



Hatfield Forest

A Best Practice and Award Winning Case Study
of Stakeholder Participation



Awards 2018
WINNER

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1 Introduction and overview

The focus of this engagement was to resolve highly contentious issues around recreation, access and sensitive habitats at Hatfield Forest in Essex, England.

1.1 Background

Hatfield Forest is a much-loved place protected for its beauty, nature and wildlife. It is one of the last remaining intact Royal medieval hunting forests in Europe.

Since 2007 visits increased from 105,000 to an estimated 500,000. This has caused poaching of rides and paths on wet clay soils, with habitats and visitor experiences deteriorating.

As custodians of the Forest, the National Trust¹ local team initially tried to tackle the problem by closing rides and pathways, locking gates and putting up signs telling people not to follow particular routes. But this didn't solve things. Instead it provoked furious reactions, particularly from local people. The relationship between the Trust and local people was on a downward spiral.

Recognising a different approach was needed, the local team initiated 'The Every Step Counts (ESC)' project in August 2016. Its purpose was to raise awareness and understanding of the issue and to bring in Dialogue Matters, neutral third party participation experts.

1.2 Best practice

Dialogue Matters (DM) together with Sarah Barfoot of the National Trust (NT), delivered engagement that exceeded standard practice, and introduced this best practice approach to the National Trust. This project has gone on to win two awards:

- The 2018 Best Practice Award for Stakeholder Engagement, awarded by the UK's Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

The highly prestigious CIEEM Tony Bradshaw Award for 'Outstanding Best Practice'. This is only given if one of the entries stands out as an "exceptional project that achieves an overall impressively high standard" and stands out above all other entries in all categories.

In summary it is considered best practice because it:

- **Placed a strong emphasis on the architecture of the dialogue** so one form of engagement fed directly into the next and integrated face-to-face deliberation with an online interactive engagement platform
- **Used Consensus Building methods** shifting people from adversarial to cooperative behaviour
- **Structured each workshop** following design principles that can increase what is covered by up to ten times
- **Delivered genuine empowerment** with NT staff deciding priorities for action with stakeholders – rather than NT deciding what to do and consulting on it
- **Ensured the stakeholder invitation list was balanced and equitable**
- **Took a Constructive Dialogue approach** instead of focusing on problems
- **Embedded ongoing participation** with a new Working Group of stakeholders and NT staff

¹ The National Trust is a charitable body that works to preserve and protect historic places and areas of beauty and nature -for ever, for everyone

1.3 Outline of the process

Working closely with the NT, DM designed and planned the following process. The two main workshops scored an average 8/10 from participants, which is high in a context of tension.

Preparatory work

This included: a scoping workshop with the local NT team, detailed design of the process and workshops, stakeholder identification, training NT staff in small group facilitation skills.



Workshop 1

Purpose: to build a vision of the future, share knowledge, suggest solutions, prioritise those with most promise, and explore the pros and cons of each.

Feedback:

- “I liked how difficult situations were handled and the variety of questions, techniques and open conversations.”
- “The most useful bit was the structure of the day.”



Wider engagement online and in a drop-in workshop

Purpose: To test the potential solutions with the wider community, asking which they supported most and how they could be improved further. This engagement prioritised which solutions were pursued in Workshop 2.



Workshop 2

Purpose: Focus on the solutions with most support from the wider engagement, discuss next steps and plan action.

Feedback:

- “I liked how everyone was listened to.”
- “I hoped to get a way forward, with consensus and a possible way of working. This exceeded my expectations.”



Setting up the Working Group

Dialogue Matters facilitated the first meeting and provided some mentoring to the NT Project Officer.



Ongoing implementation in close discussion with the new Working Group

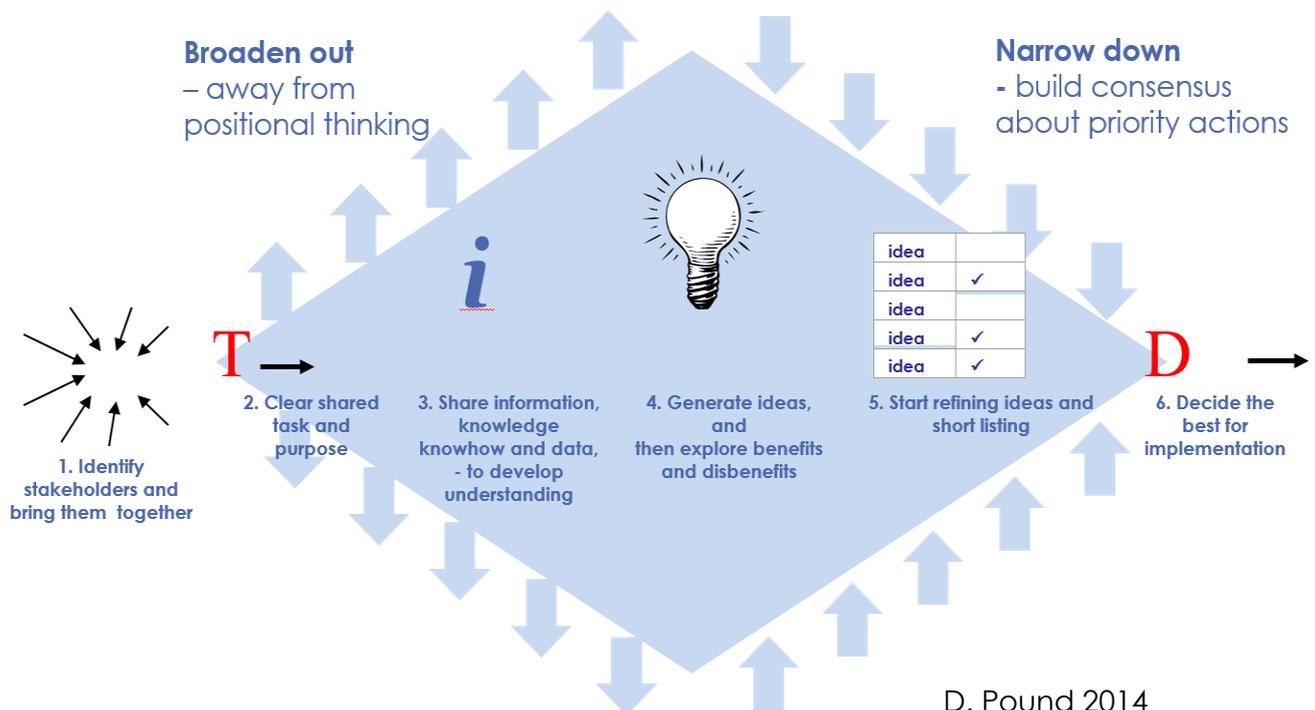
2 Best practice principles used in this dialogue

