



North Thames FLAG Interim Report 2018

The North Thames Fisheries Local Action Group (NTFLAG or North Thames FLAG) is a three-year programme. This report has been written just prior to 18 months into the programme and outlines what the NTFLAG have achieved, what has not been possible and what needs to be addressed moving forwards into the second half of the programme.

Since March 2017 - the launch of the NTFLAG, there has been £156,837.40 committed from the North Thames fund to local applicants. This has consisted of seven projects spanning across four of the five North Thames strategy priorities areas.

To date, the NTFLAG has received 17 Expressions of Interest to the FLAG board, ten of which have successfully passed to the second stage - full application. Of the ten projects that have successfully progressed to application stage, seven have been submitted to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO - the intermediate body which holds and releases the fisheries funding), as full applications and six of these have received funding offers, with the seventh currently awaiting approval. Two projects at application stage are seeking match funding before they will be submitted to the MMO for funding approval.

Contact details

anna@culturalengine.org.uk / 07710 642127;
The Cultural Engine, Beecroft Art Gallery Building,
Victoria Avenue, Southend on Sea, Essex SS2 6EX
<https://thamesestuarypartnership.org/ntflag/>



The North Thames FLAG board

Since March 2017, the NTFLAG has held 8 board meetings and the board currently has 21 individual members (including non-voting and FLAG staff) representing 17 businesses or organisations. Figure 2 displays the proportion of organisation types represented on the board.

Initially, the NTFLAG ran working groups for each priority, inviting experts or practitioners to lead on the LDS objectives and actions. This strategy has changed as many key projects were quickly identified which limited the need for working groups. There will be theme specific meetings/sessions in the future however, particularly focused on culture and heritage and skills, as well as infrastructure. The board represents a mixture of fishing, public and private sector. The chair for the board is Andrew Rattley and has been recently voted in for his second year. The Vice Chair is Carole Mulroney.

North Thames FLAG Board sectors

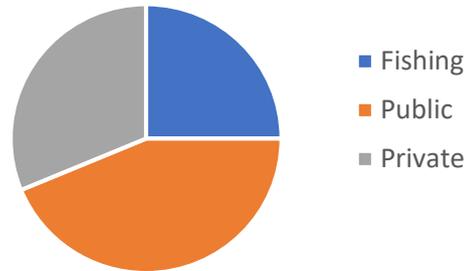


Figure 1: Bar chart displaying the different sectors on the FLAG board

Successful projects (ongoing)

Leigh Port Infrastructure – Feasibility Study

Applicant: Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

FLAG funding: £71,195, (75%) match funding from Southend Borough Council: £23,732 (25%)

A project to investigate the most sustainable solution to improve access to the port for vessels. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council employed the marine engineers currently delivering the Southend Shoreline Strategy to conduct this feasibility study. The study has included data collection, consultation, an options summary and will soon have recommended 3 preferable solutions and a report.

This project is the first phase of necessary feasibility work. Following the completion of this study, a more detailed analysis of three options will be undertaken, subject to FLAG board approval and a willing applicant.



Image 1: Photo taken at one of the Leigh Feasibility consultation events at Leigh Heritage Centre

MSC Accreditation for Cockles

Applicant: Leigh Port Partnership

FLAG funding: £21,875 (50%), match funding from 14 Thames Estuary cockle license holders: £21,835 (50%)

Starting the process of achieving Marine Stewardship Council, designed to demonstrate that the Thames Estuary Cockle fishery is sustainably managed and fished. This process will finish in February 2019, with the Thames Estuary cockles achieving the blue ecolabel tick to display sustainability and improve marketing opportunities.



Image 2: Leigh Library Gardens building

Leigh Library Gardens, stage 1

Applicant: Southend-On-Sea Borough Council

FLAG Funding: £3,525 (75%), match funding from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council: £1175, (25%)

Leigh Library Gardens is a small and currently unused building in the heart of Leigh Broadway, a great location between the Old Town and the main shopping areas of Leigh. The FLAG has funded a study to establish whether the building could be suitable as a future base for FLAG related activities – promotion of the industry, culture and heritage interpretation, events and meetings. Planning has been secured through this study and a design and cost plan are now being prepared in order to inform implementation (may require further FLAG funding).

Environmental Data Coordinator

Applicant: Thames Estuary Partnership

FLAG Funding: £23,143.64 (100% funded as EMFF will provide full funding for many environmentally minded projects)

There is a lack of clarity around environmental trends relating to the Thames Estuary, with many organisations completing a wide range of surveys and hosting data. This 6-month role will focus on collecting data (anecdotal data from fishermen and physical data from existing scientific sources) on the Greater Thames Estuary to help to define which factors to measure or areas to focus on in the future regarding environmental monitoring.

