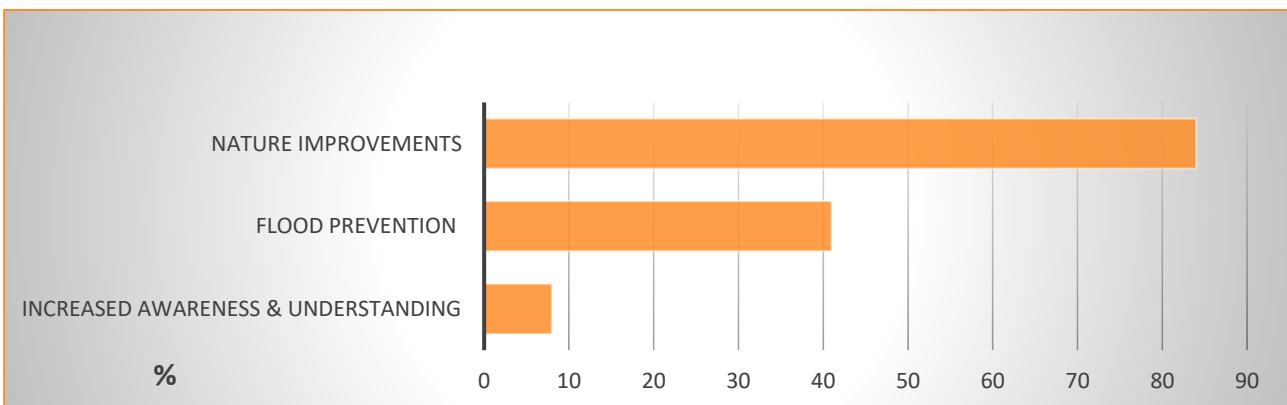


Figure 9. People Impact

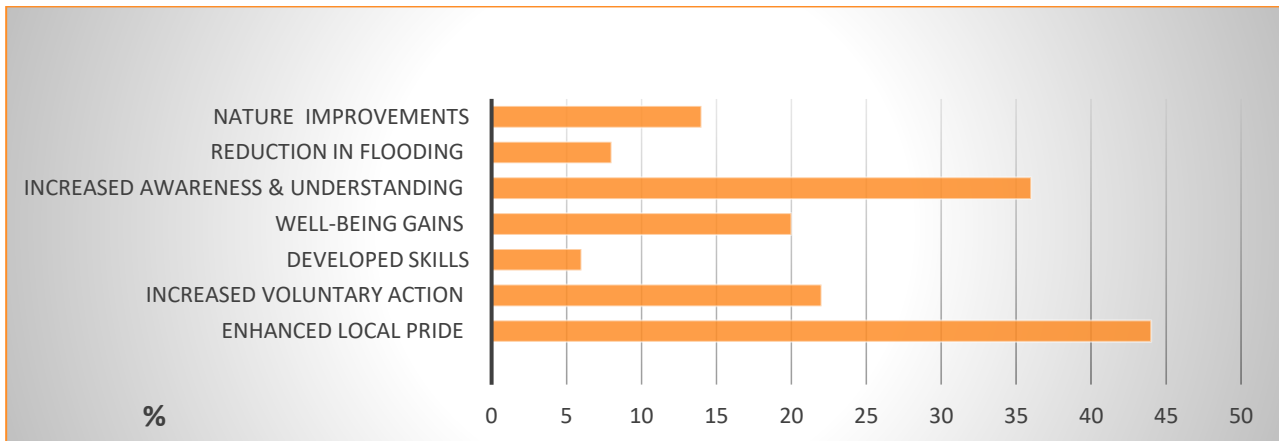
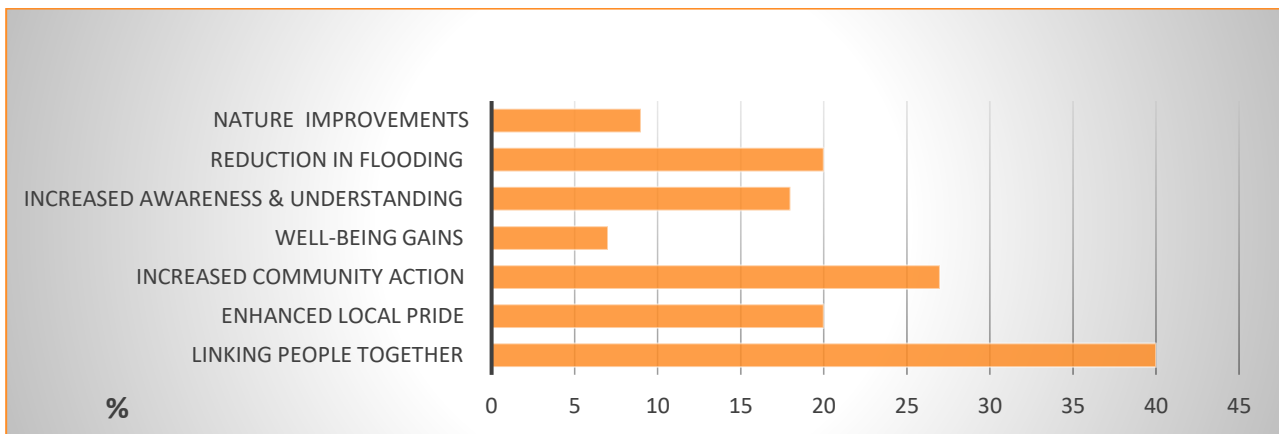


