



Learning Paper

March 2024

KEY MESSAGES

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Stakeholders in Devon and Cambridgeshire saw the opportunity to save on effort and expenditure by joining up land use decision-making with a strong leadership commitment.

Stakeholders found that a MLUF could act as an enabler for existing processes, rather than impeding or duplicating existing work, and want to understand how existing statutory instruments will integrate with it.

There is a strong appetite for change across both counties and disciplines. Ensuring citizens feel their work is recognised and valued is important to improving the 'political' context in which complex decisions can be made.

The success of county MLUF will rely on their statutory weight.

Expert facilitation is essential to delivering county Multifunctional Land Use Frameworks.

Multifunctional Land Use Framework Action Research: Leadership Lessons

This practitioner learning paper sets out the leadership findings from our pilot testing of the Multifunctional Land Use Framework (MLUF) process in Devon and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority.

Through these pilots we wanted to understand how a MLUF could help decision-making at the county, or 'larger than local' level.

In Devon, funded by the Environment Agency and the Geospatial Commission, we worked with leaders across the county to understand how a MLUF could be used on the ground by people working to balance the land use demands of flood risk and resilience, water quality, food production, nature recovery and housing development.

In Cambridgeshire, funded by the Geospatial Commission and WWF, we worked with county-wide stakeholders to explore how a MLUF could help local leaders manage competing pressures on land.

We took a developmental evaluation approach to the project, which meant adapting to new findings as they emerged, and following at times divergent evolutions of the action research projects in each county. The process generated case studies – both as part of the pilots and already operating on the ground - which illustrate the principles and ways of working of the MLUF approach, and demonstrate how these foundations can support effective action on the ground. The evidence concerning MLUF-style components gleaned from these local level examples illustrates the dynamic relationship between bottom-up and top-down forces that any MLUF approach will need to address in order to be successful.

For a broad overview of FFCC's work on the MLUF, please see our [2023 report](#) and the Rough Guide resources on the FFCC website.

Stakeholders see the opportunity to save on effort and expenditure by collaborating on land use decision-making, but this requires strong leadership commitment

Leaders across sectors recognise the problems that a Multifunctional Land Use Framework is designed to solve. In both pilots, stakeholders told us they see the costs of making sub-optimal land use decisions and not having a way to strategically balance the competing pressures land faces. The lack of a coordinated, spatially defined approach to making decisions about land use is leading to sub-optimal outcomes meeting neither the needs of citizens nor government targets.

In Cambridgeshire and Devon, we heard that a Multifunctional Land Use Framework could be used to coordinate groups with different views on land use, to target opportunities for change and maximise impact. By building shared data and understanding, a Multifunctional Land Use Framework could help address tensions inherent in complex conversations around multi-functional use of land and manage the fine grain between national, county and local scales.

The pilots showed us how a committed leadership group will be crucial in bringing about the best version of a Multifunctional Land Use Framework. Bringing a leadership group together – to share knowledge and insights around a shared evidence base – would help create a system where policies are designed in a coordinated way – rather than “joining up” policies after the event. The leadership group – people who are key decision makers on land use for their various sectors – would together have a strategic overview and deep knowledge of the multiple competing pressures on the same land.

This creates a process to build multifunctionality into policy design. Not only would leaders better understand other sectors’ priorities and regulations to integrate into their own planning and processes, but the MLUF is also a designated space for leaders across sectors to share knowledge and collaborate for optimal land use decision-making.

While many institutions, organisations and individuals are already engaged in processes that seek to make more informed decisions about land use, the Multifunctional Land Use Framework is an opportunity to join these up, make them more transparent and strengthen the work already being done. This will require principled leadership to invest the time and resources upfront in developing a Multifunctional Land Use Framework, to realise the benefits downstream. The transparency and collaboration will increase the strength and durability of decisions being taken in specific sectors – by giving a mechanism through which the siloed approach currently embedded in the culture of our decision-making architecture can be challenged.