2.1 Consensus Building methods

Consensus Building which is carefully designed, and deliberative, helps people move from positional/adversarial behaviour to principled/co-operative behaviour. The difference is illustrated in the table below:

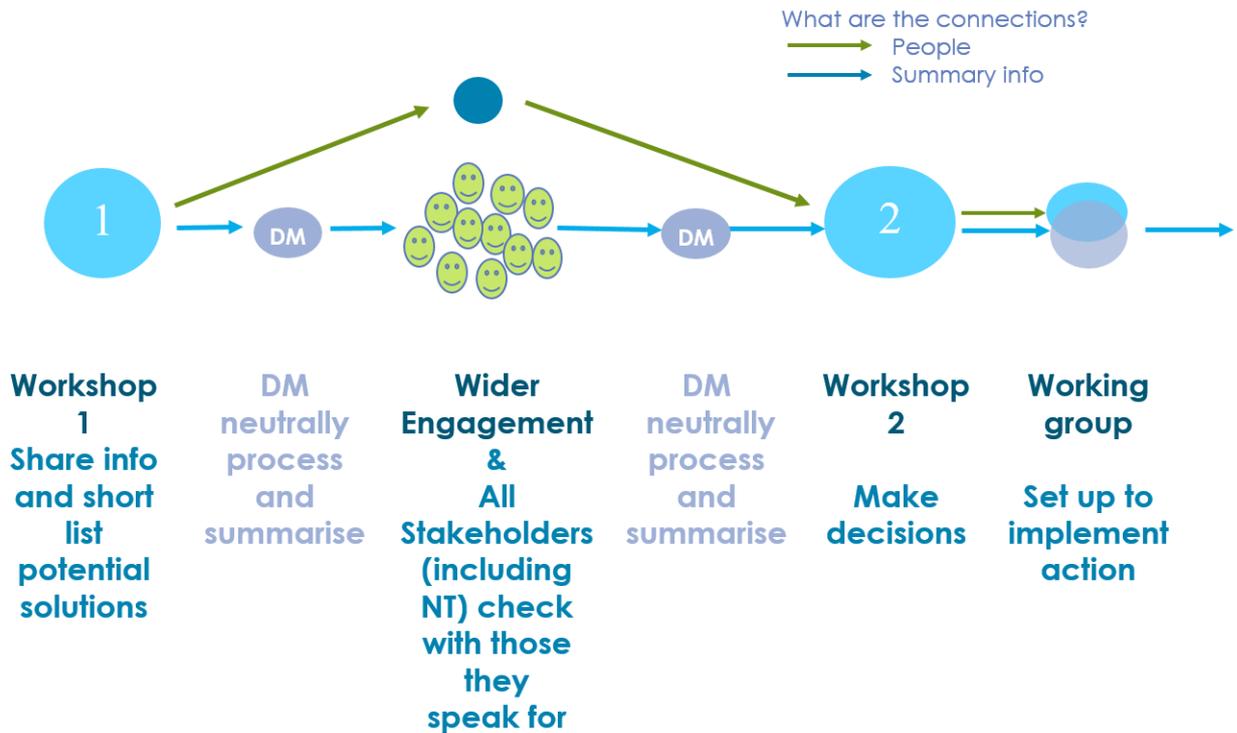
Positional/adversarial	Principled/co-operative
Withhold information	Share information
Make threats	Ask questions
Argue from positions	Explore interest and needs
Attack others' knowledge or credibility	Explore knowledge and perspectives
Defend position	Seek solutions
Work on each other	Work on the challenge
Actively seek win/lose	Actively seek win/win

The skilful use of techniques ensures that concerns and ideas are taken on merit, not on the status or power of a particular party to force their view. Different techniques are used at different stages of the process, but the overall pattern is to: first open up the discussion, away from positional behaviour; then to start generating ideas and looking for those that are mutually acceptable; next to measure support for each so a shortlist emerges; and finally to work on the shortlisted solutions to refine them further.



2.2 Designing the process to have a strong architecture

A flaw with many participation processes is that engagement is ad hoc and disconnected. Best practice is to design a clear architecture, showing how knowledge and power flows from one part to the next. This is the one for Hatfield:



It is also vital to work out how specific outputs from one element feed through to the next:

	Workshop 1	Wider input	Workshop 2
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision question 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision question 	
The context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you value? Trends and changes? Current management? Information? 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you want to know from wider engagement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you value? How do you use the forest? 	
Solutions for access and nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's working already? What else needs to happen? Think of solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is working well What more is needed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider feedback Develop the solution further Plan action for each solution
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise the six best Pros and cons of each? Support for each? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do you support these options? Other solutions? 	
Collaborative action and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we improve communication? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you like to be involved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance communication New working group – who is on it and how does it work?
Resources for change		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What can you offer? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What can you offer?

2.3 Constructive Dialogue

Constructive Dialogue (CD) is a best practice approach to participation. Instead of focusing on problems and issues, which leaves people discouraged, the focus in CD is on what is working and what more needs to happen. This fosters a positive view and a greater willingness to get involved and make a difference. CD doesn't avoid issues, but enables people to discuss them with a positive, solutions-focused mind-set. It also avoids triggering personal psychological barriers.