Figure 10. Community Impact



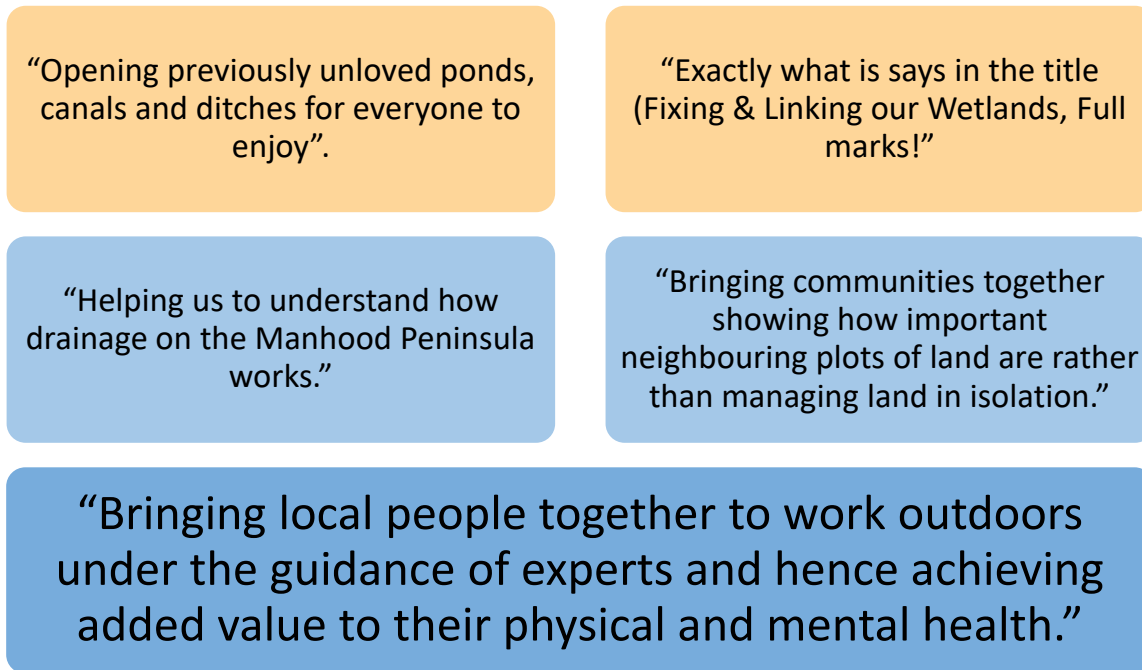
Concerning the heritage impact, nature improvements or improvements to the natural heritage are seen as the key area of impact, which should not be surprising as this was the key focus of the FLOW project. Flood prevention is also seen as important and whilst might not be seen as directly relevant to heritage it is extremely important locally in terms of people’s relationship with their environment.

When we asked people to think about the impact on people, enhancing local pride came out as the most important impact. People feel good about the improvements they see the project bringing about and their role in helping to achieve this. When you consider this alongside the high rating people gave ‘linking people together’ and ‘increased community action’ in the community impact section (Figure 10) then this suggests that process of engagement undertaken by the project has had considerable local benefit above and beyond providing person power to undertake surveys and conservation work.

MOST SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE

The online survey concluded by asking people to identify the most significant difference that the FLOW project achieved. A selection, in their own words, is provided below.

Figure 11. Most significant difference



STAKEHOLDER VIEWS

Stakeholder views come out of three different components of the evaluation methodology.

- Meeting with the FLOW Management Board – October 2020
- Interviews with 8 key stakeholders (landowners, community representatives, volunteers), and project contacts from statutory agencies)
- Validation workshop – February 2021

Views were sought in four areas:

- Project success and the key factors that contributed to that success.
- Project delivery challenges and what might be done differently next time to address those challenges.
- Longer-term impact and how that impact was to be sustained.
- Project legacy

In the section that follows we have summarised the key themes that emerged

SUCCESSSES

- **Biodiversity gain.** Visible improvements in populations of water voles, eels, and kingfishers can largely be attributed to the work of the project. And an effectively functioning wetlands habitat network.

- **Community Benefit.** There were no major flooding events during the life of the project, but the work undertaken to improve the drainage system should help to alleviate the impact of future flooding events on property and livelihoods. This will have considerable community benefit as flooding has a large detrimental effect on people's health & wellbeing, community life, and on the local economy.
- **Learning.** The FLOW project has provided a framework for the exchange of skills and knowledge. Through this, the general understanding about wetlands, their importance, and how they work on the Peninsula has increased in many sectors of the community, which has led to changes in the way people both perceive those wetlands, seeing them as an asset rather than a liability, and the positive action that they were willing to take towards conserving them.
- **Pride in place.** It has made more people in the Manhood area aware of the need to do some of this conservation work and managing the landscape. People involved and those who are aware of the work being undertaken speak of feeling more positive about the place in which they live, appreciating its heritage and environment, and feeling proud that local people are taking great care of it.
- **Volunteering.** Increased the number of people volunteering for nature in the local area and through this built new and stronger social connections that have been of benefit to both the people involved (improved wellbeing) and the local community (social capacity).
 - *"We have developed a strong core group of volunteers who are inspired by ditches!"*
- **Reputation.** The MWHG, because of the FLOW project, is valued more by other organisations and professionals in the field. Its advice is being sought and it is increasingly being asked to contribute to policy discussions. The MWHG and the FLOW project were shortlisted in 2018 and they were the runners-up in 2020 of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Group Award for wildlife recording. This pitted them against national wildlife charities like the Mammals Society, Wildlife Trusts, National Trust, and big organisations. For a small volunteer-led charity this has been a huge achievement and helped to confirm the important role this small group is playing locally with regards to biological data being collected and contributed to the Local Records Centre and thus to the NBN.

WHAT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THAT SUCCESS?

- **Relationship building:** Time spent on building relationships, especially with the landowning community where there has been the need to invest considerable amounts of time in creating an understanding about the project and to build the trust that enables work to be undertaken. Stakeholders felt that the project team had a good collaborative approach and were persistent, seldom taking 'no' for an answer.
- **The expertise and hard work of the people involved.** People were very complimentary about the staff team, seeing them as the glue that held everything together. There was also a lot of positive

feedback, from landowners and agency stakeholders, about the volunteers, for their ‘can to attitude’ and sense of humour.

CHALLENGES

- **Global Pandemic.** The restrictions placed on a whole range of activities due to the pandemic coincided with the last year of the FLOW project. Little volunteering activity has been possible but other work, such as surveying has proved to be possible at times, within the rules. Whilst working with the lockdown restrictions has been challenging the overall impact on the project has been small largely because the project was on or ahead of target in nearly all its activities and was able to provide a flexible response to filling any gaps.
- **Working with Landowners.** Whilst landowner relationships are seen as one of the reasons for the success of the project there are instances where they have also provided real challenges. Engaging with large farming companies where there is perhaps less affiliation with the area, staff turnover can be high and the decision-making process can be convoluted. A lot of land is rented on an annual basis, which means that there is little long-term thinking or interest in investing in improvements. Landowners don’t always follow up on maintenance agreements.
- **Relationship with the parent body.** During the life of the FLOW project, there were a lot of changes in the MWHG which created some delay and difficulties over decision making. FLOW has been the biggest project the MWHG has run and, in part due to the previously mentioned changes and in part due to FLOW’s success, people involved in MHWG but not in FLOW sometimes felt side-lined and there was at times a real danger of a divide being created. This was a short-term challenge and was addressed rather than a long-term problem.
- **Engaging a wider range of people.** The volunteering aspects of the project have been particularly strong but with a few exceptions, the people engaged have been those who you might expect to engage in an area such as the Manhood Peninsula. The project has tried but has not been as successful as they would have liked at reaching out to people who would not normally engage in this type of activity.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?

There was no clear point emerging from the answer to this question so a range of responses is provided below. Most are practical improvements, suggesting that the overall design of the project was seen to work but could be made better with the following improvements.

