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Evaluation of Local Places for Nature Programme: Year One (2020–2021)

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Evaluation of Local Places for Nature Programme: Year One (2020–2021)

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

Acronym/Initialism/Keyword

Definition

CAVO

Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations

Ha

Hectare

KWT

Keep Wales Tidy

LA

Local Authority

LNP

Local Nature Partnership

LPfN

Local Places for Nature

NGO

Non-Governmental Organisation

NLHF

National Lottery Heritage Fund

Peri-urban

Refers to an area adjacent to a city or urban area

WCVA

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

WIMD

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

1. Introduction/Background

Background

- 1.1 The Welsh Government acknowledge that the environment and biodiversity underpin the economic, social and cultural well-being of Wales. Furthermore, there is an acknowledgement of the threats to, and pressures placed on nature from agricultural practices, pollution, woodland and water management, urbanisation, and climate change.
- 1.2 Natural Resources Wales' "State of Natural Resources Report (2016)" identified that Wales did not meet the 2010 international and national biodiversity targets.¹ The most recent State of Nature Report (2019) indicates that of 3902 species (for which sufficient data were available), more than 600 (17 per cent) were threatened with extinction in Wales. Another 73 (two per cent) are already extinct.² Therefore, the threat of biodiversity loss is real and urgent.
- 1.3 Whilst the Welsh Government have responded by passing legislation that seeks to protect and meet these threats and challenges, it may take several years before any impact can be observed. Concerned about the urgent need to take action, the Welsh Government have also engaged in a number of initiatives to tackle the threat to nature.

Policy Context

- 1.4 The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 sets a broad and innovative roadmap to integrate environmental sustainability and the protection of biodiversity into all activities and areas of the public sector's work in Wales.³ Public bodies are and will be required to give due consideration to the long-term impact of their activities upon several areas, including the environment and biodiversity.
- 1.5 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 also seeks to address the challenges faced more directly by outlining a plan to manage natural resources in a more sustainable and joined-up way. The Act seeks to complement the ambition for a low-carbon, green economy that can adapt to the impacts of climate change.⁴

¹ [State of Natural Resources Report 2016](#)

² [State of Nature Report 2019](#)

³ See [Future Generations Commissioners website](#)

⁴ [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#)

- 1.6 The Local Places for Nature (LPfN) programme was agreed in December 2019, with the aim of trialling small-scale interventions that support nature and well-being. In May 2020, after the Local Places for Nature programme started, the Welsh Government established a task and finish group to identify priorities for action for its Recovery Plan from COVID-19.⁵ The group was explicitly tasked with developing solutions that linked climate change action with job creation and moving towards the low-carbon, green economy at the heart of the government's vision. The group identified and prioritised a number of actions, including reversing the decline in biodiversity and connecting people and nature.
- 1.7 The Local Places for Nature programme consequently aligns and supports the key strategic priorities set out in legislation. Moreover, the programme presents a means of engaging and acting on the ambitions and priorities that have been identified.

Local Places for Nature

- 1.8 The First Minister's manifesto (2018) committed to halting and reversing the decline in nature for the benefit of future generations. The primary focus of Local Places for Nature (LPfN) is that of engaging communities to participate in the process to create places for nature, not merely for communities to be passive recipients or observers of nature. Moreover, the scale of intervention aims to be relatively small and local, albeit visible, in an attempt to ensure that people see the positive impact on the variety and abundance of 'nature on their doorstep':

*'Focus on the small things which can create local, accessible green spaces: wildflower planting; changes to mowing practices by local authorities; creating meadow areas on sloping land.'*⁶

- 1.9 The programme's logic is that if people can engage with nature where they live, work, and access services, they are more likely to value it. If people value nature, they are more likely to support action, initiatives and spending to support efforts at reversing the decline and enhancing nature. Moreover, there is a belief that more indirect benefits will be achieved from engagement with nature, such as improved physical and mental well-being.

⁵ [COVID Recovery Plan](#)

⁶ [Labour Leadership Manifesto](#) (2018)

1.10 A £5m capital fund to establish the Local Places for Nature programme was subsequently announced in the draft budget on 12 December 2019. The programme utilised additional funding in the year and the budget was increased to £6.9m.

Table 1.1: Programme budget

	KWT	WCVA / LNP	NLHF	Greening	Total (£)
LPfN Programme Budget (£)	1,872,000	2,725,222	2,300,000	30,000	6,922,156

1.11 The core aim of the programme is to create ‘nature on your doorstep’, enhancing and restoring nature where people live, work, and access public services. In doing so, the programme seeks to contribute to biodiversity, environmental and well-being goals.

1.12 The LPfN programme seeks to encourage and fund community groups to engage in small-scale growing in spaces within their communities. The approach represents a relatively new way of funding and working. The programme was intended to be a demonstrator, piloting different approaches. The projects are intended to meet the First Minister’s commitment to ‘modest measures’, things that make an impact locally, which are:

- Increase wildflower planting.
- Increase pollinators.
- Increase meadow areas on sloping land.
- Reduce the use of pesticides.
- Change mowing practices to encourage wildflowers and improve biodiversity.
- Improve public access to drinking water.
- Increase local tree planting, including street trees, orchards, and small woodlands including tiny forests.
- Increase community food-growing opportunities including the provision of allotments.

1.13 The programme works towards the modest measures by targeting urban and peri-urban areas and public spaces that lack access to nature.

- 1.14 The programme also aims to target deprived and disadvantaged communities in particular. However, the definition of deprivation, whilst drawing on standardised definitions and measurements, remains relatively flexible. The definition applied seeks to consider a lack of access to nature spaces to be a relevant and important form of deprivation.
- 1.15 By undertaking and encouraging actions that are primarily small and local, it is thought that individuals and communities involved will develop a greater appreciation of nature, which will lead to greater support and active intervention to protect and enhance it in the long term. This in turn will prove to be beneficial both in terms of individual health and well-being and in strengthening communities to act decisively and collectively.

Specific strands of LPfN

- 1.16 The programme operates through three scheme managers run by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), and Keep Wales Tidy (KWT). Each scheme represents a distinct offer.
- 1.17 The WCVA administer grants (£2.7m in total) to 25 Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) to deliver local plans to restore and enhance nature. Public sector organisations in each Local Nature Partnership area are also supported in restoring or enhancing nature on their “estate” by greening their land and/or buildings.
- 1.18 The NLHF offer (£2.3m in total) capital grants from £10–50k for more bespoke and tailored interventions. The NLHF contribute 15 per cent of the funding for revenue costs, and operate on a different timescale from the other schemes, with around five projects starting in 2020 but most expected to commence delivery as late as February 2021 (depending on the pandemic restrictions). The NLHF contribute 15 per cent of the grant, whilst the Welsh Government contribute 85 per cent.
- 1.19 KWT offer pre-paid starter and development packages of capital assets to communities (£1.8m in total). Three types of packages are available: Butterfly Gardens, Fruit Gardens, and Wildlife Gardens. All town and community councils in Wales were entitled to a starter package for communities. These have been administered as open-access applications, considered on demand and criteria.
- 1.20 More ambitious development packages were also arranged and delivered by KWT. The development packages are: Community Food Growing Areas with Biodiversity Zones; Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) for Nature; and Nature

Spaces (wild gardens). Again, these have been administered as open-access applications, considered on demand and criteria.

Evaluation

1.21 This evaluation seeks to assess the progress made towards this programme benefitting nature ‘on your doorstep’ from the perspectives of scheme managers and participants by the end of the operational period in March 2021. It should be noted that impacts are not considered at this stage, as it is considered too early in the programme for any to be visible. Furthermore, the evaluation aims to consider if and how the scheme could be delivered more efficiently to increase or sustain any benefits from it. What is more, it seeks to determine whether the scheme overall provides value for money in the assets created and the scale of community involvement.

1.22 In particular, this process and outcome evaluation will aim to explore what difference the scheme has made to nature ‘on your doorstep’ and how the scheme can be delivered more efficiently. More specifically, it aims to do so by exploring the following key research questions which were identified in the evaluation framework:

- Has the programme helped to create ‘nature on your doorstep’ in urban and peri-urban areas? And if so, in what ways?
- What impact has the programme had upon individuals and groups involved?
- How sustainable is the engagement of the groups with local nature?

Coronavirus Pandemic

1.23 The one-year scheme was approved and developed in late 2019 and early 2020, with the delivery of some schemes scheduled to begin in March 2020. This coincided with the coronavirus pandemic and the associated lockdown, social distancing, and wider public health measures imposed by the UK and Welsh Governments.

1.24 Details of the pandemic’s impact on the programme are discussed below. Briefly, the impact has been significant to key aspects of the programme. Most pertinently, the pandemic and, in particular, the lockdown measures have limited the extent to which volunteers can meet and engage with spaces. Volunteers had to remain at home during the lockdowns, the numbers that were able to meet at sites when the restrictions were lifted were still limited, and many volunteers are believed to be

shielding or choosing to limit their social engagement. Furthermore, project delivery was impacted because officers in local authorities and those in scheme manager organisations were redeployed to other roles, were ill and/or were looking after dependants. Procurement and supply chains were also impacted and, as detailed in this report, many LNP projects were pushed back to deliver in the fourth quarter (January–March 2020).

- 1.25 As a programme which is designed specifically to engage volunteers and communities, this initial year cannot be understood to be typical of the impact that the programme may otherwise have had upon volunteer engagement. This evaluation has sought to account for this disruption in its discussion of the key findings and the research questions.
- 1.26 Moreover, the pandemic has impacted the nature of the evaluation. All engagement with contributors and fieldwork were conducted remotely. The evaluation team were not able to visit spaces and projects, nor were they able to engage in the informal discussions and engagement at these sites that enrich and support the formal evaluative tools and data collection.
- 1.27 The inability to canvass volunteers on site has also limited the extent to which their views and experiences could be explored. Instead, the evaluation has sought to focus on project or package leaders, drawing on their views and perceptions of the impact on their groups of volunteers. Ideally the evaluation team would have engaged with the experiences of all volunteers and sought to capture a more representative body of data in relation to volunteer experiences.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 LPfN was designed as a one-year demonstrator fund, with the ambitious aim to deliver hundreds of local projects through three different scheme managers. The evaluation therefore explores a programme that is being delivered for the first time. A key task for the evaluation was to gather data in relation to all three strands of the programme to inform future decisions regarding any continuation or expansion of the programme, as well as providing recommendations as to its future management and delivery.
- 2.2 Moreover, as noted above, the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns and stay-at-home guidance inevitably impacted the ability of officers and community groups to deliver. A key task for this evaluation was to assess the impact and consider the delivery within this context.
- 2.3 Overall, the evaluation sought to rely on qualitative data and a survey to complement the quantitative monitoring and output data collected by the programme itself. Fieldwork was undertaken between January and March 2021, involving the following methods and approaches:
- An online survey with KWT “pre-paid” package applicants. The survey was distributed to all package applicants. One hundred and forty-six complete responses were received and analysed. This number included 124 “starter packages” and 20 “development packages”.⁷ Combined, the responses amount to a self-selecting sample of 28 per cent of all packages delivered at the time of writing.⁸
 - A focus group held with six KWT package applicants.
 - Semi-structured interviews with 13 LNP coordinators. In total, 19 LNP coordinators were contacted and invited; however, the tight timeline, the high workload at the time of fieldwork, and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic limited some coordinators’ capacity to engage with the research.

⁷ Two respondents did not respond to this question, suggesting that they either did not know or had received both.

⁸ One response was received from an unsuccessful applicant, but the survey branched to a different set of questions in this instance, and the response is not present in the data presented within the report.