Problem solving/deficit based	Strengths based
Frustration	Motivated
Efforts not valued	Efforts valued
Environment is complex and difficult = a problem	Looking after the environment has many benefits and is do-able
Feeling overwhelmed	Believe in own capacity and agency to make a difference
Risk averse	Fosters innovation
Disowning – 'it's not our problem'	Willing to get involved and make a difference
No momentum or resistance to delivery	Momentum for delivery

2.4 Embedding ongoing participation

A critique of participation is that people can be empowered to share decision-making over what needs to happen, but once that process is concluded, the power reverts back to the usual decision makers. Best practice is to find ways to embed participation at the implementation stage too. In line with this, in the last workshop DM facilitated the Hatfield NT team and other stakeholders to discuss how best to do this. The following was agreed:

- To set up a new Working Group to act as a sounding board and work with the National Trust on detailed implementation of agreed actions.
- To set up a wider forum to meet a few times a year. This will create a network of champions and supporters of the forest who can come together to learn about the forest and each other's interests, provide walks and talks to explain the sensitivity of the site, help with practical tasks, act as informal 'wardens' drawing matters of concern to the National Trust local team, and maybe carry out citizen science.
- For there to be regular updates with those who took part in the Consensus Process so they know what is going on and can contribute further if appropriate.
- The Working Group and Project Officer are also now wondering about bringing all the stakeholders who took part in the main process back together to review progress and plan next steps.

3 Roles and responsibilities in this process

3.1 Role of Dialogue Matters

The role of Dialogue Matters was to function as a neutral third party and:

- Scope the situation
- Contact key protagonists in advance to put them at ease, invite them to engage in the process in a constructive way, and assure them they were going to have real influence
- Design the process and ensure that each element built on what had gone before and fed directly into the next stage without being filtered or edited by the host organisation
- Design all elements including questions and techniques
- Facilitate the workshops and online engagement
- Process engagement outputs and summarise them in a neutral way ready for the next stage of engagement
- Give guidance to the project officer and the new Working Group about creating a constructive culture in their meetings

3.2 Role of the National Trust

The local Hatfield team had three main roles:

- As stakeholders, developing solutions and agreed priorities with other people (instead of for them)
- Logistical support for the process
- Providing volunteers who DM trained as small group facilitators

3.3 Role of all stakeholders including the National Trust

The responsibility of all the stakeholders, including the National Trust, was to share their knowledge, information and experience. In the invitation it was explained that people needed to be the voice for their interest or community. For recreation activity this meant for example, being the voice for all riders who visit the forest not just of their own stables or association. Having shared their views, the stakeholders then shared the responsibility for finding potential solutions that provided mutual benefit. This meant having to grapple with the pros and cons of different ideas, and work hard on them to enhance benefits and design out any concerns.

4 Tailoring the process to the situation

4.1 Stakeholder identification

After a thorough scoping of the context, Dialogue Matters proposed a balanced invitation list ensuring it was not biased to any particular interest. The list included the following:

- **Community:** including Parish Councils, local residents, a teacher, National Trust members and volunteers, and a local councillor
- **Recreation:** including walkers, dog walkers and riding interests
- **Environment and biodiversity:** including Natural England, and the National Trust
- **Local business:** including local farmers, a grazier on the forest, tourism interests, and a developer
- **Heritage and education:** a local teacher and other National Trust staff

Whilst the invitation list was balanced, it is not possible to guarantee a balance in who turns up to take part in the process. It does however mean that the process has legitimacy. It also means that if the participant balance is questioned, there is evidence to show a balance was sought and that efforts were made to bring in all relevant perspectives.

Impact

People had confidence that the process was fair and legitimate with no side or perspective able to dominate proceedings.

4.2 Assessing and handling tensions

Assessing tension is part of a risk assessment and here it was expressed via angry letters and phone calls, and angry encounters with NT staff and volunteers. There were also regular negative responses on social media. Specific tensions were between recreation and conservation interests and between local people and visitors.

In line with DM's risk assessment and knowing how people behave when they feel their interests are under threat, DM:

- Factored the level of tension into workshop design
- Spoke with key protagonists in advance
- Trained small group facilitators to build the ratio of facilitators to participants
- Ensured DM professionals facilitated particularly challenging groups
- Used Consensus Building methods so people changed behaviour (see fig 1)
- Explained how what said would be used and ensured people saw *it* was
- Explained how to raise any concerns about the process or facilitation

Impact

- As the trust built that the process was genuine, and that the NT was of good intent, anger and hostility calmed down and led to more amicable conversations and cooperation.
- Trust continues to grow as progress is made on implementing solutions – including the contentious path closures solution. There has been the odd spat, but communication between the NT and their harshest critics is now open, regular, more amicable and more readily resolved.
- The NT team learned about refocusing negative relationships into solution-focused outcomes, and that success relies on the support of stakeholders.

4.3 Ensuring people had sufficient information

At the outset the invitation included a short briefing acknowledging how valued Hatfield Forest is, and explaining the need to involve people in solving the muddy path situation.

At the first workshop, the Regional Manager briefed people on the purpose, facts and figures. This was checked for neutral wording by Dialogue Matters. People went on to share their different knowledge and understanding with each other and identified questions they wanted asked of the wider community. These questions were asked online and via a drop-in meeting along with questions testing support for the shortlisted solutions.

To inform the discussions in the second workshop, the results were summarised in a short report and presented at the second workshop by members of the Dialogue Matters team.

All outputs were made publicly available on the (temporary) interactive third-party website and now via www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hatfieldesc (these local NT web pages also include information on other conservation activities).

Impact

People had confidence that what they said was being used and could see how their ideas were recorded and summarised, and that they informed the next stage.

4.4 Ensuring there was sufficient time

The core Consensus Building process spanned five months to ensure people had time to check with those they represented, develop their own views, and incrementally build agreement, without it being so protracted that stakeholders lost momentum.

Impact

Stakeholders were able to learn from each other and develop their thinking and ideas of what would work best.