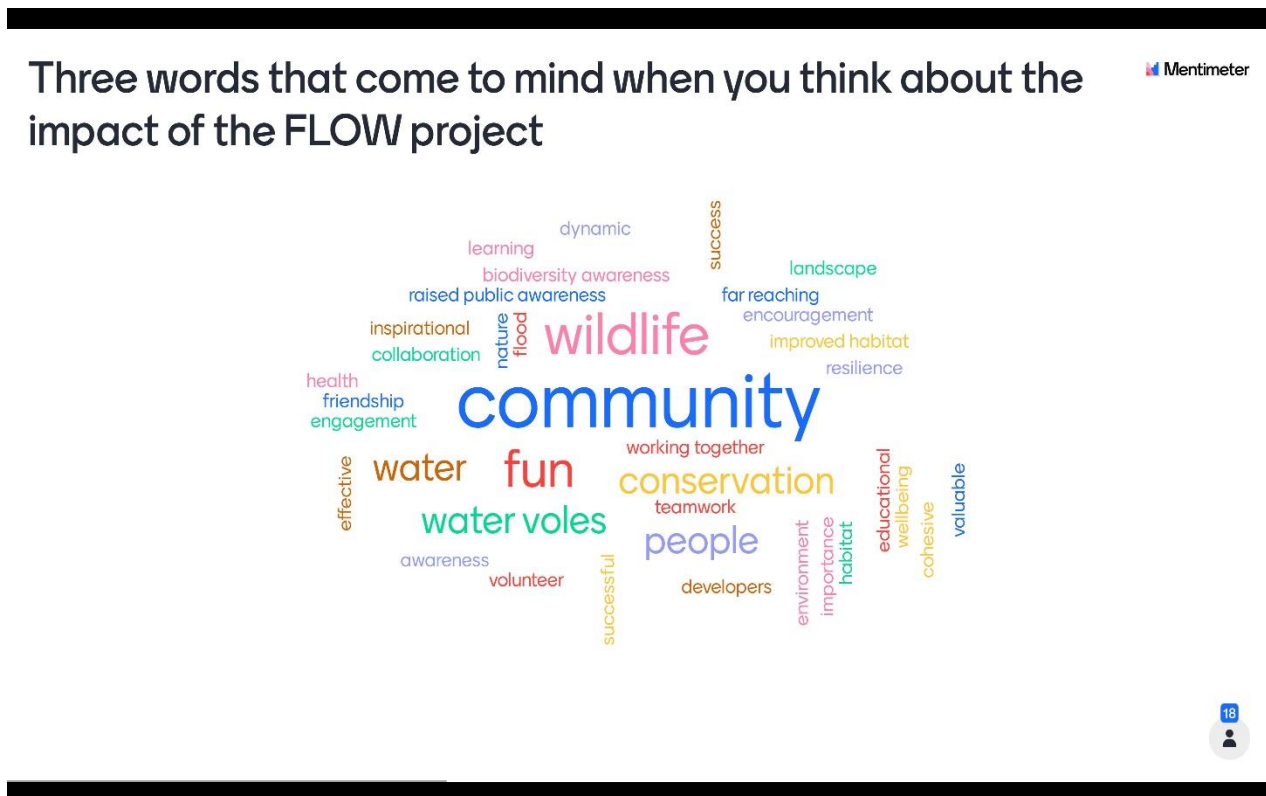
- Set up big consultation with residents at the outset of the project providing an opportunity to engage with and influence the project.
- Link the MWHG and FLOW closer to avoid the perception that the ‘tail was wagging the dog’.
- Simplify financial controls system. Relied too heavily on one person. Need to spread the load.
- Develop more ‘Tools to influence’: So important to win hearts and minds.

- Stay focused on Remit especially around advice given. Need clarity around what is provided and where FLOW'S contribution is required.
- Invest in advertising to ensure the project is better known and seek to recruit more volunteers.

IMPACT

Participants at the Validation workshop were asked to think of words that best described the impact that they thought the FLOW project was having, following word cloud resulted.

Figure 12. Impact cloud



The discussion with stakeholders provided more detail about this impact in the following areas:

- **Community.** This is the area where people feel the biggest impact has occurred. By bringing communities together to address a common goal, by helping people in these communities better understand how the importance of the wetland environment and how their drainage system works, and then by equipping them with the skills to take action the project has increased the resilience of those communities not just to flooding but to other future changes, such as sea-level rise, that they will face.
- **Flooding.** The Manhood Peninsula is a very low-lying coastal area that is going to suffer the impact of sea-level rise, due to climate change, before many other areas in the country. The work

undertaken by FLOW, to reduce the prospect and impact of surface water flooding, has bought the area a bit of time, perhaps creating a 5-10 year window, during which time adaptation plans could be developed for the area. Local people clearly remember the impacts of the very intense rainfall event of 2013 when roads were closed and houses flooded.

- **People.** Those people who have engaged with the project; landowners, community members, volunteers, etc now know more about wetlands, drainage, and the cause of flooding, they have also experienced how to do things better, how to create a wetland environment for the benefit of everyone. This capacity and capability is now a valuable local resource.
- **Biological data.** The project has contributed a significant number of new biological records to the Sussex Biological Record Centre. This and NBN valuable data about the distribution of wildlife and their habitats that can be used to influence the development of policies and plans, hopefully in ways that will benefit the heritage of the Peninsula.
 - *“It can no longer be said that (the Manhood Peninsula) is a wildlife desert”*
- **Influence.** The FLOW project provides a very good case study as to how a volunteer-led coastal group can respond to climate change and how through this community resilience can be developed across a landscape. The project is having an increasing influence on policy, particularly policy in relation to flooding, drainage, wildlife, and the wider environment and it is being consulted regularly about the impacts of development. This should mean that these issues continue to part of local policymaking.

HOW BEST TO MAINTAIN THIS IMPACT?

Stakeholders were asked to consider how the impact that had clearly been achieved could best be maintained. Three themes emerged which are set out below;