Old Leigh Film

Applicant: The Cultural Engine CiC

FLAG Funding: £7500 (75%), match funding from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council £2,500 (25%)

A film focusing on the fishing industry in Leigh on Sea, presenting the port's past, its present and considering the future. The film will raise awareness of current challenges the industry and port faces and include footage of how the industry operate that many audiences will not have seen before. This is not a promotional video but an educational resource and a tool for other sectors to better understand the industry and how the Port works.

Old Leigh Spatial Plan

Applicant: Leigh Town Council

FLAG Funding: £14,814.75 (75%), match funding from Leigh Town Council: £4,938 (25%)

This spatial plan will highlight the opportunities and the challenges for all businesses in Old Leigh with a key focus on the fishing industry. There is a need to investigate the spatial issue in the Old Town as sectors compete for space and the fishing industry may become more 'squeezed' in the future, as well as what short-term and long-term solutions for the port may look like.

Whelk Population Study

Applicant: University of Essex

FLAG Funding: £14,783.64 (75%), match funding from The Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority £4,927.88 (25%)

A project to determine whether the whelks in the Thames Estuary are genetically distinct populations and what this means post-Brexit regarding management for inshore and offshore areas. In addition, there are areas in the Thames Estuary where the whelk size is smaller, and this project will determine if these individuals are in fact reaching adult stages or not and if so can minimum landing size change for these populations and if the whelk management areas in the Thames could then shift. This project has been submitted to the MMO and is awaiting approval.

For the six (soon to become seven) successful projects that the North Thames have committed funds to, matched funding has come from a variety of stakeholders, these include; Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, private fishing businesses, Leigh Town Council and the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority, totalling at £59,108.13.

Events

In 2016 and 2017 FLAG staff worked a stall at the Leigh Folk Festival. This was used to engage locals about the programme and conduct community surveys around some potential projects. Both days were very successful, and outcomes of the survey have proved extremely useful for the direction of projects such as locals and tourists taking a great interest in the history of the Thames Estuary and the local fishing industry and how important fishing is to Leigh as a place.

The FLAG staff have attended FLAG meetings and cooperation events at other FLAGs in England, with the UK Managing Authority and two FARNET (Fisheries Areas Networks) conferences. Locations have included Hastings, Cornwall and Bridlington, but also Vigo in Spain to understand and learn from FLAGs that have more experience and see if any projects are appropriate to replicate for the North Thames.



Image 3: A photograph of the Hastings beach fleet.



Image 4: A photograph of the NTFLAG stall at the 2017 Leigh Folk Festival in Leigh Library Gardens.

Expressions of Interest

In total, 17 Expressions of interest have been submitted to the NTFLAG board. Below are the Expressions of Interest that have not been successful in reaching stage 2, full application.

1. Seal/Fisherman Interaction Study

The board felt that they did not want to fund a project that would not guarantee mitigation measures and that the conclusion would be too open ended.

2. Thornback Ray Monitoring Programme

Too costly as this project would have depleted most of the environmental monitoring priority funds focussing on one species in the Thames Estuary. It was thought that the applicant (CEFAS) may carry out this project (or similar) or investigate possible quota changes without FLAG funding in the near future as the abundance of thornback ray in the Southern North Sea had become widely known.

3. NEET Pathway Progression

The board felt this was too costly and that 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' would be the incorrect demographic in the area for this project and that the skills priority needed to tackle upskilling current fishermen, providing lower cost training for those already in the industry and new entrants but also to incorporate fishing as an option into the local community and colleges.

4. Training Trailer for a local Seafish training provider

Not locally focused enough to the North Thames area to meet the FLAG funding requirements.

5. Reducing bycatch for non-target species

Although the fishermen were interested in bycatch reduction using lights the specific technique had not yet been developed for the species abundant in the Greater Thames. There are also too few trawlers and netters in the Leigh area to benefit and therefore fund the project. However, the board were interested in the development of the lights and FLAG staff are in contact with the company for further opportunities.

6. New Entrants training scheme

Some fishermen felt that Seafish approved tickets were too specific (only for fishing) and instead wanted to provide new entrants with STCW tickets, which would allow new entrants to be able to have maritime roles aside from fishing such as those on the Thames.

7. Economic Study of fishing industry in Leigh

This application is being re-assessed, as the application cost was much higher than the original stage 1 application. This is still a priority project for building the case for future investment in the Leigh Port area over the next few years, demonstrating the positive impact that the Fisheries and the Port have on the wider economy.

8. Improvements to the safety steps underneath Southend Pier

These are incorporated into the Southend upgrades for next year, depending upon approval of plans through the Council's capital programme.