4.5 Facilitating Consensus Building and Constructive Dialogue

DM designed into the Consensus Building process principles of Constructive Dialogue (see Section 2.3). DM did this by asking people to share their long-term hopes for the forest and then asked what was already working well and what more needed to happen to realise that future. This constructive approach made a significant difference.

Impact

The constructive approach helped people to:

- Recognise what was already working well and what more needed to happen
- Focus on the future not the past
- Identify resources they could contribute (resulting in a list of offers)
- Develop real solutions and momentum
- Suggest who should be on the new stakeholder Working Group to guide progress
- Make progress on the priority actions without it stalling in the face of local reaction

4.6 Ensuring the process was culturally appropriate

To ensure the process was culturally appropriate, the DM team asked about the likely comfort of local people working with a range of professionals. DM then contacted certain

stakeholders to allay any fears and discuss the process. Based on what DM found, they ensured that:

- Background briefing and presentations used everyday language
- Technical terms used by professional stakeholders (e.g. SSSI) were explained in a glossary
- The facilitation team dressed informally
- The venue was a familiar community space rather than a hotel
- Workshop techniques were carefully selected

Impact

In the workshops locals and professionals relaxed into this way of working together.

4.7 View of impact from the National Trust General Manager

The impact of the project

Ade Clarke, (then) **General Manager, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Essex, National Trust**

"The issues we have been experiencing at Hatfield Forest are significant not only due to the ecological impact of such an important site, but the complexity of the cause. With a growing local community who have such strong emotional connections with the Forest it is a very sensitive matter when it is this passion for a place that is also the problem – too many people wanting to visit too often.

We have obviously used consultation before when making changes, but never have I gone to the extent of full community involvement and stakeholder dialogue, where we are as much a stakeholder as everybody else in shaping the options and solutions to an issue.

From my perspective, as someone usually making the decisions, this was a leap into the unknown, but I quickly found it easy to trust the process and realise it was the only sustainable approach that would ensure the long-term survival of the forest. This was because of the expertise and professionalism of Dialogue Matters as they guided us all through the process.

It was fascinating to be a part of the process, and also to watch, as people who had joined as a stakeholder with a specific agenda were being influenced from the most unexpected sources, and if not always coming to a consensus, were recognising that there were often many different points of view and it wasn't as simple as their own concerns.

It was very impressive how the team at Dialogue Matters were able to pre-empt conflict and manage the situation to a positive outcome. This was done several times with different techniques and I have never seen such expert facilitation before – the level of detail that went into the pre-planning to ensure workshops and meetings went smoothly was staggering – and highly effective.

The whole team at National Trust's Hatfield Forest has gone through a cultural shift as a result of this work. All see the benefit and importance that our local community are involved in the protection of the forest. I think it fair to say that most were starting from either a place of nervousness at best, cynicism at worst, but now would not approach anything like this in any other way."

5 Behind the scenes keys to success

This section is about the keys to success that played out within the National Trust local team and between the NT team and Dialogue Matters (DM). The quotes are the Project Officer's (PO's) comments during the review.

The review was carried out a year after the main consensus process finished. The PO and DM team carried out the review by considering what worked well and what we would do differently at each of three stages: before, during and after the main Consensus Process.

5.1 Laying foundations

Organisations like Dialogue Matters, who work as neutral third parties, do their best work when the context is open, supportive and trusting. This section reviews some of what created that favourable context at Hatfield before the actual process took place.

5.1.1 A Project Officer trained in Consensus Building theory and practice

This success story actually starts with the PO recognising that there was a challenge she didn't have the skills to handle and that she needed relevant training (DM's Good Practice Stakeholder Participation three-day foundation course). She reported that through that *"I learned the systems and methods of effective stakeholder participation that helped equip me with ideas and set the standards."* Without having had that, she said: *"I would have Googled stakeholder participation and not realised there was better quality practice that was proven to work – that would have risked doing it badly and further damaging relationships between the Trust and the local community"*.

With this grounding, the PO was able to assess the context at Hatfield Forest. With tension high and trust low, the PO recognised that regardless of her new skills, members of the local community would not be able to trust or accept a National Trust staff member as a neutral process designer and facilitator. This understanding meant the PO could make a clear case for why external independent third party specialists were needed.

Interestingly, the PO's experience of the training, and her experience of the process, meant that she can now assess other processes too. For example, when she was involved in another participation process, she reports that *"the weaknesses stuck out like a sore thumb – I had the knowledge to back up my gut instinct and discomfort, and was able to question and challenge the process"*.

From DM's perspective, working with a PO whose values and ethics aligned so well with our own, reaped dividends throughout the process and freed us to do our best work. The PO was even able to challenge DM to ensure that the two organisations were delivering the best possible process within timeframes and budgets.

5.1.2 Building internal buy-in to the process

Rather than impose this new approach on her colleagues in the local team, the PO was keen for them to experience how it works and have the opportunity to quiz the DM team.

To do that, DM designed and facilitated a half-day workshop to bring together seven members of the NT local team, the General Manager and a Regional Consultant (internal to the NT). They shared ideas about what the future would look like if the process was successful and discussed the opportunities, challenges, information needs and potential stakeholders. They also quizzed DM about the risks and sought reassurance that it did not mean 'selling out'.

After this workshop the team decided that, cautiously, they could go ahead and commission DM to design and facilitate the Consensus Process described above.

5.1.3 Understanding it doesn't mean 'selling out'

A key concern of all organisations when they consider this way of working is that it will result in weak compromise and 'selling out' on the things they care about. The Hatfield Forest Team were no exception. Reassurance was required.

The DM team explained that a well-designed Consensus Building process ensures that all participants, including in this case the National Trust, negotiate to find win/wins with each other. This ensures that solutions are well informed from all perspectives: *"Everyone worries about letting control out of their hands but if you are a stakeholder too, you can't say it won't work for us. You are in the thick of it and able to bring up constraints (like the area being a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR)) and opportunities. We were able to shape and influence alongside others, so no solutions would go forward that were unacceptable to the National Trust – or any other interest."*

5.1.4 Building trust in each other about a new way of working

During this preparation time, trust was being built in every direction. The PO was already trusted by her colleagues, but during this time she built further trust that her enthusiasm for a new approach was based on a solid understanding of how it worked. Her colleagues all knew how much she loved the forest and that she would not do anything to put it in jeopardy. Because they trusted her, and she trusted DM, her colleagues started to trust DM too.