Ensuring that time is spent up front in creating clear terms of reference for the leadership group and recruiting widely to build the cross-sector capacity of the group is critical to the effectiveness of the process. In the pilots we found that having a clearly defined set of parameters around how the group will interact with each other and outside groups, as well as what they will consider, helps to engage stakeholders and gives structure around what is a significant (but vital) undertaking.

Stakeholders want to understand how existing statutory instruments will integrate with a Multifunctional Land Use Framework

The FFCC Multifunctional Land Use Framework proposal in December 2022 was to operate at a strategic level, aiming to coordinate different sectors at the top to achieve the best outcomes for land. In Cambridgeshire and in Devon we heard concerns that a Multifunctional Land Use Framework would duplicate existing work or displace strategies and plans that have been created according to statutory or regulatory guidance (e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Biodiversity Net Gain, National Planning Policy Framework).

In going through the process, however, leaders found that a Multifunctional Land Use Framework could act as an enabler for existing processes, rather than impeding or duplicating work that is already being done. Leaders are often overseeing fantastic work happening on the ground, and a Multifunctional Land Use Framework is designed to support that work, bringing in learning and sharing across sectors, rather than competing with it.

A Multifunctional Land Use Framework is sometimes seen as a potential source of red tape that would complicate decision-making. Conversations in our pilots made it clear that the commitment of both leadership and on-the-ground stakeholders is critical to avoid this scenario. A Multifunctional Land Use Framework can amplify existing initiatives, joins the dots between them, fill gaps where they exist and support making decisions that balance public and private good.

"If we want to produce good food sustainably, minimise carbon emissions, clean up our rivers and restore nature, we need a fundamental rethink of the way we prioritise the use of our land. The Multifunctional Land Use Framework is a golden opportunity to reconcile the many competing demands on our precious land resource. I hope stakeholders from all sectors will think long-term, help shape the LUF and buy into it. If they do then we won't just get a much better result for our soils, rivers and wildlife; we will save money, build consensus and reduce the need for regulation." – **Harry Barton, Former CEO, Devon Wildlife Trust.**

There is a strong appetite for change

We found that there are multiple networks whose energy, expertise and existing work can be brought to bear on the Multifunctional Land Use Framework. When citizens feel their work is recognised and valued this improves the context in which complex decisions can be made.

In both Devon and Cambridgeshire, the variety of stakeholders that engaged with the pilot process demonstrated how groups from multiple sectors are keen to understand and support a more strategic approach to land use. This engagement was essential: the strategic expertise of leaders from different sectors helped contextualise the process and draw out the competing demands on land use. Having leaders from many different land use sectors also made it easier to identify the right datasets and other information necessary for a shared evidence base.

CASE STUDY: APPETITE FOR A JOINED-UP APPROACH, CLINTON DEVON ESTATES

Key Themes: Holistic approach; Stewardship; Sustainability; Land Use Board

MLUF Principles & Ways of Working: Supporting multifunctionality; Leadership commitment

Clinton Devon Estates is in a healthy position when it comes to meeting the multiple pressures that exist on land. Long standing tenant farmers, a strong central team working to bring the estate's 2030 vision into being, and a wealth of data that they are utilising to support decision-making. In recognition of the increasing importance of land use decision-making, the estate has established a land use programme and board. For decisions that have a significant impact on the land use, the board will go through a process of deliberation using a set of principles that speak to the objectives of the estate and consider their impact on those around them. This process is similar to the Multifunctional Land Use Framework process FFCC has identified.

The estate is seeking to balance stewardship with economic and environmental sustainability to ensure that any changes it does make to land use are considered thoroughly and specifically with multifunctionality in mind.

By taking the constituent parts of a Multifunctional Land Use Framework; leadership, data and evidence, a forum in which to bring these together, along with principles and questions that structure interactions within that forum, the estate is leading the way in understanding how this holistic approach can benefit their decision-making.