Communications

The FLAG has released two newsletters in the first year, has a Twitter and Facebook page.

The NTFLAG has had two articles in the Fishing News, one of which made front page and regularly features in the Leigh Times and Southend Echo.



Image 5: Photograph of the Fishing News article highlighting the Thames Estuary cockle MSC certification project.

Core funds

£53,547 has been offered to fishermen in Leigh on Sea with help of the Fisheries Animateur, these projects have been to add value to catch and for energy efficiency.

Priority progress

Initially, when the NTFLAG started in March 2017 budgets were allocated evenly across the five priority areas (see Figure 2). However, during the first year it was realised that some funds would be more successful than others due to the number of available applicants, funding rates and board preference. Therefore, in March 2018 budgets were moved slightly to increase the Leigh Infrastructure fund to progress with some potentially costly projects.

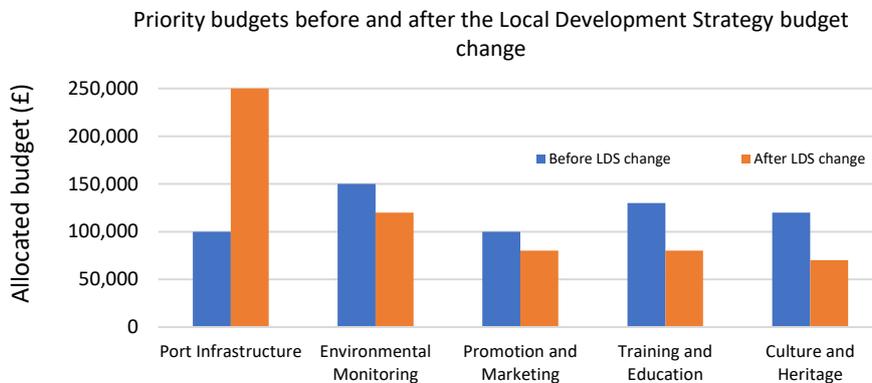


Figure 3: Bar chart displaying the allocated budgets for each priority prior and after the LDS change in March 2018

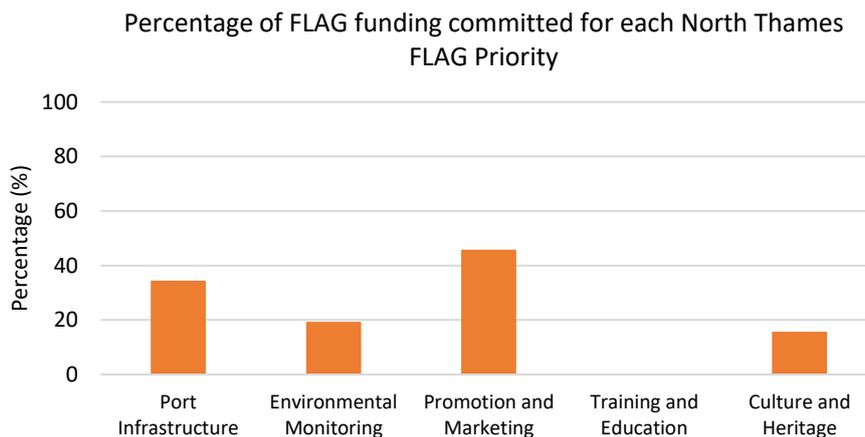


Figure 3: Bar chart displaying the percentages of committed funding for each of the five NTFLAG priorities.

Priority 1: Leigh Port Infrastructure

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of Leigh Port and therefore the need to analyse and resolve infrastructure challenges has been at the forefront of the North Thames strategy,

and the recent priority budget change has represented the need for this by increasing the allocated funds for priority 1.

Aside from the Leigh Port Feasibility Study that is investigating potential solutions into improving access in the creek, other projects listed in the Local Development Strategy included options to resurface Cockle Row which is being considered and could be funded through future infrastructure funding or the next round of fisheries funding (if available).

Initially on conversation with fishermen at Leigh Port they suggested several different projects. There is a need to replace the marker buoys in the creek that are broken. However, projects like these require ongoing maintenance and the local authority could not continue funding maintenance beyond grant availability. The same issue arose for installing waste oil tanks which the industry had requested. The Port of London Authority were also involved in these discussions, but it was agreed that these could only be taken forwards by the local authority. CCTV cameras and addressing anti-social behaviour has been discussed, the local authority is however installing two new cameras in Old Leigh and board members helped to feed into the local authority CCTV consultation determining their positions.