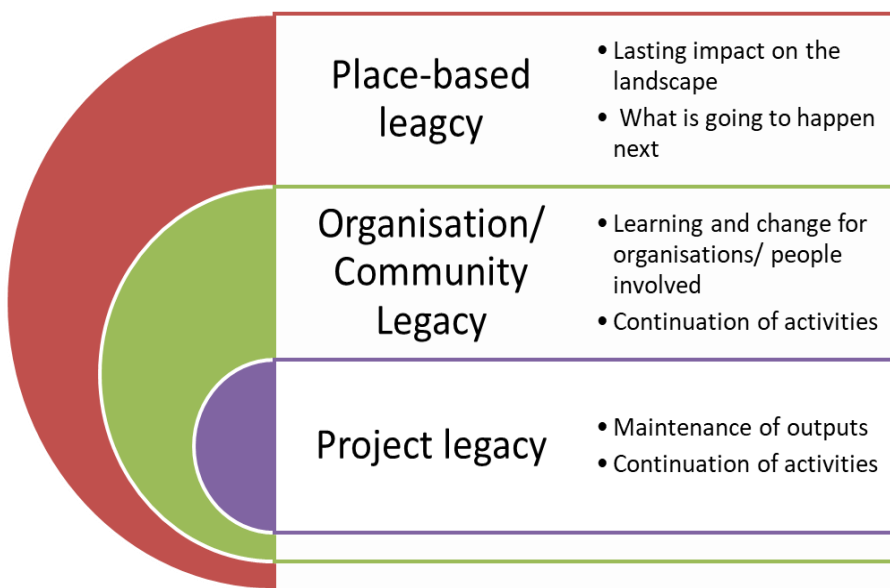
- **Local ownership.** The administrative bodies within the Manhood are the parishes, they should be encouraged to take ownership of the ditches that lie within them because they are so critical to ensuring that the roads, land, and properties aren't flooded.
- **Creating opportunities for the future.** People identified that a lot of changes were taking place at the policy level that could provide opportunities for the Manhood, the Environment Bill, the new Environmental Land Management System for farmers, and the increasing interest in Nature-Based Solutions were all highlighted as relevant to the work of the FLOW project. It was felt that FLOW had demonstrated how community-led projects could play a role in these and other emerging initiatives.
- **Build on this experience.** The FLOW project will end but the MWHG will continue. A lot has been learned about managing a project of this type and scale, experience that needs to be captured and embedded into the future activities of the group. It now has the experience of successfully

running large projects and in this way can really provide leadership on wildlife and heritage matters in the area. MWHG has recently joined the Defra Nature Recovery Network initiative.

FLOW PROJECT LEGACY

It is useful to think about legacy at a number of levels as set out in Figure 13. Each of these levels was discussed at the Validation workshop and the key themes that emerged are set out below.

Figure 13. Project Legacy



PROJECT LEGACY

- FLOW has established a successful model of operation that works (the FLOW way) - surveying/mapping/planning/sharing/implementing/monitoring. Opportunities should be explored to replicate it as a way of working on the Peninsula and to share it wider as a good practice case study.
- The model could be applied to a range of issues and opportunities, some ideas from stakeholders were:
 - Tree planting, hedgerows & woodland management
 - Habitat connectivity, keeping the Fixing & Linking theme
 - Stronger links with the marine environment
 - Ditch wardens and other opportunities for volunteers
- General agreement that key to the successful implementation of the model is an individual to oversee the work, build and maintain relationships, and be the public face of the project.

- Discussion at the validation workshop suggested that opportunities to integrate the work of FLOW into other activities (Surface Water Issues and Solutions Group) and/ or to find new sources of funding were being investigated.

ORGANISATIONAL/ COMMUNITY LEGACY

- Wildlife and drainage are no respecters of boundaries so there is a need to maintain a culture of collaboration – residents, landowners, volunteers, decision-makers. Ideas on how best to achieve this are as follows;
 - Identify a common problem or goal to align behind
 - Identify a leader/ convenor/ facilitator who can bring people together.
- Embed many aspects of the FLOW work into the work of Parish Councils and other agencies on the Peninsula. For example, it was felt that maintenance will continue where it has become embedded in what communities do for themselves. To ensure this happens;
 - The information gained by FLOW needs to be shared with the Parishes and each has been provided with a Report and an interactive map is being drawn up in one Parish as an illustration of what could be developed; and, shared with other decision-makers.
 - Some parishes have started to build up resources and incorporate FLOW legacy into parish plans and management plans. Other need to be encouraged to do the same.
 - Getting it on the agenda on parish agendas is critical but you need someone in the parish who cares about it as well.

PLACE-BASED LEGACY

- There is a huge opportunity to build on the achievements of the FLOW project by surveying and improving the connectivity of habitat and drainage across the whole Peninsula. This habitat connectivity when added to the linkages that have been achieved between people and communities is an increasingly recognised way of building resilience.
- External Agencies are increasingly talking about ‘resilience’ as a way of dealing with the impacts communities face from climate change so the FLOW project provides a real-world example of resilience building in practice

ANALYSIS

The framework used for the analysis is the Key Evaluation Topics identified by FLOW project stakeholders during the development of the Evaluation Plan.

ACHIEVING NLHF OUTCOMES

NLHF is looking to achieve outcomes with its funding in 3 areas; Heritage, people, and communities.

HERITAGE

A significant proportion of the Manhood Peninsula has now been surveyed and the current state of the drainage network, its associate habitats, and heritage features, such as historic ponds, have been recorded and mapped. This information has been shared with local people and with organisations and agencies that have responsibility for maintaining these important aspects of the local heritage. Where improvements have been identified and undertaken natural heritage features are now better managed and the habitat enhanced.

At the time of the Interim Evaluation, it was felt that it was too early to determine if these habitat improvements are benefiting local wildlife as ecological recovery often takes time. However, since then, the extensive wildlife recording undertaken by the FLOW project suggests that populations of locally important indicator species are increasing; more Water Voles are being recorded, Bats are occurring in areas where they have not been recorded before and Kingfishers are being seen more frequently.

Through the activities of the FLOW project, the heritage futures associated with this being a low-lying wetland landscape are better understood and recorded and their condition improved

PEOPLE

Volunteering has been a key success of the project, numbers, and range of people involved has increased, the types of activities they have been involved in has been expanded to include habitat surveying, wildlife recording, and a wide range of practical habitat management activities. The feedback received at both the interim and final evaluations shows that the volunteer experience was well organised and that volunteers not only were able to contribute a lot but also gained a lot in terms of learning, well-being, and social interaction.

A strong volunteering ethos starts with the MWHG, itself, an organisation that was established in 1997 and is run by volunteers. The Committee of the MWHG, all volunteers, have provided a lot of personal time in setting up the project, recruiting, and supporting the staff team, with both the governance and financial arrangements.

A lot of emphases is placed on providing training and support for these volunteers who report that they have learned a lot and have gained new skills. Volunteers have particularly valued learning more about the area in which they live, its heritage, and what needs to be done to protect that heritage. This learning

and skill development do not only benefit those who volunteer with the project. Many stakeholders, such as landowners and managers, talked about what they had gained by way of new knowledge and a fresh way of looking at things.

An important outcome for the project was to involve new audiences in care of the wetland environment. At the Interim Evaluation stage we identified that there had been some successes in this respect particularly in respect to engaging with more and a wider range of residents and through the engagement of specific groups such as those from companies. This has not changed much in the second half of the project, in part due to Covid-19 which restricted outreach activities. Achieving this broader engagement is seen by the Project board as one of the ongoing challenges for a project of this type and one that MWHG will continue to address.