Statutory backing will be essential to the delivery of county Multifunctional Land Use Frameworks

The Multifunctional Land Use Framework process needs statutory weight to ensure leadership commitment in the development of county Multifunctional Land Use Frameworks. Many of our stakeholders have questions about the 'teeth' that a Multifunctional Land Use Framework will have. This is because they recognise that the success of the Multifunctional Land Use Framework in delivering for citizens, particularly in its infancy, will hinge in part on the commitment of the leadership group: ensuring that leaders from all sectors are represented and commit the necessary time and energy to developing a functioning Multifunctional Land Use Framework.

In the absence of a statutory requirement to create a county Multifunctional Land Use Framework it may be difficult to ensure the necessary commitment from the leaders. We heard that stakeholders want to understand not only how a framework will enable higher quality decisions, but also how it will deliver more efficient decision-making – saving time and money and delivering enhanced public value.

"Key to getting a LUF implemented is it becomes statutory and embedded in everything we do, that's what we need, because it risks not having teeth otherwise. Local plans are very weak in terms of rural land use, this is exactly where the Devon Multifunctional Land Use Framework comes in. It can sit alongside and add value to the local nature recovery strategy, and it should be taken into account with planning and built into all projects. But to do that it needs to be mandatory and statutory."

- Tim Youngs, Blackdown Hills AONB

Many conversations between leaders already happen in a range of fora – but there is no dedicated mechanism through which key institutional, organisational and sectoral strategies are considered together. We heard from stakeholders in both counties that strategic conversations relating to land use at a county scale have diminished since

the demise of structure plans (1968-2004) and regional spatial strategies (2004-2010). The absence of procedural infrastructure through which multisector leadership is convened to consider their strategies alongside one another is an obvious but important finding from our pilots.

We have been asked, what is stopping this happening right now? In theory the answer to that question is nothing. In practice, the absence of a specific mechanism to structure this multisector approach at scale is a critical limiting factor. The example of non-statutory Regional Spatial Strategies illustrates the problem, in both Devon and Cambridge we heard how difficult it is to get people engaged in processes without any statutory weight.

Richard Kay, Manager of Planning Policy and Environment Lead, East Cambridgeshire District Council describes his experience: *“spatial strategies’, whether statutory or non-statutory, have struggled. This is perhaps because there is no clear understanding what they should be, or include, and virtually no government guidance on them. Where progressed as non-statutory, they’ve struggled even more, because it is easy for any one stakeholder to either not engage, or refuse (without penalty) to implement what it might say.”*

CASE STUDY: REGULATORY BODIES CAN CREATE SPACE FOR LEADERSHIP TO TAKE ACTION

Key Themes: Collaborative working; Regulators creating the context for innovation

MLUF Principles & Ways of Working: Collaborative working; Regulators creating the context for innovation

Laurence Couldrick, CEO of Westcountry Rivers Trust, and a member of the Devon leadership group, recounted his experience of the impact of an Ofwat/Defra decision in the late 2000’s. At the time water planning and investment was only within the 5-year Water Industry Natural Environment Programme timeframe, but Ofwat asked water companies to assess their assets over a 25-year horizon. Additionally, Ofwat/Defra permitted water companies to invest in third party land, effectively telling water companies you don’t have to own the asset to manage the asset. This changed how the sector was able to operate, opening up new space for collaborative working and starting the path towards a much more integrative approach and catchment management. The decision led to water companies being able to draw from a greater pool of experience, research and resource by working with partners.

A lot of work has been done since that time on the benefits of Nature Based Solutions and Natural Flood Management, which are now integral approaches to water planning. The advances of this more sustainable approach were made possible through these collaborative relationships that were brought about by the sector taking a lead on setting the conditions in which innovation could flourish. Laurence asked, could Ofwat now mandate that plans are now not only integrative across water planning but take into account other sectors e.g. food and energy security?