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five NLHF capital grants project officers. The other projects had only recently received confirmation of their award, or had, due to the pandemic, not made significant progress and were unlikely to be in a position to contribute to the evaluation.
- Twelve stakeholders were contacted and seven interviewed. The stakeholders were identified by the Welsh Government and the evaluators as having an interest in the progress of the programme. Several stakeholders declined to take part due to a perceived lack of detailed knowledge of the programme. Those who were interviewed confined their comments largely to strategic aspects.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five management and delivery personnel at the three delivery bodies and the Welsh Government.

2.4 All survey respondents and interview participants were given the option to participate in Welsh in the research in both Welsh and English.

2.5 The timing of the evaluation, between January and March 2021, has presented challenges for the collection of data. Delivery personnel were particularly busy during the research period because it was towards the end of the financial year, as well as the first year of delivery, and was also a period in which plans were being submitted for a proposed second year of activity. Several LNP coordinators suggested that they struggled to find time for the evaluation. Future evaluations should ideally take place outside of such periods where possible, ideally when the NLHF capital grants projects, which run on a different timeline, have also made more progress. Furthermore, only the KWT scheme had actually delivered projects at the time of this evaluation, with the WCVA- and NLHF-managed schemes still in delivery. The findings in relation to the latter schemes are preliminary, therefore, and may differ from future evaluations of the same work once delivered.

3. Findings: Local Nature Partnerships

Description

- 3.1 The Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) aim to build a nature recovery network across Wales, engaging people, communities, businesses and decision-makers in both practical action and strategic planning for a healthy, resilient and nature-rich Wales. They are funded by the Welsh Government and coordinated by the WCVA as part of a three-year project running until April 2022. The partnerships consist of local authorities, National Park Authorities, Wales Biodiversity Partnership, the WCVA, and Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs).
- 3.2 The LPfN funding (£2.7m in total) supports the operations of the LNPs and, in particular, funds changes to mowing regimes, the enhancement of habitats and biodiversity, the transformation of spaces and sites to enhance biodiversity and accessibility, hedgerow management, and wildflower planting. Annexe A provides a summary of the LNP plans and activities.

Rationale, Design and Delivery

Makeup of the LNPs

- 3.3 The experiences and skills contained within the LNPs vary considerably, with some partnerships having effectively been in existence for over 10–20 years and others newly established or, in some instances, without a coordinator at the outset of the programme. However, coordinators suggested that, even though their LNPs were relatively new, their staff comprised experienced individuals and organisations that had been involved in the previous Biodiversity Action Plan groups and were well placed to lead on the operational delivery of the funding.

Rationale and community engagement

- 3.4 Almost all coordinators participating in the evaluation felt that the core aim or rationale of the programme was to improve community access to local nature spaces or improve the biodiversity of local places. Some of these made explicit references to the First Minister's modest measures as a key driver for the programme.⁹ However, only a few saw improving individuals' health and well-being as being a core aim of the programme, and the majority of these felt that the benefits were a result of the creation of spaces, rather than community engagement

⁹ [First Minister's Leadership Manifesto 2018](#)

and involvement being a core driver of the programme. This may reflect the focus of the work to date, however, and that community and volunteer involvement has been difficult, if not impossible, during most of the year due to the pandemic. LNPs were consequently focused simply on the creation of the spaces, rather than on engagement with the spaces.

3.5 In most cases, coordinators stated that communities were involved in the design, development and delivery of projects. For around half of the interviewees, community involvement with their projects is an intrinsic element to their delivery model and written into project delivery plans. What is more, a few coordinators outlined that they have undertaken consultations and workshops with local community members to ensure that project visions and goals have resonated with the needs of local people.

3.6 Most coordinators who were in a position to comment also noted that the involvement of communities was a particular strength of the delivery model:

'It really works to have LNPs delivering this, because we know our communities. The best lesson has been on the importance of having people and organisations who are well versed in local nature, who can be ready to do the work.' (**Local Nature Partnership Lead Interview, 2021**)

3.7 All LNPs agreed that the rationale and need to create spaces in which to access and engage with nature was still relevant one year into the programme. Indeed, many felt that, as a result of the pandemic and the associated restrictions on movement beyond the locality, there was a greater justification for the programme.

3.8 A common challenge for coordinators was the relative deprivation of the communities within which LNPs are working, which, in some cases, can mean that communities are particularly hard to reach and engage with regardless of a pandemic. Alternatively, communities may lack the skills or experience with which to engage effectively. If the latter, then coordinators may wish to explore their methods or even means of developing their engagement approaches.

3.9 LNP coordinators commonly perceived challenges surrounding access to and enjoyment of nature to relate to behavioural or cultural factors. A culture and history of social exclusion went hand in hand with wider deprivation and a lack of access to nature spaces. Furthermore, particularly in areas of social deprivation, a few

coordinators believed that it was especially difficult to encourage local people to engage with nature on their doorstep:

[Local] communities feel they've been forgotten about, and the challenge is more about lack of social inclusion and the ability to get local people together to build something they'll be proud of.' **(Local Nature Partnership Coordinator Interview, 2021)**

- 3.10 This perception appears to contradict, to some extent, the logic of the LPfN that deprived communities can be engaged in nature projects. Moreover, the experiences of the KWT scheme suggest otherwise and that deprived communities can be engaged (see paragraph 5.6). The view further suggests that coordinators may wish to explore their methods of engagement and even seek to share and learn good practice from the KWT scheme.
- 3.11 Coordinators consequently suggested that whilst it was good that they have individuals with experience of biodiversity and nature, it was important that wider specialisms were also involved. Most useful for these interviewees were individuals with experience and expertise in relation to community development and social inclusion. These were thought to contribute effectively at the design stage, enabling partnerships to ensure that appropriate nature spaces were developed.
- 3.12 A few coordinators, nonetheless, stated that there has been no community involvement in the design of their project, though largely because it had proven to be inappropriate in the early stages of project delivery. These projects tended to include an element of externally contracted work before volunteering began.

Contribution to wider strategic objectives

- 3.13 Coordinators were somewhat aware of the wider strategic fit of the programme, whilst management personnel were particularly appreciative of the alignment of LPfN with existing and emerging objectives. The project aligned not only with the aims of the Future Generations and Environment Acts,¹⁰ but also with Green Recovery,¹¹ which forms the basis of the Welsh Government's approach to the pandemic recovery. The latter factor reinforced the view that the pandemic had, if anything, highlighted and heightened the importance and rationale of efforts to develop accessible spaces for nature:

¹⁰ [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) and [Environment Act](#)

¹¹ [Green Recovery](#)

'I'd say the most recent one is the Green Recovery strand of work. There's a lot of overlap there in demonstrating how, in practice, things can work when you're able to add resources into the environment and nature sector. It links in with the [Well-being of Future Generations Act] and things like that, but, really, it's been the Green Recovery that's linked quite strongly with the Local Nature Partnership idea, I guess.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

- 3.14 More generally, coordinators appreciated the capacity of LNPs to effect change, e.g. through the reform of mowing practices across their localities. In total, the LNPs were also in a position to effect change across a significant portion of Wales.

Access to nature and defining areas

- 3.15 There were mixed views in relation to the degree of access that locals had to nature, with some interviewees suggesting that access was easy and other respondents suggesting that the issue varied from one community to another. Furthermore, they highlighted that within their region there are some very rural areas and some urban and peri-urban areas. It was clear, however, that the works carried out exclusively cover neither urban/peri-urban areas nor areas that were deprived of access to nature.
- 3.16 The extent of engagement with urban areas, peri-urban areas or areas deprived of access to nature was an issue for scheme management who had already identified the potential for the scheme to narrow its focus on the target areas. Moreover, steps were already underway to embed the focus into the approach to any extension of the project into the 2021–2022 year. Doing so was also thought to complement the wider strategic direction of travel. Generally, it suggests an effective internal evaluation cycle at the delivery partner level as well as centrally within the Welsh Government:

'This year's delivery was also brainstorming what it could look like in the future. I guess some of that focus has been refined further. Next year there's more of an emphasis on areas of deprivation or urban or semi-urban areas and more of an emphasis on the [First Minister's] modest measures. [We will] refine it further for next year.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

- 3.17 More generally, there was a feeling that the definition of urban and peri-urban environments as a focus for the project may be a weakness, and that there was scope and a need to relax the definition. Coordinators suggested that the

geographical context should be considered, such as the wider living and travel areas related to rural residents and communities; in other words, rural residents travel much farther, out of strictly defined deprived areas, for everyday purposes and services. What is more, coordinators referred occasionally to the more dispersed nature of different forms of deprivation in rural areas. Consequently, areas that would benefit significantly were challenging to justify according to the definition and measurements associated with the programme. Moreover, coordinators suggested that it is just as important to improve the biodiversity and access to nature in rural areas.

Allocation of funding

- 3.18 It was felt by some, particularly scheme management personnel, that the allocation of the majority of the funding upon approval of bespoke plans, rather than a competitive bidding exercise, was a strength of the programme. Coordinators and partners could consequently focus on developing plans that were primarily appropriate for the locality, rather than on those that were attractive to funders and aligned with criteria.

Deadlines and timescales

- 3.19 The tight deadlines for producing plans were thought to have placed pressure on partnerships to develop and produce their operational plans in time. This was for a variety of reasons. In most cases, LNPs noted the impact of the pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union upon their 12-month plans. They suggested that from the outset they had very little time with which to get their projects up and running and that this was made more difficult by the pandemic. This, they also argued, meant that they have been unable to undertake much community engagement and, importantly, utilise volunteers to push projects forward.
- 3.20 Moreover, the tight deadlines for spending on work have placed further pressure on coordinators, risking a rush to spend (for the sake of spending) near the end of the year:

'The deadline for 31st March is unchanged and I don't think that fairly reflects the delays that a pandemic has created. Quarter 1 was pretty much a write-off. Quarters 2, 3 and 4 are more mixed. A bit of flexibility would've been nice. I understand that because of the funding it has to be used within [the] year. But [more flexibility] would've allowed them less of a panic toward the end of the year

about delivery. There's a lot of pressure on spending the project money by the end of March. It's that fine balance between making sure that you're doing what's beneficial to nature and not just spending it. It could end up being seen as a spending exercise. I'm not saying that that's the case, but there's a risk.'

(Management Interview, 2021)

- 3.21 Ultimately, the pressure and the short timescales meant that coordinators had to rely on support from the WCVA as they designed and developed their projects:

'It all seemed to be quite short notice, so there was not long to get the information in and we had to rush the project design, so we were just looking for projects to fit the criteria, and it would have been good to have time to plan. As we were all inexperienced in responding to this programme, coming up with a project and applying was quite a challenge. The WCVA has been great throughout and really helped.' **(Local Nature Partnership Lead Interview, 2021)**

- 3.22 Short timescales were also identified as an issue during delivery. Coordinators suggested that the short timescale was not compatible or that the one-year design did not account for how long it takes for procurement at the local authority level:

'Getting machinery or permissions — those things became quite difficult for some partners. Internally [within local authorities], some of the processes take longer. Even the procurement of machinery can take a good amount of time and contractors can take months [...].' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

- 3.23 Procurement delays led in some cases to periods of several months in which projects were unable to progress. LNP coordinators suggested that a 12-month programme for nature is always going to be a challenge and, as suggested by one lead, can limit meaningful impact:

'A major weakness is that the projects have to be short-lived, [i.e.] a 12-month timeframe. So there can be no planning for decent-sized projects and we have to pick projects with an easy win. Wildlife has been in decline for 40–50 years and we won't be able to reverse that with short-lived projects.' **(Local Nature Partnership Coordinator Interview, 2021)**

- 3.24 Whilst drawing up second-year plans, however, the First Minister's modest measures appear to have helped to focus their development, anchoring many plans for the forthcoming round of activities:

'The modest measures [are] for [2021–2022] really. The modest measures are quite clear and they're just a list of certain things that are a priority to focus on when it comes to nature recovery and capital assets, increasing pollinators and tree planting, and so forth. But what it's allowed is that when partners have submitted their plans for next year, it's given them a focus to ensure that at least one element has been embedded into their work.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Long-term risk

- 3.25 One key issue was identified by participants in relation to the design and model of delivery. The LNPs and related staff are funded by the Welsh Government and the WCVA for a period of three years, with LPfN funding being provided on top of the core funding for specific activities. Whilst the current LPfN demonstrator year falls within the lifespan of LNPs, the longer-term existence and capacity of the partnerships are reliant on wider — though also Welsh Government — funding being sustained. A potential identified risk exists to continued delivery through the LNPs if the wider funding does not continue:

'The idea, as I understand, is to keep it as a yearly rolling model. But the issue there is that it's strongly reliant on [LNP coordinators] being in post. One wouldn't happen without the other being in place.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Further strengths

- 3.26 Reflecting on the delivery of the project, the key strengths identified by coordinators were that the funding was easy to access and projects were set up clearly and effectively, which constituted an opportunity to build on existing plans or visions that they had not previously had the capacity to undertake.

