Restoration, Development & Funding Working Group

10th December 2025, 14:00-15:30, Room 301 & MS Teams

Attendees:	Cllr Darren Woodiwiss (DW), John Bristow (JB), Ben Devine (BD), Ian Pennington (IP), Anthony Mould (AM), Sam Valman (SV), George Bird (GB), Cat Hartley (CH), Phil Hukin (PH), Danny Smith (DS).
Apologies:	Ben Brown (BB), Simon Bonney (SB), Angus Wells (AW).
Agenda:	1. Terms of Reference 2. Project update 3. Master planning process 4. Funding update 5. Any Other Business

1. Terms of Reference:

The proposed Terms of Reference (ToRs) were shared prior to the meeting. DS presented the ToRs to the working group.

DECISION (RDF D001) – The Terms of Reference were approved.

2. Project update:

DS presented the project scope as approved by the Corporate Management Team (CMT).

DW asked how we can capture the adjacent projects happening around the HDC owned land into the scope of the project. CH answered she wanted to include the work on partner land into the scope of this forum to ensure we are all pushing in the same direction. JB spoke to the importance of using the partnerships to discuss funding opportunities and to ensure joined up approaches to access to the land to allow for maximum interconnectivity.

SV noted that whilst BNG is out of scope for the HDC owned land it will need to be included in other parcels of land in the wider area.

JB presented an update on the project related to agency meetings and site use planning.

DS presented on the project dashboard and current progress towards milestones. DS shared further details on the countryside stewardship agreement currently in place on the HDC land holdings that is in place till the end of 2026. DW asked if it was possible to terminate this agreement early. JB advised that it is possible to terminate early but he was not aware of what the penalties may be for doing so.

ACTION (RDF A001) - DS to investigate options for early termination and any associated penalties.

3. Master planning process:

JB presented the current land holdings of HDC, he asked for information on the forward plans for all the partner land holdings around the HDC owned land to ensure we had a joined-up approach to ecological improvements and any emerging funding bids.

DW gave a rundown of the LGR timelines and any impacts these may have on the master planning process. DS advised that the requirement for protection on the land for rewilding had been raised at programme board and is included in the wider project schedule. The working group acknowledged the importance of having these protections in place to support any funding bids on the land.

BD asked if the Canal & River Trust has had any conversations about this project and potential access aspirations from the Grand Union Canal across the land to the river Welland. GB advised that conversations about this are in their infancy currently; but that conversations about access are starting to be initiated.

ACTION (RDF A002) - GB to take back the discussion about options for connectivity between the two watercourses.

ACTION (RDF A003) - DS to organise a working group site visit in 2026.

ACTION (RDF A004) - DS to investigate who owns the old railway track area.

DS & CH presented the current proposed timeline for the master planning process in 2026; including the required governance sign off in the Restoration, Development & Funding Working Group, Partner Ste ering Group and Cabinet.

IP advised he has so far been able to identify 2 potential master planners as they should have experience in this type of work. The two planners are Ecosulis & FPCR. IP asked if the group had any other suggestions for planners as 3 were needed to start the procurement process.

ACTION (RDF A005) - BD to send some other master planning contacts he has to IP.

DECISION (RDF D002) - The restoration, Development & Funding WG will meet monthly till the end of March 26.

DW quired the HDC land holdings stewardship arrangements once devolution has occurred. CH & DS advised that there have been some preliminary discussions about how to safeguard the land holdings for rewilding moving forward. CH has advised that in conversations with the leader he is comfortable with several options that the project team will continue to investigate to formulate options for cabinet to consider.

DW noted that if the master plan is not approved till December, several months of planting season will have already passed. JB advised that funding for the planting can be sought in tandem with the planning process to allow the delivery of planting to mobilise early in 2027. SV also advised that it is important to

consider Anglian Water legal dates in the planning process to meet deadlines for allocation on the HDC land holdings. BD also advised that river restoration on lot 3 needs to be considered in tandem with the project schedule to ensure that the correct bids are being submitted to potential funders.

4. Funding update

SV gave a presentation on the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) progress. He advised we are looking to submit a £250k bid immently then a larger bid circa £5M later next year. He also advised that there is significant match funding available; circa £1M. AM enquired about the timeframes for each phase of the bids. SV advised that there is a development & a delivery phase for the larger bid and the EOI must be in at set deadlines; for the smaller bid it is a rolling process. He also commented that we have already had a visit from the national lottery prior to the EOI being logged which is not standard practice. BD also advised on the East Midlands gap for NLHF; which may be helpful in receiving a successful bid. CH also commented on the importance of getting funding in place for the land to continue to secure the land after devolution.

JB presented on the other funding opportunities for the land.

5. Any Other Business:

SV & DW asked for funding timelines to be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

ACTION (RDF A006) - DS to ensure that funding timelines are on the next meeting's agenda.

BD commented on the grazier being used on lots 1&3 and his knowledge of the land holdings and naturalistic grazing. He advised we should stay in contact with him and that it could be a good opportunity to show how rewilding & food production can support each other.

Date of next meeting: To be confirmed.

Summary of Actions and Decisions:

Actions				
Ref	**Date Open**	**Action**	**Owner**	**Due Date**
RDF A001	10/12/2025	Investigate options for early termination and any associated penalties.	DS	Next meeting
RDFA002	10/12/2025	Take back the discussion about options for connectivity between the two watercourses.	GB	Next meeting
RDFA003	10/12/2025	Organise a working group site visit in 2026.	DS	01/03/2026
RDFA004	10/12/2025	Investigate who owns the old railway track area.	DS	Next meeting
RDFA005	10/12/2025	Send some other master planning contacts he has to IP.	BD	19/12/2025
RDFA006	10/12/2025	Ensure that funding timelines are on the next meeting's agenda.	DS	Next meeting

Decisions		
Ref	**Date**	**Decision**
RDF D001	10/12/2025	The Terms of Reference were approved.

RDF D002	10/12/2025	The restoration, Development & Funding WG will meet monthly till the end of March 26.