The General Manager felt that taking this approach was a *"leap into the unknown"* but based on the PO's case he was also willing to give such a different approach a chance. His own view of the role of the National Trust shifted too: *"we may own and manage the site, but we are one of many stakeholders in the future of the forest"* – a genuine view that he later said at the start of each workshop, and in response to other stakeholders, when they asked questions to test how genuine the Trust was about making decisions with them.

5.1.5 Clear understanding of the third party role

Trust was further built with the signing of DM's Protocol which describes the respective roles and responsibilities of the organisation sponsoring and hosting a process (in this case the National Trust) and DM's role as an independent third party holding responsibility for a well-structured and equitable process for all. In line with this, the Protocol explains why DM can't be directed what to do or how to do it by any one party. In future processes, the PO recommends that more of the host team sign this protocol upfront.

The idea of contracting someone you can't direct can be hard for some officers from sponsoring organisation to understand. They are used to commissioning and directing the work of contractors.

At Hatfield, the PO understood this well and had got DM in precisely because she recognised the need for impartial third party dialogue specialists. This foundation of understanding smoothed the way for the two organisations to cooperate with honesty and trust to deliver a fair process.

From DM's perspective, working with project officers who fully understand our third party role and values makes a huge difference to our ability to do our best work.

5.1.6 Establishing a supportive relationship with Head Office

The National Trust as an organisation is in the early stages of transitioning to more participatory approaches to its work. As with any such change, there are pioneers, early

adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards². The PO recognised that as a pioneer she needed to be wise, and work out who at head office could support her and help her smooth the way through some of the internal procedures. Particularly those not yet adapted to this new way of working: *“Relationships are really crucial internally to support the process and I didn’t always know who was the best person to speak to – I had to work this out under the pressure of a live process - next time I will work this out more strategically and I am already having conversations with our Participation team at Head Office”*.

5.1.7 Getting value for money

Investing precious funds for conservation into a Consensus Building process is rightly challenged. The PO found *“a lot of reassurance was needed that the money was being well spent and that it would benefit and help everyone find a way forward – without this we were at an impasse with the condition of the forest deteriorating and local people getting more angry”*.

The PO also needed to explain what an independent third party actually does, and why the National Trust local team would not be accepted by local people if they tried to take on that role themselves. *“It was important to get the team to understand that when this is the situation, the perception is the reality – whether it is factually true or not”*.

To get the best value for money, work that didn't need DM's skills was done by the local team and volunteers. That included some of the workshop logistics, typing up outputs, and helping to facilitate small groups under DM's guidance. The PO found that having internal administrative support to help her cope with this was essential.

5.2 Preparing for the process

5.2.1 The value of preparation

The amount of advance preparation before the process got underway, and before each workshop, was significant and took time *“but advance preparation is really important and makes all the difference to the success of the process and events”* – a view shared by the Dialogue Matters team.

5.2.2 Detailed process and event design

The budget allowed for a process with two workshops and on-line engagement and a drop-in meeting in-between.

Guided by Consensus Building principles and ethics, a bespoke process was designed for the situation.

The design included not just what happened at each stage but crucially how information and knowledge flowed, where the key decision points were, and how power to decide was shared. This strong design has many benefits:

- The steps and stages are clear to participants
- If challenged, it is clear how information is used, flows and that it is a genuine Consensus Building/shared decision-making process
- The design provides continuity even if some of the facilitation team has to change during the process

² Rogers, Everett M. (2003) Diffusion of Innovation 5th Edition. Simon and Shuster.

One area of learning was the length of the day workshops. Day workshops are always demanding on participants but those there in a professional capacity are at least accustomed to working days. Some of the people who were there for the local community were retired and found the days too demanding. Two left at the afternoon break saying they were only leaving because they were tired and couldn't give more. In hindsight this raises the question as to whether, when working with local people, *"two long workshops were best or if three shorter workshops would have been better"*. This would bring increased costs but may have been easier for some participants.

5.2.3 Work out who from the National Trust local team should be a participant/stakeholder in the process and brief them on their role

Not everyone from the local National Trust team could take part in the process as a stakeholder because it would have created an imbalance and bias in the stakeholder group.

The PO used several criteria for working out which of her colleagues should be negotiating in the process, alongside her, on behalf of the Trust. Her criteria was specialist knowledge, seniority, ability to commit to action, and interpersonal skills. The last was particularly important because the sensitivities of the situation required people who could be assertive about the National Trust's views, but also open, amicable, and constructive so they did not alienate people further.

Aware of the risks, the PO did further work with her local team colleagues to brief them on their role and stance within the process, encouraging them: *"to listen hard, be as open as possible to others' perspectives, and not react to provocation"*. This was essential guidance to help officers representing heritage and nature.

5.2.4 Build facilitation capacity – but give careful consideration to who does this

When tensions are high and the group size is large it is necessary to have a good ratio of facilitators to participants (about 1:8). Bringing in a professional team is beyond the budgets of environmental organisations, so a solution is to train people from the organisations involved in the dialogue (but who are themselves not needed as participants). Working out who to invite to take up this opportunity requires careful consideration about who has good interpersonal skills, self-confidence, is willing and able to function in a neutral way, and who doesn't need to have a say. Within the National Trust team, the PO needed input from the General Manager to work out which of her colleagues would be best at this.

5.2.5 Finding the optimum venue

Finding the right venue seems like a small detail but can make a significant difference. From Dialogue Matters' perspective it affects which techniques are possible and how groups are divided and the space used. From the participants' perspective, a venue they are comfortable in makes it easier for them to relax into working cooperatively. But the time needed to track down a suitable venue, located nearby, and available when you need it should not be underestimated.