Further challenges and weaknesses

- 3.27 As noted previously, the challenges encountered have limited the extent of delivery. Most notably, these related to the difficulties, if not the prevention, of engagement with volunteers and the community, as well as the delays created by the UK's exit from the European Union, the pandemic, and internal local authority procurement issues.

- 3.28 Some coordinators reported having to request wider local authority staff involvement in the projects, even if they were not LNP staff. These coordinators suggested that more could be done to involve senior staff members within local authorities in order to better link with wider work and priorities across the authorities and speed procurement and delivery issues.
- 3.29 Some LNPs began work without a coordinator in post, which in turn led to delays in beginning delivery work.
- 3.30 The pandemic, meanwhile, reportedly led to periods in which key staff, partners or delivery personnel were furloughed, further adding to delays.
- 3.31 Both coordinators and management staff claimed that the inability to buy land was a weakness. Being able to buy disused or derelict land would enable the LNPs to expand their operations, create new assets and make a visible difference within some communities:

‘Can they work on private land or purchase land? Those are things that a lot of LNPs would like to do, but at the moment they aren’t seen as favourable [...]. It’s mostly derelict land that they feel [would] be an ideal way to create a new natural asset and turn it into something really good. But the idea of land purchase, well, there are some barriers around that in Welsh Government. I know that our link with the programme is trying to break that down a little bit.’ (Management Interview, 2021)

- 3.32 There was a consensus that the impact of the pandemic has largely been in relation to delaying procurement, restricting volunteering, furloughed personnel, and adding to a backlog of work for contractors, consequently leading to delays in procured work.

Impact

- 3.33 Evidencing the creation of spaces for nature was deemed to be relatively straightforward, and was accomplished largely through the monitoring and evaluative processes already in place. Measuring the impact on communities, however, was deemed to be more challenging for some coordinators.

- 3.34 Indeed, the vast majority of coordinators (who felt able to comment) stated that the LPfN programme has helped to create ‘nature on your doorstep’ in urban and peri-urban areas. In most cases, coordinators evidenced this by referencing the physical spaces that have been or will be created or rejuvenated as a result of their projects. The management output data presented in this report supports this belief.
- 3.35 As a key aim of the programme, this suggests that, despite the challenges and barriers faced over the course of the last 12 months, LNPs have been able to take positive steps towards increasing biodiversity in their local areas.
- 3.36 However, at this stage of project delivery, no coordinators were able to identify and evidence tangible community impacts that have occurred as a result of the LPfN programme. Nonetheless, many were confident that there would be discernible impacts but that it was too early to tell and/or measure these.
- 3.37 Some coordinators outlined methods by which they anticipated measuring the project impact on communities. These largely involved qualitative feedback through case studies, surveys, and further engagement with volunteers and communities. Some coordinators, nonetheless, stated that they have not measured, and do not anticipate measuring, the project impact on communities.
- 3.38 Management staff felt that by the end of the first year (March 2021), they would be in a better position to evidence or collect data that will indicate the impact of the programme:
- ‘We’ll be doing our end-of-year report over the next few months and [will] get our summary and asset database as well. We’ll have more information, then, around exactly the details around what’s been utilised. That’ll improve in [2021–2022] as an output measure.’ (Management Interview, 2021)*
- 3.39 However, a perceived lack of clarity and guidance as to the impact measures appear to have limited LNPs’ engagement with the task of evidencing their impact. Some coordinators suggested that their reporting requirements could be more specific and could support the task of evidencing impact. Furthermore, management staff suggested that the appropriate impact measures only became clearer over the course of the first year and as a result of learning and knowledge gathered through experience:

'A lot of the time from [Welsh Government], that was a little unclear as to what the output measure was in [2020–2021]. It wasn't always very clear. They knew what the plans were and what the output would be, but not necessarily what the measure would be. There were some things added in but not from the very start of the programme.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Management

- 3.40 LNP coordinators were appreciative of both the support of the WCVA and the interest of the Welsh Government in the operational aspects. Both coordinators and management staff suggested that the strong and close working relationship with the relevant Welsh Government management staff had contributed to an effective internal evaluation cycle, wherein feedback was offered, listened to and acted upon:

'From a partnership perspective, they've all felt well listened to by Welsh Government. Our main link to that programme [has] been fantastic and a real asset, I guess, really taking on board that feedback, and without that relationship we wouldn't be able to tweak things the way we have.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

- 3.41 Indeed, the value placed in the management staff at the Welsh Government appears to be particularly valuable, as well as being key to ensuring that the demonstrator programme was appropriately developed in relation to the experiences on the ground. A risk emerges as a consequence, however, in the event that key staff members move posts and break their engagement with and input into the programme.

- 3.42 Whilst a considerable challenge to delivery, the pandemic has, nonetheless, enabled the management and delivery staff to meet more regularly and contribute to a regular and effective cycle of feedback and internal evaluation:

'As much as [COVID-19] has made things difficult, some of the benefits of using online technology [include that] we've been able to meet as a partnership much more regularly than normally. We've been meeting weekly, [with] regular discussion with everyone, and [Welsh Government] have been very open, being at those meetings and relaying information about how that funding could look like.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Post-funding Sustainability

- 3.43 All coordinators (who felt able to comment) stated that LPfN activities will be sustained after the funding in some capacity. The majority suggested that all activities will be sustained, whilst a few suggested that only key elements will be maintained. In most cases, coordinators indicated that because projects were delivered by the local authority and/or included public areas, these projects would be embedded within local services' working practice; for example, National Park maintenance teams will continue to operate and maintain practices and spaces regardless of additional funding. This was anticipated within the design of the programme.
- 3.44 A few coordinators also indicated that their projects were delivered by local volunteer groups, who were also responsible for and committed to the continuation and sustainability of the activities and spaces. These latter approaches had built the handover into their plans from the outset:
- 'The plan is for all activities to be sustained [after the funding] by the groups who implemented them, who already have volunteers.'* **(Local Nature Partnership Lead Interview, 2021)**
- 3.45 It is unclear at this stage, however, as to what impact the pandemic may have had upon local volunteering and involvement with projects that have not been able to engage their volunteer communities. The risk exists, therefore, that the pandemic may have proven to be too challenging for the groups responsible for sustaining the activities and spaces, or that the work of doing so may now prove to be too burdensome. The prospect of prolonged pandemic control measures may further jeopardise volunteer groups' capacity to support and sustain the activities and spaces in the mid-term or long term. These groups may require further support to sustain the projects' achievements and impact in the future.
- 3.46 Many coordinators indicated, nonetheless, that although projects are sustainable to some extent, there was also a continued need for LPfN to support LNPs. Continuation of support was understood to be a good mechanism through which assets can be created, projects can sustain momentum and communities can be supported, and it was understood that 'nature on your doorstep' continues to be a visible local authority priority.

3.47 The lack of clarity surrounding the wider financial support for the LNPs and the coordinators was a key barrier to long-term planning:

'I don't have any immediate plans around that because I know it's interlinked with coordinator resource. If that comes to an end, I'm not really sure who within a local authority or National Park could take this on, because they're stretched already (by the sounds of it). I'm not sure how this work could be taken on. Maybe some [local authorities] had the resource there anyway? But that [wider funding for LNPs] has created that post to concentrate on this kind of work. It's quite key to keep that resource in place (from our point of view).' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

3.48 Finally, and with an eye towards possible developments in the future as well as sustaining the impact beyond the lifespan of the programme, management staff suggested that bringing wider partners in to support delivery would offer a range of benefits:

'[I would like to be encouraging] them to work more with partners. Because of the timescales, they weren't able to do that always. That would bring new ideas. You'd get more and different variety in ways to look at it.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

4. Findings: National Lottery Heritage Fund Capital Grants

Description

4.1 The NLHF capital grants scheme (£2.3m in total) offers up to one year of grant funding for nature projects (worth up to £50,000, though the scheme will consider projects up to £100,000). It is a capital grant that can be spent on items such as:

- the purchasing of native trees, shrubs and other plants to create local places for nature.
- the purchasing of equipment to restore and enhance nature. Capital spend also includes training in using the machinery and purchasing fuel for use during the project.
- the preparation of a site, such as removing man-made structures to create places for nature, creating new (but not replacing) fencing and accessible pathways to protect nature, and removing invasive species.
- the purchasing of land to create places for nature and accessible green spaces.
- project planning, procurement and financial management of the project costs to bring the capital asset into being (up to 10 per cent of the total fund); or
- the cost of labour associated with any activities related to the creation of the natural asset.

These projects are not part of the LNPs, nor are they predefined. Indeed, the application process commonly involves a process of developing a bespoke plan for each area/application. Annexe B presents a summary of the NLHF capital grants projects that have been approved.

4.2 The capital grants scheme began receiving and approving applications in July 2020. Consequently, it runs along a different timeline from the other two schemes; in other words, the first full year of operation will not be completed until July 2021. As of February 2021, the NLHF capital grants scheme had received 31 applications and approved 27, approving a total of £1,009,158 in funding and 42 per cent of the total fund.

Makeup of grant holders

- 4.3 Around half of the grant holders were town or community councils. Management staff suggested that these were very suitable candidates, believing them to have the resource, through clerks, with which to administer and manage the grant. Town and community councils were also thought to be particularly effective in engaging local communities and generating interest and support on a local level. Management staff contrasted the effectiveness of town and community councils in engaging and involving local communities in decisions with the tendency for county councils to conflate engagement with consultation after decisions are made. The latter approach did not, in the views of management staff, satisfy their interpretation of the need to involve local communities:

'A lot have found ways to [engage the community] by using social media and using public meetings via Zoom. It's not brilliant, but one of the criteria that we use in applications is not [whether they "have"] consulted but "how" they've involved the community in design. I think the town or community authorities are very good, but the county authorities aren't. I think that's why we haven't seen much from them — they're not good in involving the community. They can consult on a decision. Consultation and engagement — some [local authorities] struggle with the difference.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

- 4.4 Furthermore, medium-sized or large third sector organisations, normally associated with nature-based and community projects of the scale which could be funded by the grant, were thought to be refraining from engaging. This was believed to be largely due to the inability to recover the full cost of the project:

'Third sector [organisations] aren't allowed to claim full cost recovery and that's a major disincentive to large or [medium-sized] organisations because they can't meet all of their costs in delivering projects. Welsh Government are effectively asking them to subsidise the programme. We haven't consequently seen applications from [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds], Big Life, and stuff. You can get some staffing costs but the costs are much more than that — that's a barrier to organisations participating.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Spaces to access and enjoy nature

- 4.5 Generally, capital grant applicants were of the view that the areas being developed through the programme were not particularly deprived of spaces in which to access and enjoy nature. Even if the space in question were not accessible or developed as a nature space, there were commonly areas nearby that were accessible:

'It's easy-peasy here. Physically, it's quite easy in [redacted] and [redacted]. For me, nature is every little thing, so it depends on your definition of nature, but there is a lot of accessible nature.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

- 4.6 Management staff noted that their definitions of urban and peri-urban as well as deprivation were relatively flexible. The particular groups and communities of people being targeted by the intervention were often a factor that could influence a decision to approve a proposal, regardless of its proposed location:

'We have got a little bit of a spin on [urban/peri-urban]. Yes, we're targeting those areas but some projects aren't within an area of urban deprivation. So, for instance, Vale of Clwyd Mind have permission to have a community garden on the grounds of a community centre. It's not in an area of deprivation but, because it's going to be used for mental health concerns, we've allowed it, [as well as] in Criccieth (around social isolation and older people).' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Rationale and strategic fit

- 4.7 For the grant holders, the driving rationale of the programme was to create more spaces, so as to support biodiversity, and link those spaces with the community. But the projects commonly formed only a part of a wider master plan. This is likely to be a reflection of the individual projects, with the majority amounting to a portion of a broader master plan. The funding often supported an initial stage of engaging and improving spaces, but was to be followed later by engagement with the community in relation to the upkeep and use of the spaces. One project, for example, consisted of contracting a company to prepare allotments and purchase equipment. Once the work, and the grant, was completed, the group would move on to engaging the community.