Two project ideas that were not included in the initial strategy were to improve steps underneath Southend Pier and to install power and storage containers onto Two Tree Island car park. The steps underneath the Pier required improvements and this was taken forwards to the FLAG board for discussion, however it was later found that the local authority have scheduled these improvements for 2019-20 (as part of wider refurbishment plans for the Pier) and therefore does not require additional funding. The developments on Two Tree Island have come from many discussions with several parties and a working group to progress the project was set up in June 2018 where actions were developed with local authority staff and some initial work relating to costs and surveys may go ahead. Two Tree Island is an opportunity site for several local industries; fishing, recreational boat users and part of the Foreshore department at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. The fishing industry are keen to make use of the area due to the lack of space available on Leigh Port. Due to the location of the slipway on Two Tree island car park it is possible for vessels to land and launch at a much lower tide (impossible at Leigh Port), providing the industry with flexibility. If this project is progressed within the next few months, it will be taken to the FLAG board for discussion and a decision.

Priority 2: Environmental monitoring of the Estuary

Three environmental monitoring working group meetings took place in the first year. The first project to have resulted from these discussions is the requirement to collate the existing data on the Thames Estuary, from surface temperatures to anecdotal trends in fish populations. Depending on the datasets collated, mapping of data and analysing long-term datasets for trends will be carried out to produce recommendations for the Thames Estuary. Thames Estuary Partnership as a neutral membership organisation are currently recruiting for the 6-month data coordinator role.

Another project fishermen were keen to fund included scientific studies into the abundance of Thornback Ray currently in the Greater Thames Estuary region, which due to the low

quota in place produce high discards. By 2019 when the discard ban is fully implemented the species are likely to become a choke species (where vessels reach their full quota on one abundant species and cannot continue fishing). Unfortunately, the board felt that the CEFAS led project was too expensive for the North Thames FLAG to fund.

Other projects included an anthropological study delivered by a London University in matching anecdotal data provided by the fishing industry and scientifically collected data as fishermen's observations on populations and species trends are not considered and could be a valuable resource in measuring fish stocks or predicting environmental shifts in the Greater Thames. Similarly, this project cost was too high for the environmental priority and match funding had not been found.

The NTFLAG are currently in conversation regarding two more environmental projects, these will be taken to the board as soon as they are ready for EOI stage.

Priority 3: Promotion and Marketing

Promotion and Marketing held only one working group meeting at the beginning of the FLAG process. This priority was to focus on Leigh as a brand and promoting the fishing industry and their catch locally. Aside from the Whelk Population Survey which may help to promotion of the Whelk fishery and the MSC Accreditation for Thames Estuary cockles the NTFLAG may be part-funding a Leigh Port Website. This project is awaiting match funding but would be for Leigh Port Partnership to gain more capacity and presence online. The website will display information about the port for local users but also residents in Leigh and tourists. It will hold information about the newly set up Thames Fisherman's Association.

There have been several discussions regarding a wider Leigh brand and in a board meeting (May 2018) it that a fisheries specific communications company would conduct a pre-brand perception study before it was determined whether the FLAG would fund a full Leigh brand. However, there have been no willing applicants and no availability of match funding and until then the project cannot be taken forwards.

Priority 4: Training and Education

Priority 4 has been the most challenging priority to administer any projects. Initial discussions explored funding specific Seafish tickets as part of a wider Seafish based training scheme. These conversations were with Eastern Seafish Training Association (ESTA) where it was decided that the best option and confirmed by the fishermen included an apprenticeship scheme. As FLAG funding cannot fund direct apprenticeships (although funding the set up of a trailblazer group would be possible through conversations with South Essex College), a structured course delivered by ESTA would be possible. The ESTA-run course would provide Seafish tickets, hands on experience and fishermen leading training. However, this became very difficult to coordinate and the FLAG Board did not approve the project at full application stage as to explore the options of STCW tickets.

Currently, the most sensible route may be to fund training opportunities during Winter 2018 to include STCW tickets, forklift training, Hygiene Level 3 and possibly a 3-day Seafish course which is currently in development by Seafish.

Priority 5: Culture and Heritage

This priority has been steady with two projects successfully funded, both of which complement each other. This priority has the most number of attendees at the working groups and many project ideas have been suggested. The conversations at these working groups centred around improving the connection between Old Leigh and Leigh Broadway, adding to the interpretation that is on offer in Old Leigh and providing an educational spin on the fisheries. It therefore looks as though the best option is to develop a maritime interpretation programme delivered in Old Leigh over a one or two-year period. There are also very good match funding options which are being considered including Heritage Lottery Fund and Arts Council.

Moving forwards, all funding will be allocated by March 2019, and projects ending by March 2020 – the end of the FLAG programme, when a final report will be produced.