5.2.6 Explain the style of the process to key protagonists in advance

Dialogue Matters spoke to key protagonists in advance of the process. This was to hear their concerns, invite their participation, and explain that DM would design and facilitate the process as a neutral third party to ensure it was fair and unbiased.

Some of these people also spoke with the PO. She was able to encourage them to take part to give their views but reiterated that this was a different kind of process and that it

would be facilitated to “help everyone say what they needed to” and “it was fine to disagree, but not be disagreeable”.

5.3 During the Consensus Building process

5.3.1 Build a strong and cooperative relationship with the professional facilitation team

The relationship between the PO and Dialogue Matters worked really well. Frequent and open communication helped to ensure all was delivered to time and quality. One way of doing this was to create and monitor a 'to do list' which itemises tasks and which organisation was responsible for delivery and by when. This meant that in as far as delivering the practicalities of workshops and engagement, DM and the PO could act as one team.

5.3.2 Put yourself in other people's shoes

Under the earlier stress of deteriorating relationships with the local community, members of the NT local team were developing a 'them and us' view; an entirely normal part of tension and conflict.

The core values for the National Trust are access and nature. But at Hatfield Forest, the issues were at the juxtaposition of these two values and made it harder for the local team to navigate and plan a clear way forward. These tensions were not just external but also felt within the local team. However, the PO took inspiration from the NT strap line of “for ever for everyone” and “took a 360 degree perspective to imagine how everyone else saw things... I encouraged my team colleagues to do the same... I think a key to change was when we reversed our subjectivity and all started imagining what it would be like to be in other people's shoes”.

5.3.3 Be sure to explore interests and needs early in the dialogue

A key part of well-designed dialogue is to help people share and be aware of each other's needs and legal or technical constraints. For the National Trust this was about needing to explain that the area was an SSSI and NNR meaning there are legal requirements for the habitats to be maintained and restored. For local people, a key need was to be able to access the forest on foot from their homes, and do circular walks – something that had not been possible with routes closed to access.

For the National Trust team, seeing this discussion happen at an early stage was crucial and built their trust in the process that it would not involve selling out what they cared about.

5.3.4 Keep exchanges safe and fair – including during breaks

When working in a context of tension, professional facilitators know that the most likely times for things to erupt is not during the facilitated sessions but during breaks. In this context, the DM team has someone on duty at breaks to alert the lead/professional facilitators to any escalating tension.

In this case the National Trust participants were on the receiving end of some forceful behaviour but one of the facilitation team would intervene to calm that down. This built trust in the team and helped the NT and other participants relax more.

The professional facilitation team also observed group dynamics and individual behaviour and were able to adapt quickly in workshops to ensure that groups with particularly strong characters were led by the professional facilitators they responded to best.

There were also strong characters who later acknowledged that they were trying to throw the workshop off track. But the design and facilitation mitigated this.

The PO had thought a temptation would be for facilitators to favour stakeholders who behaved more amicably and cooperatively. Instead she saw that the strong characters were listened to with respect, and their points recorded in writing, in the same way as anyone else's. As a result, everyone gradually settled into working cooperatively.

5.3.5 Reap the benefits of integrating face-to-face and online engagement

An online platform called Engagement HQ³ was used during the consensus building process. This is interactive and enabled a variety of benefits:

- People could go online and place a pin on a map of the area and say what they valued or were concerned about. They could also tell stories, do a quick poll, and fill in the survey about potential solutions.
- All workshop and other outputs were freely available which added transparency.
- People could see that what they said was recorded in workshop records and reflected in summaries.
- It was clear to participants how their Workshop 1 discussion flowed through to wider engagement and how that was summarised and came straight back to them.
- If someone was new to the process they could catch up.
- All comments made online were moderated 24/7 by the EHQ support team, who had to clear some comments with Dialogue Matters before publishing them. A learning point here was that the DM team needed to develop some guidelines to make decisions more quickly.

Recommendations for future use of EHQ include the need to be very clear with responders that the site is moderated and that bullying tactics or insults will be removed. For the DM team and PO greater clarity was needed about the line between being open to listen to all views, including uncomfortable or ill-informed comments, and where that provided a platform to trouble makers.

From the National Trust's perspective, setting up a separate temporary website was contrary to internal guidance and needed clearance from Head of Digital at their head office. This had the potential to stop the process in its tracks. For the future, NT need to develop some procedures to streamline permissions for this specific purpose.

5.3.6 Make every day language summaries of workshop and online engagement outputs freely available

A key part of ensuring that a Consensus Building process integrates all elements and ways of engaging people is to process the outputs of one stage and neutrally summarise them in everyday language ready for the next.

These easy to digest summaries help everyone to get back up to speed. It also builds trust because the summaries show participants that what they said in workshops, or online, is reflected in the summary and is shaping the outcome.

At the second workshop, simple graphs provided the evidence for which potential solutions had the most support and so were most viable. It also demonstrated that this prioritisation had come from the wider community (not the National Trust team selecting the ideas they

³ EHQ is community engagement software developed and licensed by Bang the Table: www.bangthetable.com

liked best). With this information the second workshop could focus on refining proposals to enhance benefits and address any concerns.

5.3.7 Ensure the whole local team know their role and are appreciated

As the Consensus Building process got underway, the PO guided colleagues about how to handle other communications. This was so it was consistent with the ethos of listening to understand, and of making decisions with other stakeholders.

From the PO's perspective this was a vital part of helping key protagonists from the local community build trust in the process. However, when she thanked her colleagues for how much they had contributed to the project's success (and Awards), she discovered they did not recognise they had made any particular contribution. In future she *"will give regular feedback and make sure my colleagues know how much they are doing and the difference it is making"*.

5.4 Ongoing engagement

5.4.1 Embedding collaborative working as business as usual

Best practice participation continues from the process of planning and agreeing change to sharing power and resources to implement what has been agreed.