4.8 Only one grant holder saw the involvement of the community in the work associated with the grant itself as being a key component. This was also a reflection of the particular project in question, which was aimed at drawing the neighbouring schools into the upkeep of the space. This project had already engaged the community and involved them in the design stages of the project:

‘Community involvement I’m particularly passionate about, as is the environmental and well-being committee [i.e. the grant holder]. We want a community growing area [...] we’ll give schoolchildren the opportunity to grow their own food. It’s not about working directly with the recovery — it’s about recognising the social value on the local people. It can be a gateway about getting enthused with the environment and wildlife.’ (Capital Grants Interview, 2021)

4.9 For some grant holders, particularly town and community councils, the national legislative framework surrounding biodiversity and well-being was a key factor in their rationale for engaging with the programme:

[Welsh Government] require all community councils to have a biodiversity plan in place. As part of our actions, the Local Places for Nature grant will really help with our biodiversity plan. There’s a high level of poverty, unemployment and ill health [in the area as well], so there’s a chance to volunteer and upskill. This grant will enable us to do that [...]. [COVID-19 has] emphasised the need for this [and] almost added a secondary layer; people are even more aware of how important these things are, with the [Welsh Government’s] environmental growth and the [First Minister’s] desire around nature.’ (Capital Grants Interview, 2021)

4.10 Moreover, the impact of the pandemic upon individuals and communities appears, in the views of many grant holders, to have magnified the relevance of the project. It is thought that the demand for outdoor nature spaces to enjoy has increased as a result of, or at least during, lockdown. Furthermore, the project appears to be well aligned with the Welsh Government’s direction of travel in relation to COVID-19 recovery:

‘The modest measures are part of the programme, and it does sit alongside Community Woodlands [a separate project]. But as a result of the pandemic, there’s the Green Recovery and nature networks, and they sit alongside and complement it.’ (Management Interview, 2021)

4.11 Management staff also noted that the scheme aligned particularly well with the Community Woodlands initiative, which offers similar grants with which to develop woodlands. Indeed, applicants to either project were commonly recommended to the other, which, whilst slightly overlapping, was seen to be a strength that ensured that any small- or medium-scale redevelopment or repurposing of a space for nature could, in theory, be covered by either project:

'It actually makes it easier for us to say to Community Woodlands projects to go for Local Places for Nature, or the other way around, depending on what they're planting. If they're going for a lot of trees, then we can say [to go] for Community Woodlands. If it's only a few trees, we can say [to go] for Local Places for Nature.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

4.12 Finally, management staff felt that the various strands of the LPfN programme were complementing one another and encouraging sustained engagement from groups:

'It's good for smaller groups to have everything provided for them [through the KWT pre-paid packages]. That's good because we're starting to see that organisations that have gone through that stage are ready to come to us to take the next piece of work. It's building their skills and abilities to deliver environmental projects [...]. Just in the last couple of weeks we've had a couple of these organisations enquiring [about the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant]. We've also undertaken a piece of work directly with Keep Wales Tidy to give those organisations a prod to tell them: "You can do this now." We're starting to see some movement there.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Design and application

4.13 The grant holders interviewed were frequently experienced in identifying and applying for grant funding. Many were also town or community councils and were consequently both well-resourced to do so and linked to networks that shared knowledge and information on emerging funding opportunities. The Welsh Government management staff were also identified as having been proactive in promoting the grant and were identified in at least one instance as being key in raising awareness of the grant and encouraging an application.

4.14 Few concerns were voiced in relation to the design and application process. The flexibility inherent in the design, which allowed for projects to be developed with particular spaces and wider plans in mind, was considered a key strength. As noted, many grant projects were, in reality, contributing aspects to wider efforts to regenerate, redevelop or enhance a particular space. The grant enabled key work to be carried out or equipment to be bought to enable the groups to move forward to engage the community:

'To be honest, strength-wise, it's nice and varied. Even though it's a heritage fund, it has many branches to fit into and the application process was easy to a point. It wasn't so rigid and you could cover a lot of topic areas within that grant.'

(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)

4.15 The support offered by the NLHF officer before the application phase was widely praised and identified as being a key facilitating factor. The management staff themselves suggested that this was a deliberate approach by the team to engaging with potential applicants early, advising and supporting them as best they could before the application phase, as well as raising awareness of specific facets of the NLHF funding process:

'I would say that [with regard to] the support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, [the manager is] very helpful and fully understanding of the issues we're facing. [With] any issues he can be really helpful.'

(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)

4.16 Whilst the engagement with local communities was both a necessary and a celebrated aspect of the application process, the engagement with communities was, in reality, limited by the technical nature of many of the activities supported by the grant. However, in being part of wider master plans for the areas in many cases, local communities were in a position to contribute constructively to some aspects of the design process. As noted previously, town and community councils were thought to be better placed than other potential applicants to lead effective engagement exercises:

'The design was basically done by myself and the chair of the committee and the ecological consultant and a few others on the group with experience. They are encouraged to be involved in [wider community groups] as well. They are encouraged to make comments on the design. I think that because they don't

have knowledge of what should go where and not go where, they haven't said much. One asked for a bug hotel and that is something that is in our agenda for when the site is finished. Schoolchildren [are] coming down on the 24th of this month to see maintenance work going on.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

'We put a notice on our Facebook page to say that we were applying and wanted them to tell us what places in the community would benefit from a biodiversity perspective and where we could place planters. We also had a youth club and we spoke to them about getting involved in the project. The plan was for them to do some planting, though the youth club is closed at the moment. From the local council [we are] going to have the biodiversity officer come along and talk about the benefits.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

- 4.17 The only common criticism of the design and application stage related to deadlines for completing the work. The delays caused by the pandemic have rendered some completion deadlines unlikely to be met. However, grant holders that had been in contact with the NLHF suggested that the funder understood the delays and appeared to be relatively relaxed about meeting deadlines agreed in the design and application stage.
- 4.18 The inability of some medium-sized and large third sector organisations to claim full cost recovery was identified as being a barrier for such organisations (and discussed above). A further barrier was that of the restrictions on where spaces could be developed and accessed. School grounds were explicitly identified by management staff as being key spaces that would add value to communities. Work on such spaces would facilitate school involvement:

'It would also be good if we could put stuff on school grounds. Anything behind a locked gate tends to be outside the community. We do put stuff on allotments that are locked, but we can't on school grounds. Some schools in urban, deprived areas might benefit from additional funds to enhance their green space.'

(Management Interview, 2021)

Delivery strengths and weaknesses

4.19 All interviewees were positive and optimistic in relation to the delivery of their projects, despite a widespread acceptance that the pandemic has proven to be a significant challenge to several aspects of what was planned. Essentially, grant holders felt that once pandemic control measures had been eased or rescinded, project delivery would continue relatively effectively. The only concern related to meeting the deadlines that were originally set, due to the delays caused by the pandemic:

'It's gone great. There have been some delays, but we've done everything we planned to do — local suppliers are helping. We are using a lot of our own workmen for it as well. Our boys are quite busy. [The timing] was the main challenge. We have got lots of community members and volunteers willing to help with the planting, but unless there are any changes [in the deadline], we'll struggle to get it all done.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

4.20 The pandemic had led to delays in the procurement of capital assets and equipment, as well as delays to planning application processes and backlogs of work for contractors. Whilst largely a direct consequence of the pandemic and the related control measures, some aspects (such as planning applications) may have been identified as a potential risk for some projects in any context:

'It's quite difficult. Things haven't been delivered as fast as we'd like. People are restricted because of [COVID-19]. It's slower and [it] started then stopped. Projects [have been] awarded in places like Merthyr, [which] went into lockdown very early and I don't think have come out. Purchasing capital is okay, but then the community planting (that depends on volunteers) hasn't happened. We are seeing progress, but not as fast as it would be without a pandemic. Running-over time isn't important — what's important is that it's delivered.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

4.21 The most significant impact, however, has been in relation to the capacity for engaging the community and volunteers in particular. With stay-at-home measures in place for the majority of the projects' lifespan, and social distancing likely to impact further activity for the foreseeable future, it has not been possible to make full or any use of volunteers for delivery purposes:

'There have been restrictions because of [COVID-19]. We would normally have lots more volunteers but haven't been able to.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

4.22 All interviewees were confident that the volunteers anticipated within their plans would, once able, engage with the project. Indeed, many felt that the enthusiasm and desire to support the projects had increased or grown during the lockdown period. However, it was difficult to judge the capacity of volunteer groups to engage and to be involved in the continued maintenance of the spaces into the future following the delays:

'Not a great deal [has been] done yet and [it] is set to be done at the end. The eco-park will be close to the local school and the kids around there, and the sensory garden is by an old-age home up the road; they'll enjoy that. The community orchard want to get involved. We have had a lot of enthusiasm. The community forums have been part of this plan from the get-go [...] the enthusiasm isn't as much as I would like, but that's because they haven't been able to be there.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

Impact

4.23 All interviewees were confident that the work being carried out would create new spaces of nature accessible to the community. This had been core to the application and a condition of the funding, and provided that the contracted work and assets had been delivered, the spaces would be created:

'Yes, absolutely. [Regarding] one of the main roads that comes through our area, quite a few streets are quite urban and now an orchard is plonked in the middle of it, and [it is the] same with the mindfulness garden. In the orchard, a young couple just moving in [who] have just been developing over the last six months are really excited. They started working on their house at the same time as the orchard and they've been able to see it grow. They are in urban areas and small pockets of nature. Small community parks are being created.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

4.24 There may be some delays due to the reasons explored above, but management staff were confident that spaces of 'nature on the doorstep' would be created. Moreover, grant holders and management staff were of the view that, once engaged, the skills and knowledge of volunteers will develop naturally as a result of

the work and, where possible, that learning and the raising of awareness are already taking place:

'We've had two or three progress reports so far, but (again) it's couched in terms of "we could've done this, but because of restrictions, we couldn't". The potential for impact is there — we just need the freedom to get to the point where it can happen. And it will get there because town and community councils have genuinely engaged with people who are anxious and eager to get out there and do that stuff. There's a lot of pent-up demand, but impact is delayed.'

(Management Interview, 2021)

'It'll increase when it's up and running. There has been a lot of discussions about learning what needed to be in place for the sensory garden. Mindfulness is [an important aspect] and we have used the time to have guest speakers and we have learnt the reasoning around why things are put into a mindfulness garden.'