Similarly, there is a role for regulators from other sectors to play in providing the enabling conditions within their policies to promote cross-sector collaboration. The Multifunctional Land Use Framework process could meet the needs of this approach by providing a place for the data and evidence to be considered deliberatively, creating shared outcomes that have built on the opportunities and grappled with the trade-offs.

Expert facilitation is essential to the delivery of county Multifunctional Land Use Frameworks

Both the Devon and Cambridgeshire pilots provided valuable insights into the importance of expert facilitation when bringing the Multifunctional Land Use Framework to life. The experience of applying the principles to various spatial scales and contexts in Devon revealed how supporting conversations around land use decision-making needs clear guidance and experts to facilitate the users through that guidance. Through our work with pilot sites, we sought to understand how the principles in the FFCC Multifunctional Land Use Framework would operate on the ground to open and structure conversations around land use. The stakeholders we worked with agreed that the principles and their associated questions (see p 9-12 of [December proposal](#)) are an important organising structure around which participants in a Multifunctional Land Use Framework process can balance the conflicts and opportunities in a given area.

A critical element to bring the principles to life is an experienced facilitator who understands the context and needs of the group they are working with. In the Devon pilot, we saw how expertly facilitated sessions could bring together a group of stakeholders with different motivations and contexts through our [design sprint](#), led by the British Geological Survey (BGS).

The purpose of the design sprint was to rapidly develop a prototype land use decision support tool over the course of a week. The design sprint shone a light on how a deliberative methodology ensures that voices on the ground can be brought together to consider a subject, co-design a response, and quickly test that with a group of wider stakeholders to gather learning and influence next steps. This approach fits with our developmental evaluation methodology that aims to pick up evaluative feedback over the course of research and adapt to the findings.

Trade-offs were managed through negotiation led by the BGS facilitators, who steered the group towards common ground from the variety of positions in the room. The prototype that was created was by no means perfect; however, it allowed the team to have something to test.

The highly facilitated nature of the design sprint process has similarities to the development process we imagine a Multifunctional Land Use Framework would go through. Prototype versions of the framework could be stress tested with working groups comprised of multi-sector stakeholders to understand where further opportunities and constraints lie.

"I have not taken part in a design sprint or anything like it in my career to date, but I found it to be a powerful process. When faced with a complex challenge like land use decision-making, it's vital to ground things in reality, and focus on the achievable. I think of my school motto "a posse ad esse"; "from the possible to the actual". The facilitator was expert at ensuring everyone had a voice, that understanding was checked regularly, and once we'd agreed our objectives, these were continually used as the yardstick to keep us focussed. I was amazed at the quality of the outcome the team achieved at the end of the week, and I am keen to use the technique in my present project management role." - Simon Bates, Killerton Estate, National Trust

In Cambridgeshire we ran a series of events, with the support of WWF, across the combined authority to better understand how land use issues were affecting citizens. We designed this process to be open and approachable with a few simple questions that could be easily replicated at every session. The listening tour revealed that citizens were deeply frustrated about land use and planning decisions happening around them, feeling that their views were not

being heard. Citizens were interested in more locally grown food, greater wildlife abundance, access to green space, more renewable energy, cleaner water, and more considered housing development.

The next step to these listening exercises would require a highly facilitated process that brought spatial data to the group to explore some of the trade-offs inherent in land use decision-making in light of the citizen priorities. A spatial data visualisation tool, of the kind that we later prototyped with Vizzuality (discussed in detail in the [Data Learning Paper](#)) would have been critical in supporting these conversations as an anchor through which to ground the conversations.

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT FOOD

At our leadership roundtable and throughout our leadership group meetings we have heard that it's crucial for a Multifunctional Land Use Framework to foreground food production and food security. Many of the conversations around land use change had across the country will involve land that is currently used for agricultural purposes. However, there are no concrete targets for food production. This means that when places have conversations about balancing the competing priorities on land, many of which have concrete targets (e.g. 300,000 homes, 30,000ha of trees, 30 x 30, increasing solar five-fold by 2035), food struggles to assert its place in the conversation because it has no target to trumpet.