COMMUNITIES

A key focus for the project was to combine improving the natural heritage of the area by helping to reduce flood risk. There has not been a major flooding event during the life of the project to date, but the perception is that the work of the project is helping to reduce the risk when a future flooding event does occur. If this is the case, then the project is directly contributing to enhancing the local quality of life. People are becoming more aware of the importance of their local wetlands, how they contribute not only to flood risk reduction but also to the amount and diversity of wildlife. This has helped develop a stronger 'sense of place' for people who now report a greater pride in their local area. This 'pride' not only relates to the heritage improvements that make it a nicer place to live but also because it is local people who have brought these positive changes about.

Another aspect that was often mentioned through the consultation process was that the project has brought people together, people in neighbouring parishes, landowners and local volunteers, experts, and the general public. Creating these connections is seen as an important project outcome as it has engendered a strong sense of collective action towards a common goal.

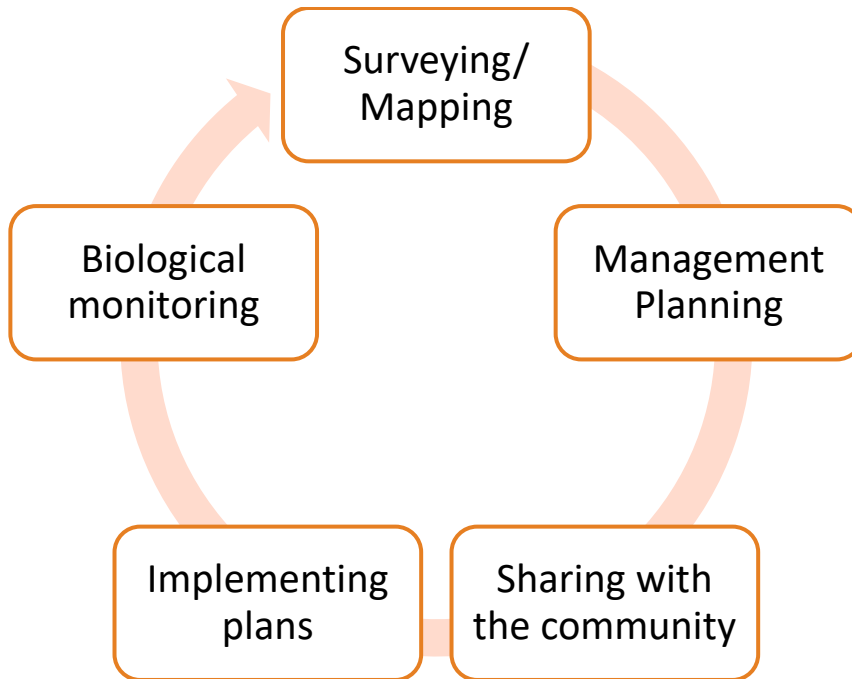
The FLOW project is clearly achieving NHLF outcomes in all three categories. A real strength is that it has been able to integrate all three elements into one approach. Addressing issues of real community concern (flooding), involving local people in finding solutions and implementing those solutions to achieve gains both for heritage and the community in which that heritage is located.

GOVERNANCE & WAYS OF WORKING

FLOW project stakeholders were keen to know what elements of the project design are contributing to its successful delivery. At the end of the project, people talked about the FLOW model, a particular way of working that had developed over the life of the project and had proved to work successfully in the context of the Manhood Peninsula. The model is illustrated in figure 14 and is one that could be replicated in other locations to address different environmental and heritage issues. The key element in the model that is perhaps a bit different from more traditional approaches is the 'sharing with the

community’, creating a sense of local ownership that is going to be so important if the improvements made are going to be maintained and hopefully enhanced.

Figure 14. The FLOW model.



Having a model is one thing, implementing it successfully is another. The elements identified in the Interim evaluation were largely reiterated at the end of the project with the addition of the ability to be flexible and adapt to changes in the external environment, an element that came out strongly in the last, Covid-19 effected year of the delivery phase.

The following have been identified as important governance and ways of working in delivering a successful project:

- Local ownership – the project is run by a local organisation, (MWHG), based in, and supported by, the local community.
- Continuity – MHWG has run a number of projects funded by NLHF, working on similar issues and through the same sort of approach. This has meant that they already experience and had some of the relationships, processes, and procedures as well as volunteers needed to create an effective project.
- An effective and well-led staff and volunteer team who have seen themselves as ‘facilitators’ of action rather than necessarily direct deliverers. Good communication has perhaps been the key factor underpinning this approach; the team has been good at getting the message across and, through this, getting people to do things.
- Relationship building – considerable time and effort has gone into building productive relationships with a wider range of stakeholders but perhaps the most important are those with landowners and community representatives such as Parish Councils. The project manager in particular is seen as providing a thoughtful and responsive approach that has won over the support, of sometimes sceptical, local people. These people identified that building trust was critical to their involvement in the project.

- Flexibility. The project was faced with a major challenge in 2020 as Covid-19 restrictions curtailed a lot of what was planned in the final year. The fact that output and outcomes have still been delivered is a tribute to the adaptability of the project team, the MWHG, and the stakeholders supporting the project.

WIDER BENEFITS OF A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

There is a general recognition among stakeholders that the FLOW project has brought people together. It got landowners talking to each other, communities working together perhaps for the first time, and helped representatives of the Local Authorities and agencies, such as the Environment Agency, to engage more effectively with local people.

The FLOW acronym stands for Fixing & Linking our Wetlands. During the life of the project, the word 'linking' has perhaps developed a wider meaning as the importance of linking people together has become apparent. One way of thinking about the project is of two networks represented as one; the network of ditches, ponds, and hedges overlaid by a network of people, community groups, and organisations all working to maintain the connectivity of both.

This has given the project access to more people and additional resources but has also meant that things can happen independently of the project which is a key legacy consideration. This enables a more 'joined up' approach to be taken which is valued by stakeholders but is currently dependent on the FLOW project team to provide the 'glue' that holds it all together.

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE BARRIERS TO CHANGE

The attitude and approach of landowners were seen as a key challenge for the FLOW project at the outset and one that, in many instances, has been successfully addressed through the 'ways of working, as previously mentioned. However, there are gaps in the network (both the ditch and the people network!) because some landowners do not see value in cooperating with the project. What is better understood now than perhaps at the beginning of the project is that there is a wider variety of landowners, land management approaches, and business models, all of which might elicit a different response to the same approach. So, for example, farmers on short-term tenancies may not perceive a value in improving their ditch system, when it is likely to be the next tenant that benefits. Understanding these differences enables the approach to be adapted but also for the project to be selective as to where it spends time working.

Another barrier to change that might become more significant is the fact that the last flooding event took place 6 years ago and the issue is therefore slipping down the agenda locally. This may particularly impact upon the interest of, and the willingness of, communities to get involved in the future. Maintaining visibility of both the issue and the potential solution through continuing, effective communication and promotion are going to be key to addressing this barrier if the FLOW approach continues.