(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)

'It's stimulated discussion. We've [spoken] to young people and through social media and had a good response from all ages and genders. We feel that we've hit a spread. We also have a day centre for pensioners and as soon as that's up and running, they'll be involved, so [we are] trying to get all age [groups] fully immersed in the project.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

'It's changing people's perceptions of what a wildflower does. A lot of people would just call it a weed. Now they know it's a flower that is good for an insect. And people are appreciating nature more. That is generally down to [COVID-19] because people are seeing and appreciating their local environment and nature more.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

- 4.25 However, some grant holders expressed uncertainty in relation to evidencing their impact on communities. Some grant holders, referred to below as coordinators, were unclear as to why and how the impact on communities should be measured:

'It's called Local Places for Nature. We were having a discussion last week. A lot of the coordinators struggle. They can prove how it's benefitting nature, but then how something will benefit people is a completely different skillset. Because it is called Local Places for Nature, coordinators sometimes struggle to justify with why they should justify the benefit for the communities beyond just the nature bit

[...] there needs to be better understanding of how the nature benefits the communities.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

- 4.26 Management staff were of the view that informal, qualitative feedback was the means by which impact was being tracked, albeit (again) within the context of there being little to report or capture thus far:

'We're not asking people to complete a formal well-being assessment before they start [...]. We're not asking them to go through a formal assessment. We are asking for informal feedback.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Post-funding Sustainability

- 4.27 The sustainability and maintenance of the spaces are built into the applications and are a condition of grant approval. Furthermore, as noted above, the grants normally constitute a portion of a wider master plan for redeveloping the area and engaging the local community with nature. Local volunteer groups, therefore, are invariably tasked with the maintenance and upkeep of spaces after the funding. Town and community councils that lead the grants often aim to remain engaged with the spaces in various forms, supporting and monitoring sites:

'We will be embarking on a programme of monitoring. We had some botanical surveys done last year and then this year [we conducted] botanical and invertebrate monitoring on verges and meadows. So we will be able to show that impact and then, hopefully, if we can get volunteers out, we should be able to record flowers and insects on their local patch, and then I try to monitor social media stuff. On Facebook, people comment more. The local authority will be doing a promotional campaign when it's time to cut the grass again, to monitor community reactions.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

- 4.28 Local authorities also play a role in monitoring and supporting the sustainability and maintenance of the spaces and activities. Moreover, there are instances of wider buy-in from local authorities, committing to buying equipment and capital assets to support the sites in the future:

'Within the local authority, they have committed to spending more on equipment. The [NLHF-bought] equipment was a trial and the reports back have said that works really well. It'll cost £40,000 each, but it is an investment.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

4.29 The post-funding period was also thought to be a more appropriate period for monitoring and evaluating the impact, due to the nature of the work being undertaken. Planting and growing take time and the results of these or mowing practices will not be experienced either until the following spring and summer or until the community is able to engage fully with the spaces. Nonetheless, some groups were already identifying which groups to target with their evaluative data collection:

'We'll be doing both [quantitative] and [qualitative evaluations] once the engagement starts with them going into plant and then measuring the use of the plants and how many are engaging with them. Because we've linked certain groups with each site, we will be able to measure constantly.' **(Capital Grants Interview, 2021)**

4.30 Interviewees had a firm understanding of what will be managed and by whom after the funding comes to an end. Allotments are commonly turned over to allotment associations, schools are brought in to make regular use of spaces, and nursing homes have been engaged, which will ensure ongoing engagement from the community.

5. Findings: Keep Wales Tidy Pre-paid Packages

Description

- 5.1 In total, including the delivery planned during or after the time of writing this report, 438 KWT pre-paid starter packages will have been awarded to applicants, as well as 82 development packages, by the end of March 2021. The total value of approved packages amounts to £1,854,058. Whilst delivery of the approved projects may continue, the expenditure is recorded within the 2020/21 financial year.
- 5.2 The demand for development packages was higher than expected. This was, as discussed below, due to starter package recipients applying for additional packages and/or moving on to the larger development packages:

'In [2020–2021] we were originally aiming to install 66 development packages. As the programme developed, it [became] clear that there was a greater demand, so we reduced the number of starter packages to accommodate a total of 83 development packages.' (KWT LPfN Business Plan, 2021–2022)

Table 5.1: Project delivery, by 28 February 2021

	Total delivered to date	Planned delivery March '21	Total planned delivery
Starter packages delivered	414	24	438
Development packages delivered	38	44	82

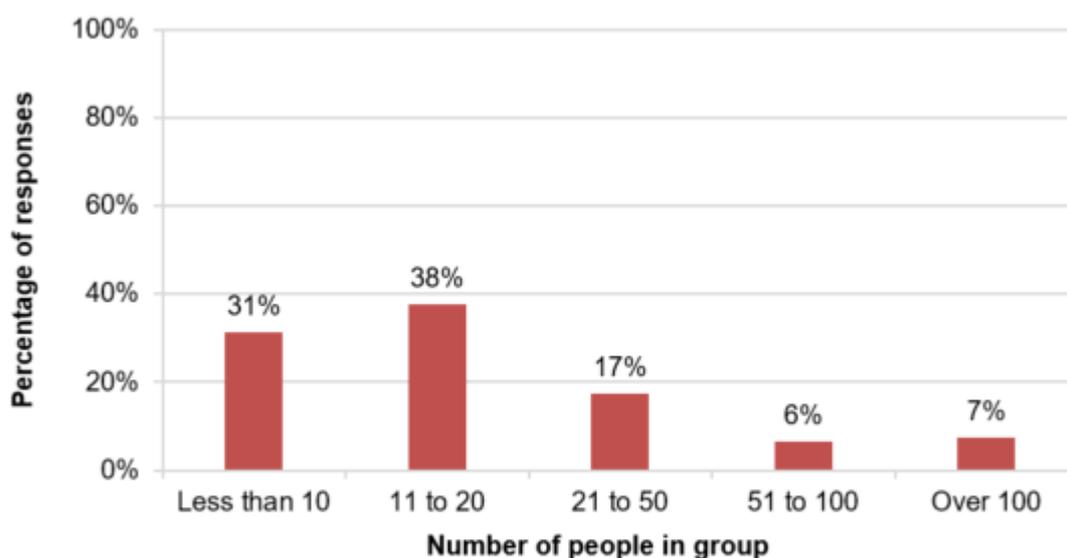
Source: Welsh Government, February 2021

Makeup and rationale of groups

- 5.3 The packages have appealed to a range of groups and individuals. Figures 5.1–5.2 outline the profile of the groups that have received a package. This data suggests that the packages primarily attract groups of up to 20 individuals (69 per cent), but that there are also instances of large groups of more than 50 (13 per cent, seven per cent of which have more than 100) people. The latter may relate to packages that were delivered by community councils or schools that drew on particularly large pools of local volunteers.

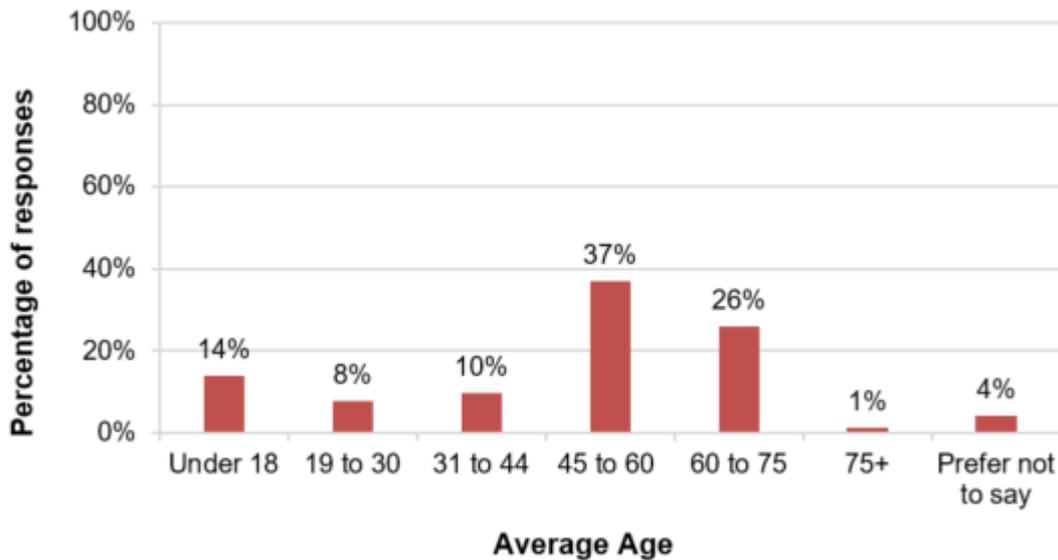
5.4 The packages are primarily delivered by groups of volunteers with an average age of between 45 and 75 (63 per cent). Schools are likely to account for many of the 14 per cent of under-18s, whilst participation by groups with an average age of 19–44 accounts for only 18 per cent of packages. These patterns may reflect the time constraints placed on those of a parental age during the lockdown, particularly during the pandemic. However, identifying whether this is the case was outside of the scope of this research. Management and delivery interviews suggested that even when 19–44-year-olds were involved, frequently these would be individuals out of work, who were invited and encouraged to volunteer in part as a means of upskilling. The low involvement from the 75+ age group may be due to this group being more likely to be shielding from or avoiding social engagement during the pandemic. However, identifying whether this was the case was outside of the scope of the current research. Future age profiles may be expected to differ if the impact of the pandemic is diminished.

Figure 5.1: How many people are part of your group?



N=109

Figure 5.2: What is the average age of the group?



N=143

- 5.5 More than 200 packages were awarded to town and community councils in 2021–2022. These applications were automatically approved and did not require processing through a selection panel (as with all other applications).
- 5.6 Management staff reported that around 22 per cent of all groups that have been awarded a package are minority or disadvantaged,¹² or that the groups are primarily or entirely composed of minority or disadvantaged individuals. Management staff believed that this would be a higher proportion if the town and community council package holders were excluded from their calculations, none of which would be classified as such. Management staff were, nonetheless, eager to stress that the scheme will seek to target minority or disadvantaged groups more explicitly in the 2021–2022 year.
- 5.7 Though these may be the demographics of the groups involved, responses during the focus group with KWT package recipients suggested that, in reality, due to the pandemic and the associated restrictions, the ages and sizes of groups that were actually able to engage with spaces throughout the project lifespan may be different from the planned involvement. Contributors frequently noted, for example, that they had drawn interest from people who, ultimately, due to the pandemic restrictions,

¹² KWT management used the term “disadvantaged” to refer to groups (or individuals) based within the most deprived wards, as defined by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

were unable to engage with the site, though they were still seen to be part of their group:

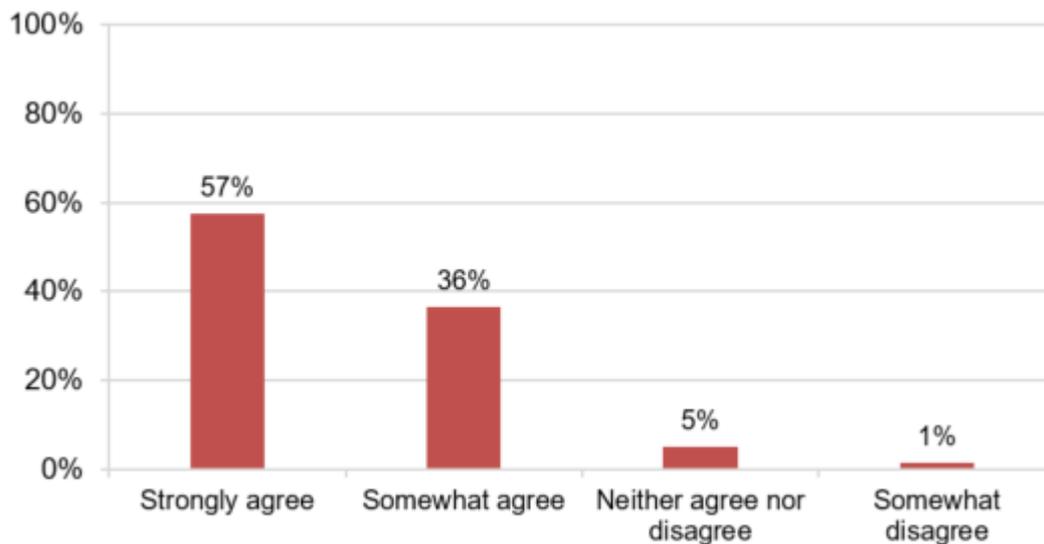
'I guess [COVID-19], obviously, has stopped the wider volunteers being able to be involved, so that's one element [...]. I guess just involving the community in the delivery [is] the major [challenge].' **(KWT Package Holders Focus Group, 2021)**

- 5.8 The groups were in some cases already established, and some data suggests that completely new groups were created solely for the purpose of applying for the packages. This latter instance cannot be quantified using the data available, but management staff or future evaluations may wish to explore the creation of new groups explicitly, as it suggests that the programme is expanding the wider infrastructure of support for nature and local habitats.
- 5.9 Interviewees suggested that established groups were attracting new members and interest and that there was evidence also that groups were using the packages as a means of generating interest in their groups.
- 5.10 Established groups were in some cases particularly active and engaged with nature and environmental projects, though there were also instances of groups that had little previous experience with nature or environmental projects that were engaging with the starter packages. This latter aspect may also be worthy of closer inspection by future evaluations, or by the management team in their monitoring.
- 5.11 To summarise, demand was higher than expected for the development packages, whilst 482 starter packages were distributed. Groups tended to be small (fewer than 20 individuals) and, most commonly, older with respect to their age profile, though the pandemic may likely have impacted who was able to engage. Whilst around 22 per cent of the packages were awarded to minority or disadvantaged groups, this, management felt, would have been higher if town and community councils were not automatically approved for packages. Established and new groups were thought to have engaged with the programme, with there being evidence of some groups progressing from formation and starter packages to more starter and development packages.