We have heard clearly that the economic, social and environmental value attached to food production and food security should be considered as part of the Multifunctional Land Use Framework. Farmers have rightly questioned how the needs of food security in the future are being balanced against the ecosystem services, forestry, energy and housing needs of the future. Data and models exist that can support us to address these questions. These tools need to be considered in an open and deliberative way so that a clear ambition can be set for food locally that recognises the interdependent nature of food, energy, and ecosystem services outcomes.

The Multifunctional Land Use Framework process can support the conversations places need to have about what the food system should look like in 10, 20, 30 years' time. It can act as an enabling tool when determining what the agricultural output as well as the supply chain mechanisms need to look like to fulfil that vision.

The Devon Food Partnership, hosted by DCC, are keen to explore this question and they have been working with their steering group to understand what it would look like to stitch together all the work happening across the county into a coherent vision for the future. Charlotte Molyneaux, team manager in the DCC Business Support and Innovation team, and convener of the Devon food partnership, said "The Devon Food Partnership steering group brings together representatives from across Devon's food system, including the Devon Wildlife Trust, the NFU, and the Devon Climate Emergency Partnership. Our aim is to ensure that locally and sustainably produced food is available for everyone in Devon.

In February 2023, we launched [Devon's Good Food Strategy 2023-2028](#). This document identifies the key priorities for Devon's food and farming sector for the next five years. Strategic priority 6.7, in the Food for the Planet section, recognises the need to support the development and implementation of a Devon Multifunctional Land Use Framework. This is essential to ensure that the importance of using land for local, good food production is acknowledged at all levels."

In Cambridgeshire we heard from leadership group members that they are interested in exploring the value of a spatial approach to food. In a session on spatial data, we asked what important datasets leaders felt were missing. One group told us that they were interested in mapping local food systems to reveal the relative health and viability of local food supply chains.

For example, these maps could highlight food-related infrastructure such as mills accepting small batches of flour or abattoirs accepting small numbers of livestock. This infrastructure is critical as it enables farmers to process their goods for selling into local supply chains. We have heard from farmers in both counties that they would be interested in selling their food locally if the routes to market were there. Mapping this kind of food processing and distribution infrastructure would reveal underserved areas and guide investment to the places where it would be most impactful.

Duncan Catchpole, Managing Director of Cambridge Organic and Cambridge Food Hub shared his reflections after the session: "It is common practice for strawberries that have been grown on a farm just a few miles to the north of Cambridge to make their way into Cambridge itself via New Covent Garden Market in London. The reason those strawberries have to travel 100 miles, only to be consumed less than 5 miles from where they were produced, is because the infrastructure for getting them there directly simply doesn't exist. Vibrant local food economies are of vital importance not only in terms of food sustainability, but also in terms of resilience. Lack of local, smaller-scale food processing and distribution infrastructure is a considerable barrier to foods making their way directly into local markets. The Multifunctional Land Use Framework could be very useful in helping us to take a strategic approach to the recreation of local food supply-chain infrastructure, identification of opportunities, and the cultivation of vibrant local food economies."

Conclusion

Practitioners constructing leadership models for Multifunctional Land Use Frameworks should base their thinking on the key elements revealed in this FFCC research. Perhaps the first thing to recognise is the strong appetite for change: anyone offering to make land use decisions work better will be welcomed. Underpinned by skilled facilitation, with (hoped for) statutory backing, joined-up multifunctional land use decision-making will enable existing processes to work more effectively, and give new interventions the opportunity to gain traction more quickly with wider support.

This paper is one of four setting out the findings from our pilots. The series is available on [*A Rough Guide to the Multifunctional Land Use Framework*](#), which brings together learnings, discussions and tried and tested ideas about a MLUF.

To find out more about FFCC's work and join the MLUF Practitioner Community, contact georgie.barber@ffcc.co.uk