Reaching a wider audience, as has already been mentioned, has proved challenging. The FLOW project is not alone in this as it a challenge for many heritage projects and organisations. It has worked in the FLOW

project, where specific groups, such as company volunteer groups, have been engaged and this probably suggests an appropriate way forward. Providing opportunities for non-environmental and heritage groups, ones from the social or health sectors, for instance, enabling new people to engage with nature in a way that can be very beneficial.

MESSAGES AND ACTIVITIES THAT WORK

Three factors come to the fore in this topic, more activities than messages but taken together, as an approach to engagement, they have contributed to the success of the FLOW project.

- **Volunteer involvement.** A lot of the project would not happen without them and again the time and effort invested in creating a welcoming inclusive and fun approach to volunteering has not only created an effective delivery mechanism but has created considerable value for those who volunteered.
- **Outreach.** Raising awareness will be one of the important things the project would be best remembered for. It has brought to the fore the issues to do with the network of ditches and ponds, and their importance for both local heritage and flood prevention, and it has used this increased awareness to facilitate action. The project has been good at communication which is one of the foundations of awareness-raising but it has also run many successful events or attended other people's events, providing speakers, activities, and other engagement opportunities. This 'outreach' has been supported by publicity in local media and effective use of Social media. Stakeholders particularly valued the regular FLOW project Newsletters which kept everyone up to date on FLOW project activity.
- **Demonstration.** Increasing people's pride in their locality has come out as a key impact. An important impact because people are more likely to care for things that they have pride in. Many of the people that we spoke to during the evaluation process talked about driving around the peninsula and seeing examples of what had been achieved, restored ponds being frequently mentioned. This suggests having a few easily seen and accessible demonstration sites is important in helping to create that sense of pride.

LEGACY

FLOW project legacy has two components; how the work is to be maintained and its lasting impact

MAINTENANCE

Two themes emerged during the interim evaluation that were amplified as of critical importance in the final evaluation. These are:

- **Embedding** – creating a local culture that recognises that, with respect to wetland management *“this is how we do things around here”*, so that landowners, residents, and communities all take their Riparian Responsibilities seriously and do so in a way consistent with good wetland management practice for the Manhood Peninsula.

- Joined up thinking and action – people, as part of a network, think, plan and act collaboratively so the drainage network works in terms of, both, heritage and flood control across the whole area.

Discussion with stakeholders suggest that, particularly at a Parish level, options for embedding the work of FLOW and the overall FLOW approach are being considered and, in some cases, implemented, which is positive in terms of project legacy

LASTING IMPACT

The Manhood peninsula, a low-lying area, is going to face considerable challenges over the next few decades as the impact of climate changes starts to take hold. This will potentially have a large impact on people, wildlife, and heritage and will require a lot of change and adaptation if people are to continue to enjoy a good quality of life on the peninsula. There is a need for communities like those on the Manhood Peninsula to become more resilient.

The FLOW project has shown how this might be achieved, not only addressing key current issues in the area but road testing a model, a way of working, that should have wider application. Key to this model is connections or linkages (as per the project title) that link habitats, wildlife, people, and communities together. This connectivity is a key feature of resilient communities; ones that understand how their place works, have the skills and knowledge to take action but are connected to outside support when required.

Increased community resilience is in the view of the evaluation team the most important lasting impact of the FLOW project.

ACHIEVING INFLUENCE BEYOND THE PROJECT

In some respect, the FLOW project is dealing with a set of local circumstances unique to the Manhood Peninsula but there is much to learn from the approach it has taken that is probably transferable to other situations and projects. This is particularly so with respect to community engagement with drainage and flood issues and the need to engage property owners and communities in addressing the issue of Riparian Responsibility more seriously.

Achieving influence was seen as an area that needed more emphasis in the second half of the project. Since the interim evaluation, the project has undertaken the following to spread the message to a wider audience.

- Publication of a booklet on 'Managing ditches for people and wildlife' (2nd version) that can be downloaded from the MWHG website and will be part of a resource used by partner organisations to highlight flooding issues, response, and riparian responsibilities.
- The erection of interpretation boards at 10 FLOW improved sites, across 7 parishes, highlighting the work carried out and the wildlife species that can be seen each season.

- A trail booklet that can be downloaded from the MWHG website that leads people around a range of FLOW sites, with a summary of the work completed, tying in with the sites with interpretation boards, and also incorporating others.
- Educational resources that can be downloaded from the MWHG website about the value of ditches and the wetland species you might find living there.
- A new website that is easy to navigate and to access more information about the FLOW work, with downloads available of PDF booklets, reports, educational resources, and maps.
- Creation of a video

Awards

- 2018 shortlisted for the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Group Award for wildlife recording
- 2020 runner's up for the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Group Award for wildlife recording

As part of the evaluation process, a series of case studies have been developed covering the topics of; biodiversity, Surface water flooding, Volunteering, and Partnership working. These will be used to enhance external influence further and can be found in Annex 1 of this report.

CONCLUSIONS

The final evaluation has shown that the FLOW project has been successful, achieving, and regularly exceeding, its desired outputs and outcomes and having a real impact on the heritage, people, and communities of the Manhood Peninsula.

The foundation for this success has been an effectively led and well-managed project. It should be remembered that this is a volunteer-led project and although the personnel on the board of the project have changed the MWHG has continued to provide the governance a project like this requires. Mention should also be made of the staff team who have provided very effective 'on the job' leadership and designed the process required to effectively manage a diverse and at times challenging work programme, which was able to build on work already done by MWHG across the MP.

Two elements of the project's delivery come out of the evaluation as particularly important.

- Building good relationships, particularly with those who have influence over land, are critical as the 'FLOW model' requires the co-operation of lots of other people. Having personnel who have the skills to develop and maintaining these relationships is, therefore, an important success factor.
- The importance of the volunteering aspects of the project. FLOW could have been delivered by a staff team, consultants, and contractors but it would have lost a direct link with the community which has been so important and would not have derived the value of getting local people involved, in respect to pride of place, health & wellbeing, and local support. Volunteering is at the core of the successful model that the FLOW project has developed.

Community resilience has emerged through the life of the project as the key lasting impact and perhaps the most important legacy of the project. FLOW has demonstrated how communities can engage with issues such as flooding and be empowered to seek solutions themselves. This type of resilience thinking, and action is going to be important in going to be increasingly important for the Manhood Peninsula.

In terms of how the legacy is taken forward, the idea of embedding both the maintenance of the improvements and the way of working seems to have traction with the communities and organisations involved. The project has produced invaluable information in the form of reports, maps, and data. A future project could build on these tools and MWHG seeks to support communities to implement these excellent results. The evaluation findings suggest that there will be a need for ongoing facilitation of the FLOW model if it is going to apply to other communities on the peninsula, thereby completing the network of ponds, ditches, people, and communities that will lie at the heart of a more resilient Manhood Peninsula.