Nature on your doorstep

5.12 Figure 5.3 below demonstrates that groups feel that the scheme has helped to create new spaces in which to access and enjoy nature. This relates to a core aim of the wider LPfN programme and suggests that those involved have a greater awareness of nature on the doorstep.

Figure 5.3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the work helped create new spaces to access, experience and enjoy nature locally?



N=143

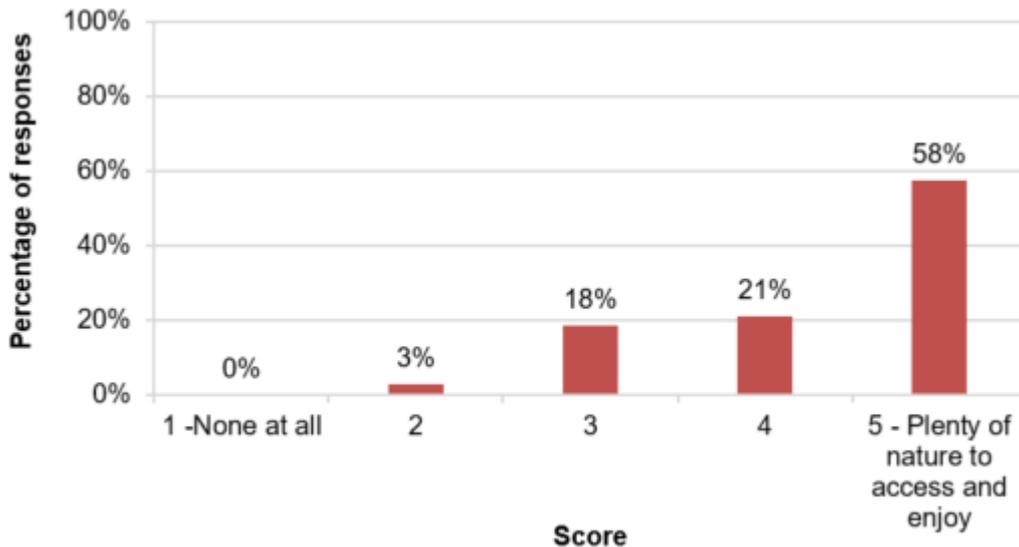
5.13 However, as Figure 5.4 suggests, respondents were largely of the view that there was plenty of nature to access and enjoy in their areas. Whilst the scoring is subjective, it is, nonetheless, a useful heuristic and may suggest that the packages have not always been awarded to groups and areas in which nature spaces are scarce. Importantly, however, without a more comprehensive and detailed evaluation of the spaces and localities, it is not possible to judge the quality of the spaces or whether the packages have helped to improve the quality.

5.14 Indeed, when explored during the focus group, several respondents noted that their packages were adding to existing nature spaces such as LA-owned parks and allotments:

'Keep Wales Tidy asked us if we would be interested in taking on one of these Local Places for Nature packs, so (of course) we said: "Yes, we would be delighted." [This is] something which is, undoubtedly, enhancing the site, although the site is already [a] nature reserve site of special scientific interests

and a Green Flag park, so it's adding to what we've already got (rather than starting from scratch).' (KWT Package Holders Focus Group, 2021)

Figure 5.4: On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is “Not possible at all” and 5 is “Plenty of nature to access and enjoy”), how easy is it to access and enjoy nature where you live?



N=146

- 5.15 Management staff noted that the prevalence of town and community councils would also merit consideration in this regard. Indeed, management staff suggested that the automatic approval of town and community councils would skew these results. With more than 200 packages awarded to town and community councils, many of which are based in rural areas, it was likely that many respondents would not consider their area to be deprived of nature spaces.
- 5.16 Management staff believed that the rationale for automatically approving packages for town and community councils stemmed from the belief that it would support the delivery of the large number of packages. Moreover, the management staff could have confidence in their capacity to deliver, due to their existing infrastructure and networks.
- 5.17 The scheme management at KWT, however, suggested that the first year had demonstrated proof of concept and that the packages were attracting a range of even new groups who were able to deliver and complete the work. The original rationale for automatically approving town and community councils, therefore, in the eyes of the scheme managers, was no longer relevant.

Design

- 5.18 Management personnel echoed the views of grant holders in suggesting that the ease of the application process was a particular strength of the design. Packages could be quickly approved and delivered to groups to start the work. This was thought to be an important feature, ensuring that the enthusiasm of groups, particularly groups new to nature projects, did not diminish through an arduous or long application process.
- 5.19 Focus group participants suggested that the status and brand of KWT were particular advantages in their dealing with local authorities and in attempting to gain permission to access and work on land. KWT was thought to be a respected and valued organisation whose involvement reassured local authorities, giving weight to the plans and applications of the groups:
- [...] the support and maybe, like, the recognition of Keep Wales Tidy as an organisation in Wales — the council could look to and feel like they could trust it. I [suspect] that made them more likely to give us permission to go ahead with it.'*
- (KWT Grant Holders Focus Group, 2021)**
- 5.20 A further strength in the design was that of the role and support offered by project officers.¹³ The support offered to groups was deemed to be invaluable by both management and participants, and in some cases, as detailed below and due to the barriers to volunteer involvement, delivery was only possible with this support.
- 5.21 For grant holders, a perceived (albeit inherent) weakness of the design, however, related to the need to pre-purchase large numbers of packages. This led to having to standardise the packages and running the risk of a package or components of a package not being suitable for each group. Indeed, focus group participants noted the fact that some parts of their packages were not suitable. For example, benches with no ability to attach to the floor were deemed to be unsuitable by some due to the likelihood that they would be stolen. Focus group participants also noted that they would like the opportunity to select the contents of the packages. Plans submitted for the 2021–2022 year have sought to address this by detailing the exact contents of every package, whilst a contingency fund was also available for minor modifications.

¹³ Project officers supported the groups in their delivery of the packages. The role was originally to involve a site visit and to support the planning and offer guidance to the groups.

5.22 Nonetheless, the risk of occasionally receiving unsuitable components was deemed to be necessary in order to enable the packages to be distributed quickly to applicants. Purchasing more than 500 bespoke packages was not deemed to be practical by the management staff who envisaged a considerable increase in cost and workload if all packages had to be tailored. With the packages pre-purchased by the scheme management, KWT only had to arrange delivery to complete the process. The diverse landscapes catered to also presented an inherent challenge to any efforts at creating a single package that will fit anywhere:

'The ease and [pre-paid] package list [have] been a strength but also a weakness because not every package looks right on every site. For example, our raised beds are in recycled plastic but they're quite shallow. They look great on soft ground but they don't look as good on concrete. We've made some changes for year two, but sometimes it is hard to make one package fit all.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

5.23 The changes proposed for urban packages in the 2021–2022 business plan, however, evidence an effective internal evaluation process within the scheme management, as well as close monitoring of feedback from package recipients. The new packages aim to address the significant issues as well as offer more vandal-proof components for urban areas.

Strategic "fit"

5.24 Management staff felt that the scheme played an important role within the LPfN programme. The scheme's ability to draw new and inexperienced groups to work on nature projects was thought to be unique, as well as key to feeding demand for further support, funding and action on creating nature and supporting biodiversity.

5.25 The staff also noted that the pandemic had heightened the relevance of and demand for the scheme. Volunteers and groups were thought to be more appreciative of nature on their doorstep during and since the lockdown, as well as being more eager to engage with projects that protect local habitats.

5.26 The scheme and the wider LPfN programme were also thought to complement the direction of travel in Wales in relation to the environment, nature, and harnessing their benefits for people and communities. Moreover, the pandemic and the Welsh Government's publication of its intentions for a Green Recovery further heightened the programme's relevance to wider strategic objectives.

Delivery

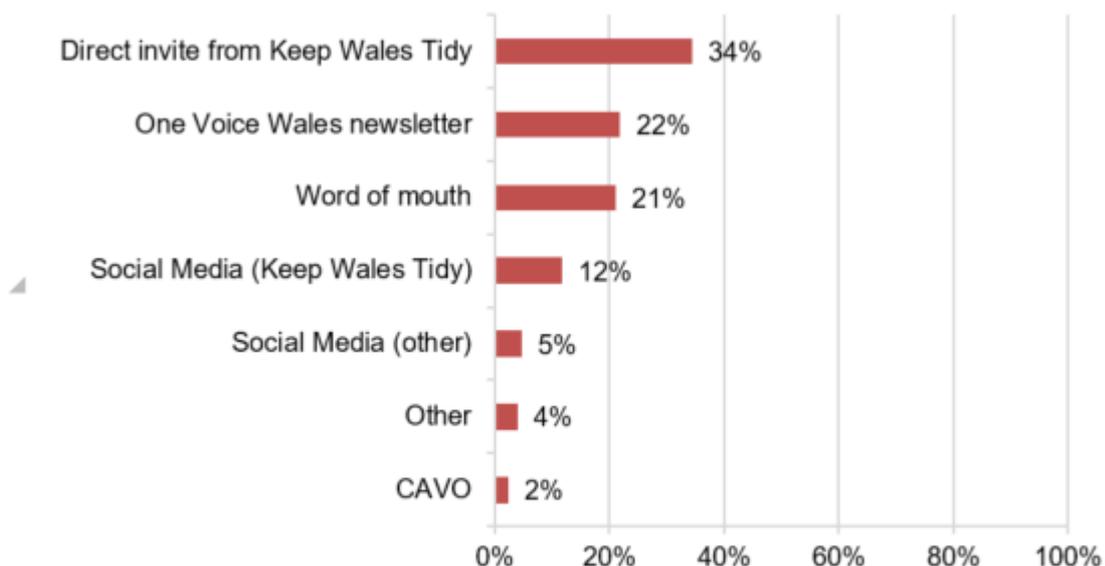
Promotion of the scheme

5.27 Management and delivery staff noted that interest in the scheme was always high and that encouraging engagement with the scheme was never an issue that required much consideration in relation to meeting targets. The promotional and engagement issues that were discussed internally related to targeting minority and disadvantaged groups for engagement more explicitly. As a result of these discussions, it was felt that a more concerted and explicit effort was required in order to engage certain groups:

'Engagement was never the issue. Particularly with COVID-19, people are desperate to go out and engage with nature. The issue was being able to deliver the work, because of COVID-19. We had 300-odd applications in a week, then COVID-19 hit.' (Management Interview, 2021)

5.28 Figure 5.5 below suggests that direct invites from Keep Wales Tidy (34 per cent) and publicising through the One Voice Wales newsletter (22 per cent) were the main ways in which the scheme was promoted, alongside word of mouth (21 per cent). The latter category may be explained by the nature of the survey respondents, however, and whilst they would have been part of the group, they may not necessarily have been the individuals reached by the initial promotion. They are likely to have been told by another member of the group.