This transition point is a vulnerable time for maintaining trust. Knowing this upfront, the PO was expecting the hard work to continue, saying *"I couldn't take my foot off the gas just because the initial process had ended"*. And at this new phase it is just as important to keep *"reiterating the best way of doing things in line with best practice – holding ourselves to account post the main process."*

5.4.2 Setting up the working group

The interests stakeholders wanted represented on a new Working Group were agreed by them at the last workshop.

The first meeting was in the evening and facilitated by Dialogue Matters to include:

- An interactive team game which demonstrated the effectiveness of working collaboratively and broke the ice
- Eating supper together – which helped to create an informal relaxed atmosphere *"enabling laughter and relaxation"*
- Members saying their hopes for the forest and how they hoped to contribute to the group
- DM suggesting guidelines for working together and providing a short training session on how to self-facilitate which *"helped the relationship between the Trust and local community and enabled them to progress and relax"*.

From a National Trust perspective the PO feels it is vital to have the General Manager present at the Working Group meetings. That is because she doesn't always have the mandate to make agreements in the room. The presence of the General Managers increases the level of trust within the working group members, and makes the group more effective.

Other learning points were:

- The key to longevity is to quickly replace members that leave the working group.

- Working out how members relate to the wider community. In this case it was decided the PO would be the conduit of information to and from the wider community, and the working group members would be the two way flow with their interest type.

Interestingly, the PO is beginning to wonder (a year on from the group's inception) if there might be a need to refresh who is on the group now and then. This is because she can perceive that the bond that has built up within the group, and their loyalty to it, could itself become a barrier to hearing fresh ideas or concerns.

5.4.3 At implementation stage ensure you stay focused on the agreed priorities

Once the Working Group was set up, the summary of what had been agreed in the process has functioned as guidance. It ensures that the group stays focused on delivery of the agreed priorities: *"We keep going back to the end summary report to make sure progress is in line with what was agreed"*.

5.4.4 Briefing new colleagues so they understand the new approach

As new members of staff have joined the National Trust Hatfield team, and a new General Manager has been appointed, it has been vital to explain the approach that has, and is being taken, why it works, and what that means for traditional approaches. A focus now is to help the new General Manager to get to know people and support this ongoing approach.

5.5 Legacy

5.5.1 New ways of working for the National Trust local team

Working this way has had an effect on the NT local team, including:

- NT team members use some of the techniques and skills to the benefit of other meetings and discussions
- The team is more skilled at diffusing contentious situations: *"New issues can occur from complaints towards the Trust – we now recognise these need to be listened to and understood, regardless of who they may come from"*
- *"There needs to be a shift to doing these processes upfront – not just when we go into a conflict/mess – do it pre-emptively"*
- Great care needs to be taken around language. For example, ecologists would describe the routes as 'damaged' but to local people this sounded like an accusation of deliberate destruction, not a mere description of the condition of the ground
- The NT can tend to focus on just technical solutions but the Hatfield Forest team *"has shifted to a relationship approach"*
- The property team *"recognise it's working and that it was value for money"*

5.5.2 A shift in stakeholder behaviour

Stakeholders have also changed their behaviour to be more constructive (and this has withstood National Trust staff changes).

5.5.3 Sharing best practice for others in the National Trust

The Project Officer has been asked by other National Trust teams to share her learning. This includes Head Office wanting to reflect on how the current National Trust procedures

helped and to understand what would have helped her more. This report is part of capturing that learning.

5.6 Concluding thoughts

The fact that this project received two Best Practice Awards is very welcome. However, each time DM applies the principles and practices outlined here, we innovate and work at delivering best practice for that context. Reviewing projects is an important part of our work. We welcomed this opportunity to probe a little deeper than usual in order to understand the components that can make the difference between good work and great work.

It is certain that DM facilitating Consensus Building at Hatfield Forest was the best thing for the situation. It gave those who care for the forest the chance not just to be listened to, but fully involved in shaping the outcome. As a result decisions were well informed and there was buy-in and support for implementation.

From DM's perspective it was a privilege and pleasure to work with the Sarah Barfoot, the National Trust PO on this project. It certainly demonstrates what can be achieved when there is mutual trust and understanding between DM and the project officers from the organisation sponsoring the participation process.

Annex 1 Details of the process

Initial discussion of the approach – July 2016

- NT convened a meeting of staff facilitated by DM** to introduce this different approach to the team and scope the benefits and challenges of working this way. The workshop also scoped issues, opportunities, the information needed to make decisions, and who the stakeholders might be if that approach was to be taken. Following this meeting, key people in the team expressed caution but wanted to take the 'risk' and gave the go ahead for a Consensus Building approach.

Step 1: Preparation for working differently and for the dialogue – September to mid November 2016

- The NT gathered a team of staff and volunteers who DM* trained in small group facilitation skills to help deliver the workshops.
- The NT and DM reviewed background information (plans and maps) and did a site visit to better scope the situation and to feed into process design*.
- The NT carried out more detailed stakeholder identification work based on the list generated at the initial discussion, checking for balance and inclusion with DM. The balance DM recommended was across the following five categories: community, recreation, environment/biodiversity, business and heritage/education.
- DM designed the best dialogue process that would work in the budget and timeframes.

Step 2: Workshop 1 – November 23, 2016

- This first workshop was designed to create a shared vision, to share information and build understanding, to consider what was already going in the right direction and what more was needed, to suggest solutions, shortlist six for more in-depth discussions, and to then develop ideas for collaborative action and communication. DM also asked what people needed to know from the wider engagement to help them in their discussions at workshop 2.
- All of this was then typed up, processed, circulated and used to design the online engagement.

Step 3: Online engagement by DM and drop-in by the NT – Online December 16, 2016 to January 16, 2017 and drop-in January 7, 2017

- This step involved online engagement, including testing what people thought of the shortlisted solutions and asking questions that the stakeholder group wanted to know from the wider community.
- The results were then typed up and analysed. It showed that some of the shortlisted solutions had good support and others too little to pursue at that time.
- The outputs were summarised by DM in a short report and PowerPoint to share with stakeholders at the second workshop to inform their deliberations**.