I have really enjoyed working with the FLOW project, thank you for making me feel welcome and for all your co-operation with the evaluation. I hope that your legacy plans are successful.

Good luck

Mike King
Resources for Change
April 2021

ANNEX 1: CASE STUDIES

PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDY

A Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands (FLOW) case study

Partnership working

Over the course of the project the FLOW team have worked with many different organisations, from local parish councils to the district and county council. They have worked to build relationships with landowners and other local stakeholders to create a more joined up approach to managing the peninsula's wetlands.

"It's very helpful to have advice and guidance on how there are solutions that might offer more benefits than just reduced flood risk and how we can do the work in a way to optimise habitats for wildlife"

"Jane has the vision for partnership-working seeing where the common ground is between the specific remit for the FLOW project and where it can deliver wider benefits to West Sussex and in particular to the objective that the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) has to minimise flood risk for the Manhood Peninsula."



Working with the District Council

The FLOW project worked closely with local landowners and parish councils to identify potential flood risks and draw up maps of these at risk areas. By building up this network of local contacts and local knowledge the FLOW project has been able to provide valuable local knowledge to Chichester District Council (CDC) Drainage engineers. This relationship with local landowners has enabled the FLOW project to direct the landowners to the relevant people at CDC for water course consents.

We spoke to Duncan Keir at CDC to hear how he found working with the project:

The FLOW project has enabled the CDC to establish good links and engagement with riparian landowners in a way that wouldn't have been possible otherwise. Because the project is not an enforcement agency and is approaching the work from a different perspective landowners have been more open to hearing what they have to say and this has allowed Jane and the team to pass on information we need to share, for example consents for specific types of work.

Overall our response to the project is very positive, it has helped inform our response to drainage and flood risk and to help reduce flooding. The mapping the project has produced will continue to help reduce flood risk in the future.



"I certainly found it a mutually beneficial relationship because I could see how much FLOW would benefit the work that we were seeking to do to encourage parishes to take ownership for drainage."



Working with the County Council

West Sussex County Council (WSCC) approached the FLOW project for help on reviewing the flood risk to certain ponds and waterways within the FLOW project area, including Apuldram lane south and Chartswood Nursery. FLOW was then able to review tithe maps and contact the relevant landowners as they already had a relationship with these landowners. Through site meetings and discussions they were able to bring a range of skills from both the council and the FLOW project to complete the work.

Ray Drabble WSCC's flood risk engineer spoke to us about working with the FLOW project:

Jane has shared her knowledge and expertise with members of the LLFA team personally. The LLFA has a far improved database that the FLOW project has compiled of the watercourses on the peninsula. This informs our understanding of the drainage in the area (our primary focus of interest) but no doubt informs our colleagues in ecology of biodiversity, species and habitat distribution on the Manhood Peninsula.

There are several instances where we have specifically worked in partnership. Aside from the general principal of sharing data and expertise, we have worked on improving drainage at the intersection of Ham Road and Easton Lane; at Apuldram Lane; and at Selsey Road, Sidlesham. At all three sites, the FLOW project has undertaken extensive clearance of neglected ponds. This has directly and significantly benefited local drainage. In addition, we have liaised with the project to provide traffic management on a zero cost basis to the project where spare resources have allowed us to redeploy contractors to support the work of the FLOW project.

Looking to the future

Surface Water Issues and Solutions Group (SWISH) has representatives from CDC Drainage team, WSCC Flood Department, Southern Water, the Environment Agency, Local Flood Groups, and some Parish Councils. Flooding and water management issues on the Manhood Peninsula are discussed as well as specific problems, procedures, and policies.

With MWHG representative involvement, post FLOW, there will be an emphasis on wetland habitat management, continuing improvement work in parishes, supporting parishes with the riparian management responsibilities, updating Parish Online with ditch and landowner information, landowner liaison and managing physical improvement works.



VOLUNTEERING CASE STUDY

A Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands (FLOW) case study

Volunteer experience

The Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group (MWHG) is a volunteer led group, with over 100 members. In setting up the FLOW project the MWHG hoped to increase the number of community volunteers, empowering communities to take responsibility for their wetlands.

The FLOW project reached out to a wide range of volunteers from a 14 year old Duke of Edinburgh student to people in their retirement.

We spoke to a number of volunteers to see the impact of the project on their lives.



"It's nice to be out with people who are likeminded and Jane is great, she is very concerned about our well-being and how we are."



What do you think you have you learnt from the project:

"My knowledge of management was very poor on wetlands. Jane and Chris are absolutely fantastic and knowledgeable. They give you a good insight and talk to you, on why and how and where they are doing it. Right from talking to landowners to opening up the new project areas."

"I learnt so much knowledge of different plants and animals and everyone is so knowledgeable so I can learn so much from everyone else. I've been thinking of doing something similar to this for my job in the future."

"It was about halfway through when I joined, and that led onto me learning more on the wider issues of conservation and ecology and biodiversity. Its actually opened my mind to all sorts of things."



"Jane and Chris managed to recruit new volunteers for specific areas where we didn't have volunteers before so there are now dedicated groups in many areas willing to carry on with the work."



How has the project affected your view of nature?

"When we moved down here I thought, a housing estate, from an environmental point of view is grass and a few trees, but the more and more I learnt about ecology and biodiversity and so forth, the more I was walking around our estate thinking there is so much we could do here and so much potential."

"The project has made us aware of what is so close to us, when you volunteer on the sites it makes you notice them so much more."

"It has made us a lot more aware of how things work around us and you can see how well it works. We had problems with flooding and particularly old ponds and ditches and now they have been opened up the flooding has gone."

How has volunteering impacted your well being?

"Definitely being outside in the fresh air, the work you do is really rewarding, you start something and you can see a massive change and improvement. You can see how it makes a difference to nature and watch the sites develop."

"It's nice to be out with people who are likeminded and Jane is great, she is very concerned about our well-being and how we are. To be with people who are likeminded it is great to get out and talk to people and you get a different view on life."

"During Covid it gave us an opportunity to get out even if it was just for a walk to take photos of the project for records. A lot of people were able to do individual habitat surveys, which were once a week for an hour a week. Just nice to be sat there quietly with a pair of binoculars and a notebook just listening and watching."

The best thing about volunteering with the FLOW project was...

"...Taking it from several aspects, on the scientific side its been really good to learn about the biodiversity and to see it happening on the ones we started right in the beginning. On the social aspect it has been a joy to work with other people."

"...Becoming aware of our environment, its this idea of years ago I would have said I'm over here and natures over there and I will come to it when it interests me but now I have come to realise we are all a part of the same system. Its been an eye opener and I said to the others if you had tried to twist my arm three years ago and said you must pay more attention to the environment I would have just backed off and wouldn't have been interested but its been this gradual realisation and learning for myself."