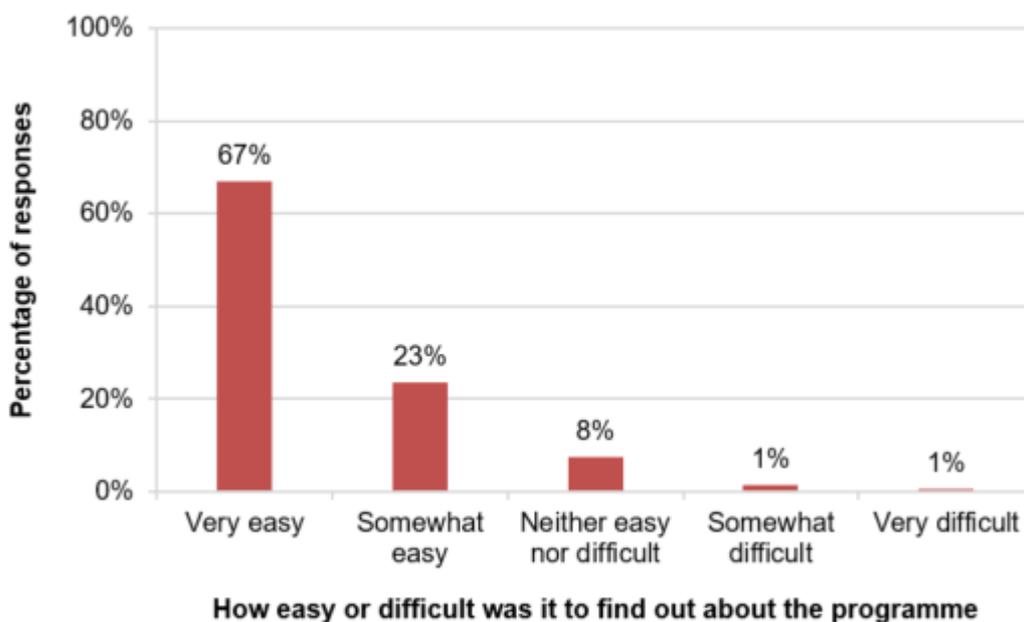
Figure 5.5: How did your group find out about the LPfN programme?



N=128

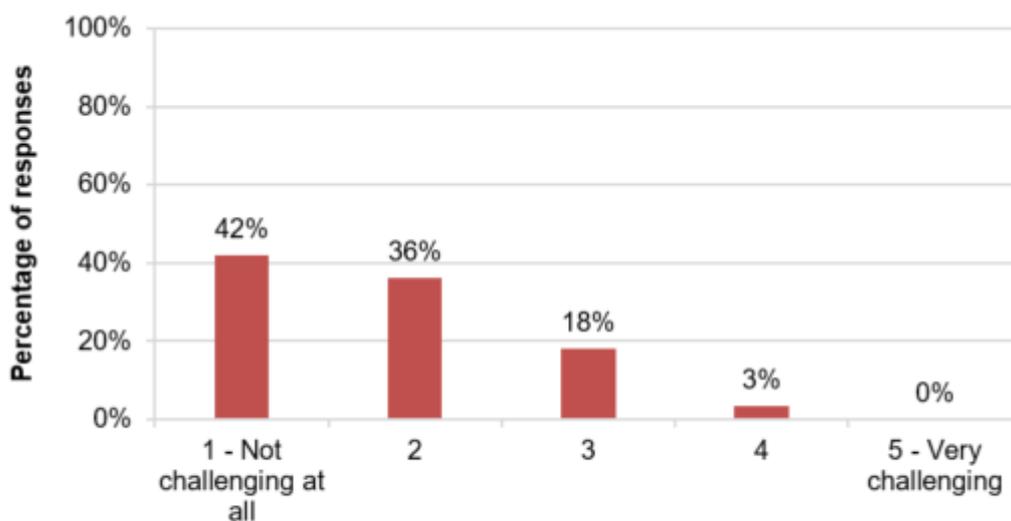
5.29 Figures 5.6 and 5.7 suggest that nine in 10 (90 per cent) of the respondents feel that it was very or somewhat easy to find out about the programme, and that for these groups the promotional material was effective. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (78 per cent) did not find the application process to be particularly challenging, if at all.

Figure 5.6: How easy or difficult was it for your group to find out about the programme/package?



N=143

Figure 5.7: How challenging was the process of applying for the funding?

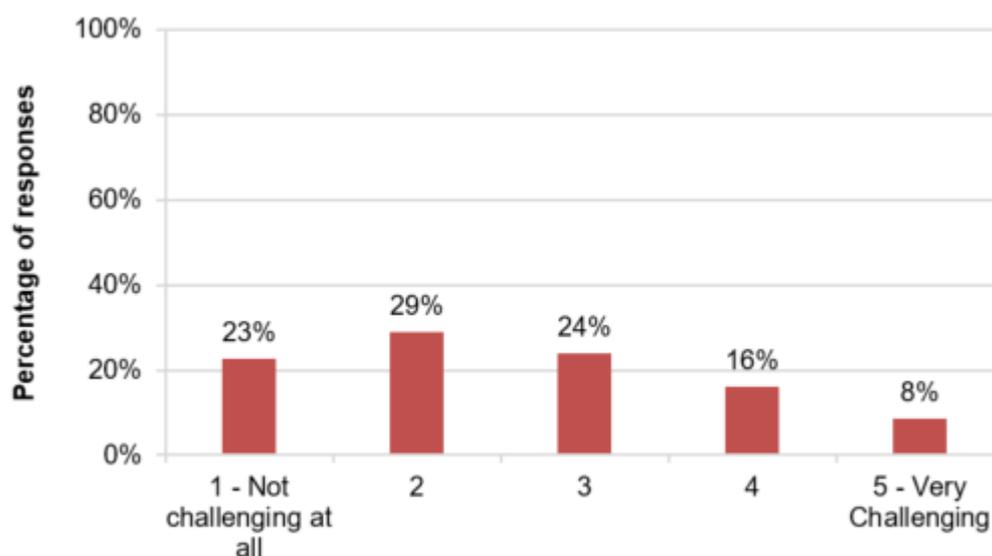


N=143

Delivery strengths and weaknesses

5.30 When asked to consider the delivery of the programme, the responses were relatively mixed. Figure 5.8 suggests that whilst just over half (52 per cent) did not find delivery to be particularly challenging, if at all, almost a quarter (24 per cent) found delivery to be challenging to some or a greater extent. When the packages were delivered must be a consideration, however, with lockdown restrictions being a key factor in how challenging the projects were to deliver/complete (see Figure 5.9).

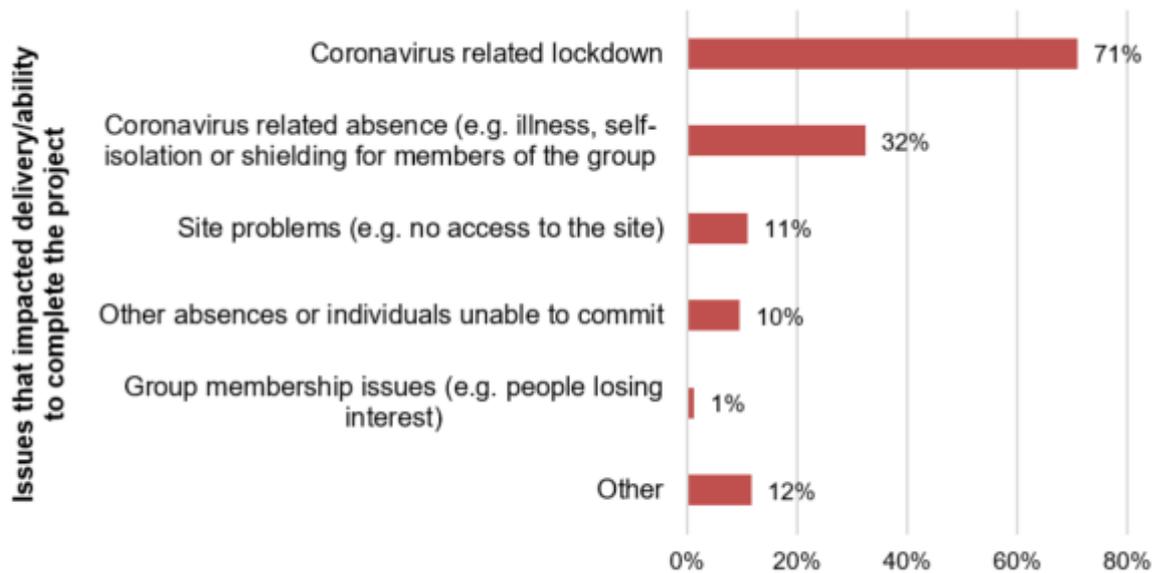
Figure 5.8: How challenging was it to deliver/complete the project?



N=143

5.31 Discussions during the focus group strongly suggest that the key challenges derived from the restrictions and barriers created by the pandemic, most notably the difficulties regarding having (or the inability to have) volunteers on site to help with delivery. Indeed, as Figure 5.9 shows, the coronavirus lockdown and the virus' more direct impact on individuals were widely considered to have impacted projects' ability to deliver or complete.

Figure 5.9: Which, if any, of the following issues impacted upon your ability to deliver/complete the project?



N=138

5.32 Management staff also recognised the limitations on community engagement due to the pandemic and, with a wider view of all projects, suggested that project officers had to become more involved in delivery to ensure the completion of projects:

'Because of [COVID-19], it's been a crazy year. It's put a lot of issues in the way that we've had to be flexible and work around. We have delivered those green spaces but the way we've done that has changed. [We] wanted them to be big community events and engage the schools, but [sometimes] it's just been our project officers going into build under lockdown. [In] a lot of spaces, we've worked with community groups and established long-term plans.' (Management Interview, 2021)

5.33 However, procurement issues were also raised, including the tendency for various components of the packages to be delivered at different times. These deliveries often came from England, and businesses appeared to be unaware of the different lockdown regulations in Wales. This led to some groups having to seek assurance that they could collect deliveries or to rearrange deliveries.