Step 4: Workshop 2 – February 8, 2017

- At this workshop people worked up the solutions and the next steps required to make progress and volunteered to take action and help out after the workshop. People were also asked what offers they could make to contribute to the shared initiatives and shared outcomes.
- Outputs were typed up and analysed.
- DM added the outputs to the short report ready for the Working Group**.

Step 5: Establishing a working group – June 12, 2017

- The Working Group convened to develop ideas on how they wanted to function and to receive some training and ideas from DM on how to be self-facilitating in order to run meetings in a more efficient and collaborative way.
- Their role includes being a conduit for two way communication with NT.

Step 6: Ongoing work

- **The stakeholder and NT Working Group** has met eight times to date to focus on implementation of solutions.
- **The Forum** is under development by the Working Group as they decide their priorities and ways of working.
- **Ongoing communication with those who took part in the dialogue** takes place with quarterly updates and via the Working Group to those they represent.
- **Ongoing communications on progress** goes out via a dedicated web page www.natoinaltrust.org.uk/hatfieldesc and social media channels.

Annex 2 Agendas

Shaping the future of Hatfield Forest together

Workshop 1 of 2: November 23rd 2016

09:30 Registration, coffee and tea will be available, informal starting activities

Its 2030 efforts to balance access and conservation for this special place have worked and you like what you see. What pleases you most?

Add your thoughts to those of others

10.00 **Welcome**

Facilitator's introduction Diana Pound Dialogue Matters

What's this all about? Ade Clarke, National Trust

Questions of clarification only (there will be plenty of opportunity to give your views later)

Session 1: Building understanding

Visit each of the different topics below and have your say.

What do you value

- Q Where do you value now and why?
- Q What do you see and do that you would like future generations to be able to see or do?
- Q What does Hatfield Forest provide that locals and visitors benefit from?

Trends and changes

- Q What trends and changes are taking place that need to be taken into account?
- Q What is your observation based on? (e.g. observation, a photo record or research)

Current Management

- Q What is the current management and what is the reason for it?
- Q What are the constraints on management choices?
- Q What would happen if there was no management?

Information

- Q What else do you want to know to help you in these discussions?
- Q Who has that information and can make it available?

11:20 **Tea and coffee break**

Session 2: Access and nature in Hatfield Forest

- Q What is already being done that is going in the right direction? (by land managers, communities, volunteers)
- Q How could that be strengthened and enhanced?
- Q What else needs to happen?
- Q Any new ideas and solutions? (include any you have heard worked well elsewhere)

- Q Out of everything you have heard suggest 3 solutions you think are worth more in-depth consideration?

12:40 **Lunch**

Session 3: Considering solutions

- Q Consider the solutions and select the ones that are worth more in depth consideration
- Q Select the one you most want to talk about

Developing ideas further

- Q What do we know about this (facts and figures)?
- Q What are the benefits?
- Q What are the challenges and disbenefits?
- Q When and where would it work well?
- Q When and where would it not work?
- Q What do you want to know about this idea to consider it further?

At this stage which management solutions do you most support?

15:15 Tea and coffee break

Session 4: Collaborative action and communication

- Q At this stage, what kind of resources do you think your interest or organisation might be able to contribute to positive change? (Recognising this is tentative and you will need to check it and discuss this with others).
- Q How can visitors be helped to understand and adapt to change?
- Q What would you like us to find out from the wider engagement if we can?

Finishing tasks

16:30 Finish no later than this

Shaping the future of Hatfield Forest together

Workshop 2 February 8th 2017

The morning focuses on specific solutions proposed by participants at the first workshop and tested through wider engagement.

The afternoon focuses on enhanced communication and involvement

09:30 Registration, coffee and tea will be available

10.00 Welcome

Facilitator's introduction Lucy Armitage: Dialogue Matters

Why we need your involvement Ade Clarke: National Trust

Findings from the community engagement Lucy Armitage: Dialogue Matters

10:40 Session 1. Considering solutions and planning action

Each of the following topics will be considered in more depth.

Pick the topic you want to work on and plan action for.

(Please note: these topics are listed in the order of support from the wider engagement. To build momentum we would like at least 7 people to work on each topic. So if there are fewer than 35 at this workshop, the later topics will be tackled post the workshop)

1. Communicating about path closures
2. Adjacent land visitor centre
3. Influencing plans and policies so there is more greenspace elsewhere
4. Strategic Drainage Plan
5. Finding ways to change the priorities/funding model for the forest

Your facilitator will take you through some topic specific questions first. As a group you will then start to plan action in response to the following questions:

- Q What are the next steps to make progress on this topic?
- Q What action could you help with or lead on?
- Q Who wants to help shape and influence this after today?

12:00 Lunch time

12.45 Session 2: Enhancing communication, understanding and care for the forest

In this session you will be asked to consider key audience types and think about:

- Q What would inspire them to respect the forest and get more involved?
- Q What types or methods of communication would work best?
- Q What are the key messages that this audience would want to know?

Session 3: Wider Forum

- Q What are the benefits for the members – why would you join?
- Q What could members contribute?
- Q When, where and how often should it meet?
- Q What are the practical steps in setting up?

Q Who wants to help make it happen?

Brief break whilst the spaces are prepared for the next session

Session 4: New working group/sounding board/implementation group

- Q What could be their main functions?
- Q How often and when could it meet?
- Q What makes for successful meetings that are constructive and good to be part of?
- Q What 'guidance for working together' would help the group achieve this?
- Q If there were 12 places, what interest or organisation should have a place for a balanced group? (Suggest names too if you can)

15:00 Tea and coffee

15:20 Session 5: Resources for change and a directory of offers

What have you committed to do or offer during the process and what can you/your organisation contribute to shared initiatives and shared outcomes?

Prompts for the kind of things you might consider include:

- People: Volunteers, networks, staff time
- Funds: Funds, corporate funds, fund raising
- Interpretation: Places, IT, education
- Data, information and knowhow: data sharing, skills
- Promotion and championing the forest
- Practical management: of access, land and heritage
- Support, partnership, active involvement

Finishing tasks

16:00 Finish no later than this