"...Its helped get through the last year, we weren't allowed to do many things, but we were able to do volunteering. Really nice to be able to do something so we were really lucky to be able to be outside and seeing other people."

BIODIVERSITY CASE STUDY

A Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands (FLOW) case study

Biodiversity impacts

Prior to the FLOW project biodiversity on the Manhood Peninsula was dropping, with three or four species dominating and water voles, a key flagship species in the area, suffering from habitat loss.

The project aimed to restore relic ditches and ponds and improve wildlife corridors and valuable habitat.

With the help of their volunteers the FLOW project have also been able to improve the local wildlife records.



"The interaction I had with them at the pond in West Itchenor village pond, really good example of a local group steering the local residents and parish council into management that would otherwise have been more damaging to the environment.

This is really practical level intervention and on a scale that the local authority wouldn't be able to do but the FLOW project could talk to the parish council and householders and give practical advice."

Peter Hughes, Chichester Harbour Conservancy Ecologist

What has the project done to improve the level of biodiversity on the peninsula

The project has not solved the problem, but it has started a programme of improvement and raised the awareness of the issue at landowner, parish, district, and county level. There is also more knowledge about getting advice, where to go, what to do.

One of the most important things the project has done is integration of the various drainage systems around the project area. Linking up drain systems in the farmland and getting local parish councils and landowners to think in an integrated way and see how relatively simple things can have a big impact.

Those corridors provide a valuable network for wildlife, linking three important protected sites on the peninsula. The project has further increased awareness protecting these sites and helped to identify what needs to be done to keep those connections strong.





Water Voles

Water voles are a flagship species for the area but their habitats had been destroyed through ignorance, development and neglect of the areas waterways.

By the end of the project 25% of the projects sites that did not have water voles at the start of the project now have water voles.

The water voles were seen to move into the newly managed areas within 12 to 18 months of the work being completed

Updating records

The project has surveyed most sites worked on for a range of species and has put the results into the SxBRC via iRecord.

These results are then used by the parish as part of neighbourhood planning, Chichester District Council for development planning and ecological consultants.

The project has been good at spreading the message that people can record species from their own land. Some species are widespread but under recorded and the project has been able to go out and record these.

Bats

Surveys carried out by the project show that many of their sites did not have records of bats at the start of the project but by the end of the project they did.

Increased numbers of bats are a good indicator that the riparian vegetation and invertebrate populations have improved.

"The one key thing has been building a dialog with the landowners and I think Jane is really mostly responsible for that, we have been able to engage with them and they have been very cooperative and have enabled us to carry out various activities that we wanted to do to enhance the wildlife.

That then paves the way for education which is the other key part of it, the engagement with the local community has been fantastic, people are starting to take a pride in their environment again and value it."

Nick Gray, consultant ecologist

Looking to the future

The parish councils and landowners where the project has worked can see the differences and many are committed to the long-term management of these sites to ensure the biodiversity value.

These conversations with local landowners and parish councils, have helped to ensure that protecting biodiversity is a priority. The previous management around land drainage were quite simplistic, the results were moving a problem around rather than solving it. They have made it much more joined up.

"We fully support your work and I wanted to let you know that this initiative is helping to deliver action 3.6 of our 5-year Management Plan for the AONB (2019-24):

3.6 To assess the conservation value of the large ponds in the AONB and thereafter to seek actions to improve biodiversity."

Richard Austin, Chichester Harbour AONB Manager



SURFACE WATER CASE STUDY

A Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands (FLOW) case study

Flooding impacts

The Manhood Peninsula can experience high levels of flooding as it is flat low lying land. One of the project aims was to help to reduce this flooding by restoring the network of ponds and ditches across the peninsula.

The project identified key problem areas by carrying out surveys to create ditch maps as well as communicating with local parish councils, landowners and the district council.

The pictures below show the before and after for one of the sites the project has worked on

"FLOW has helped to create a linked up network of organisations to help tackle the issues of flooding on the peninsula and has shown that working in a connected way makes a difference"

Tim Firmston, Chair of Birdham Parish council



Earnley Parish

The benefits of working with the FLOW project are described by one Parish Councillor below.

"In 2012 the parish experience quite bad flooding with around 25 houses being flooded, so the parish council started a big project to alleviate the flood risk and through this became aware of the FLOW project and the habitat implications for clearing the ditches.

The parish has six main rivers running through it and fluvial flooding has been our main problem. The parish council helped in pulling together the FLOW report for Earnley. After the report was published the parish council met with the chairman of MWHG and Jane and created our own action plan and identified a series of projects. Detailed plans to improve the drainage and habitats were drawn up, we put our money in, the project put their heritage lottery money in and those projects were carried out. I am convinced they have made a difference and local residents think so as well.

We have also worked quite a lot on legacy, we have a couple of projects still on the go that haven't progressed because of covid 19. We are trying to engage a group of local residents who will carry on after FLOW, maintaining ditches and in a way that is environmentally friendly. The FLOW team have provided support for our local volunteers as well as equipment for carrying out tasks. We have a list of people but we haven't started it because of the pandemic."

Robert Carey, Earnley Parish Councillor



Identifying local flood risk

The project carried out reviews of tithe maps and liaised with landowners to identify potential at risk sites.

They then gained necessary permissions, and worked on nearby relic ponds and ditches to improve the flow of water during high rainfall on sites identified by West Sussex County Council as an issue.

The project worked closely with a number of parishes in a range of ways:

- Helping to identify the key areas of flood risk and drawing up management plans
- Helping with applying for Operation Watershed funding for the parishes
- Providing or matching funding to carry out the maintenance work
- Providing volunteers or contact details for contractors to carry out the work



Birdham parish

We spoke to the Chair of the Birdham Parish Council about the impact the FLOW project has had on the parish.

"The project started working with Birdham parish two to three years ago, the first year was spent identifying the key management issues and then the following two years were carrying out practical work.

Birdham parish can experience quite a lot of flooding. The FLOW project has focused on clearing and deepening some of the ponds in the parish to improve water storage. It also cleared and maintained the ditch network to create both transport ditches and storage ditches.

During the flooding around Christmas 2020 the pond in the Triangle Copse helped to store the run off water caused by a blocked culvert.

The parish had a three year management agreement with the project and the project will provide a management plan for the ongoing maintenance of the parishes ditch network after the end of the project. The Parish Council has now put aside money each year to do ditch and culvert maintenance, we made a conscious decision to put a 'nest egg' away that can be spent to maintain the drainage.

The project has been good at cultivating awareness in the parish which will help with future management of the ponds by local volunteers"

Tim Firmston, Chair of Birdham parish council

Looking to the future

The project has put in place a number of ways to help parishes maintain their ditch networks in the future:

- Setup community wildlife groups
- Providing tools and storage to parishes
- Continued support by MWHG volunteers