5.34 Focus group participants also expressed a degree of dissatisfaction that the equipment and materials contained within the packages were sourced from England or internationally. Participants felt that there were plenty of nurseries in Wales that could be used to source materials and that doing so would ensure that the expenditure supported the Welsh economy:

'My biggest bugbear is that money was not spent in Wales. Almost all of the items [came] from Blackburn, the trees came from Malvern, sheds came from Bradford. Even the books were not bought locally. The [greenhouse's origin] is in Israel. [I] don't know where it was bought from but, I mean, it's just bonkers. To me, that money should be spent in Wales. I mean, there are nurseries in Wales. You know, they are greenhouse and shed companies... I work with people who are... sort of at the very small business/microbusiness level. You know, we could have got people to build some of that stuff and, you know, created employment within Wales and [spent] that money within Wales for the Welsh economy, so that was one of my biggest bugbears.' **(KWT Grant Holders Focus Group, 2021)**

5.35 Management personnel noted, however, that there were significant challenges in procuring materials and equipment. Suppliers with the capacity to supply significant amounts of equipment and materials to the whole of Wales had to be found. Moreover, supply and availability problems were experienced as a result of the pandemic, with suppliers stopping trading, deliveries impacted, and a significant increase in demand for gardening and horticultural equipment and materials during the lockdown leading to nationwide shortages:

'If we procure for a national programme we have to find suppliers who can supply nationally. We can't have 22 different suppliers — it would be too big to manage. The cost would vary massively. We have some variation and we try to use local suppliers. But for some things, like bird boxes, we have to go to a supplier at this scale who can supply all of Wales. Where we can, we will. But we have to be realistic where we procure.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

5.36 The pandemic also impacted the processing of applications. A prolonged delay at the start of the operational period led to the application period being kept open throughout most of the year. This amounted to additional challenges and workload for staff and fluctuations in the number of applications being received and processed. Management personnel were required to deviate from their original

intention of approving packages and a reserve list within the first few months, and then focus on supporting delivery:

'Ideally we planned to have a few panels at the beginning months (and have them assigned) and a reserve list [for the rest of the year]. But because of [COVID-19], we had a huge first wave, then the advice from [Welsh Government] for the lockdown was not to promote it and no conflicting messages [with the lockdown restrictions]. We had a bumpy period of putting things on hold. What it really meant was that the application period was open throughout. So even in October, November, we were running applications and having panels. I firmly believe that had [COVID-19] not hit, we would've carried on having hundreds [of applications] every week, which is the plan for year two.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

Management

- 5.37 The KWT support appears to have proven to be particularly useful for some projects, particularly in the context of the pandemic. Project officers have provided on-the-ground support to projects that have, due to an inability to engage volunteers, struggled to deliver:

'I definitely don't think we would have been able to complete without the support of the project officer. So that is a positive that the project officer was available to help us do some things that otherwise we wouldn't have been able to do because of [COVID-19].' **(KWT Package Holders Focus Group, 2021)**

- 5.38 Management staff also suggested that the project officers provided much more informal training and sharing of good practice and knowledge when on site with groups than originally envisaged.
- 5.39 The challenges presented by the pandemic have, in the views of management staff, led to a significantly bigger workload, including offering more support in delivering the work. Wider challenges, such as the variation in sites, have also required more staff engagement than initially planned for. The latter issue has led to a proposal within the 2021–2022 business case to plan and budget for a more flexible allocation of time and support to starter packages.

Lessons learned and the internal evaluation cycle

- 5.40 Management staff and the business plan for the 2021–2022 financial year evidence a conscious and effective internal evaluation cycle. Key lessons have been identified and changes proposed for the forthcoming year of delivery. Amongst a range of minor changes are a few notable reforms.
- 5.41 Firstly, the business plan proposes to end the automatic approval of town and community council applications. Staff noted that the majority of such councils were based in rural locations, neither deprived of nature spaces nor in the definition and measurements of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). Staff frequently referenced Powys, which has more than 100 community councils who were eligible for automatic approval, regardless of the degree to which they could be considered deprived, urban or peri-urban. Cardiff, by contrast, has six such councils eligible for automatic approval.
- 5.42 Moreover, the justification for automatic approval of town and community councils appears to be at odds with the logic of engaging unconstituted or “first time” groups with simple and easily accessible nature projects. Suggestions explored in relation to the capital grants programme later in this report also suggest that town and community councils, due to the resource available through clerks, are well placed for a grant scheme and the administrative burden of compliance and reporting.
- 5.43 Management staff and the business plan also note that there will be a more concerted effort to encourage disadvantaged and minority groups to engage with the scheme. The business plan for 2021–2022 proposes a target of 10 per cent of applicants being from disabled or Black and Minority Ethnic groups.
- 5.44 Finally, management have sought to develop packages that are especially designed for urban environments. Having drawn on feedback from delivery personnel and grant holders, the intention for 2021–2022 will be to offer 165 urban starter packages adapted for areas without soil and in which materials and equipment are more resistant to vandalism.

Impact and Sustaining the Impact

Discussion of the possible impact

- 5.45 Consideration must be given, firstly, to the logic that the scheme could deliver the wider, community, well-being, and knowledge acquisition impacts that were hoped for. The scheme is, as designed, a capital installation scheme to enable a range of groups to access the equipment and materials necessary in order to begin and develop their journeys of engagement with nature. Those journeys are what will bring the individual, community, well-being, and knowledge acquisition, not necessarily the process of procuring and installing the equipment and materials. Staff would also emphasise that, as designed, this was not a well-being or skill development programme, but rather a capital installation scheme:

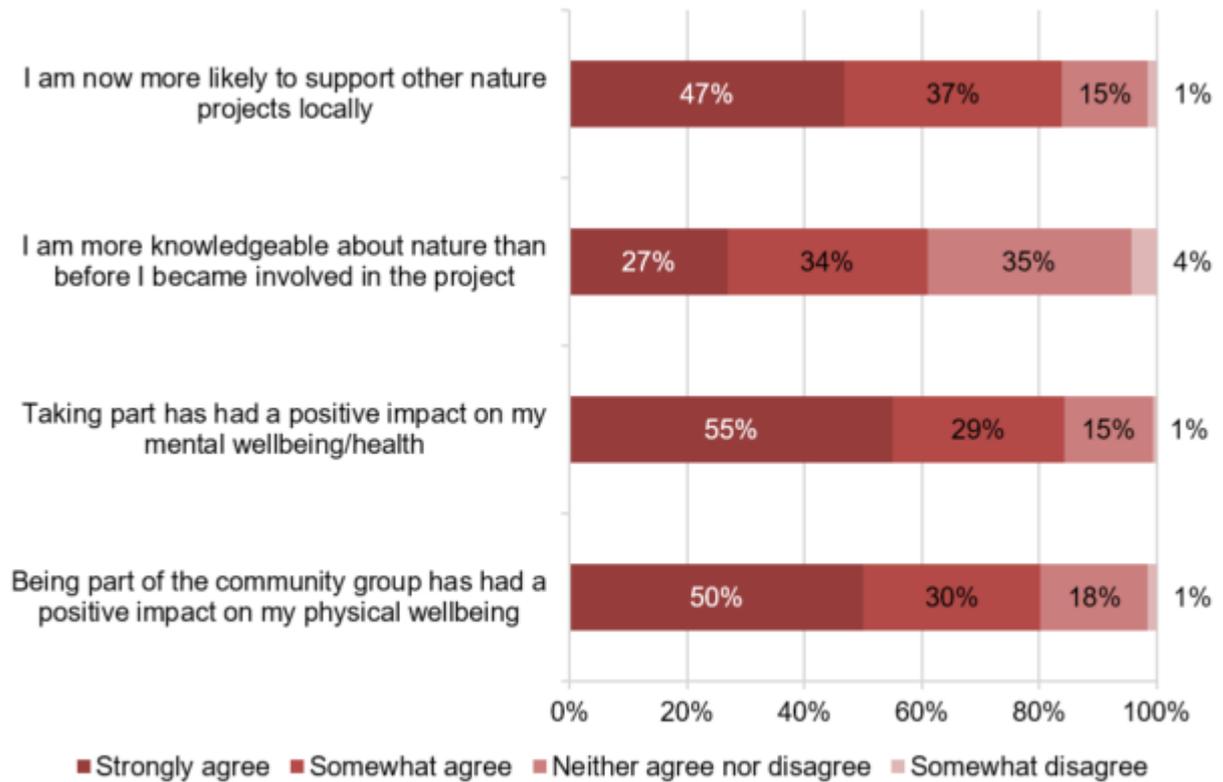
'This is a capital programme — we must remember that. It's a capital installation programme. We've done a capital installation programme, not a skills programme over some long term. We'd like it to be [a skill development programme], but that's not possible under a capital programme.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

- 5.46 Consequently, the wider impact of the scheme, beyond the creation of accessible spaces for nature, should realistically be expected in the longer term and as a result of continued engagement with the spaces by the groups and communities. Therefore, the programme and its delivery staff may only have enough capacity to establish and encourage sustained engagement within its lifespan. This report has noted that they intend to continue to encourage groups to sustain their engagement.

Impact

- 5.47 As Figure 5.3 above suggests, package recipients are very much of the view that the work has helped to create new spaces in which to access and enjoy nature. Indeed, over nine in 10 (93 per cent) recipients felt this to some or a greater extent.
- 5.48 Survey respondents were also asked a series of questions relating to the impact that the programme has had upon the respondents themselves, their group, and the wider community. Figure 5.10 below presents the responses to questions about the impact on individuals. The data suggests that engaging in the project is largely securing the kind of impact desired. The majority agree to some extent that taking part has had a positive impact on their mental (84 per cent) or physical well-being (80 per cent), with only a small minority (one per cent) disagreeing.

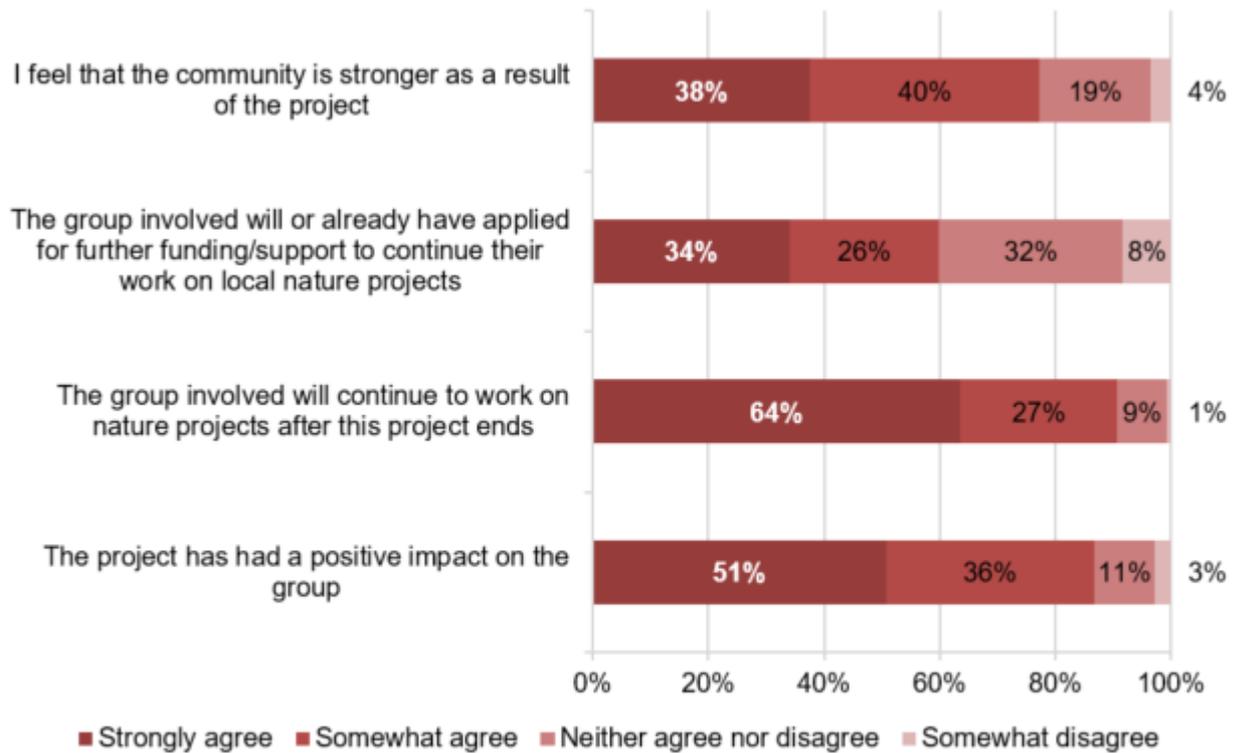
Figure 5.10: Impact on individuals



N=142

- 5.49 The majority (84 per cent) also felt that they were now more likely to support other nature projects locally as a result of their engagement with the programme. This suggests that the pre-paid packages are succeeding in not only generating engagement and interest but also sustaining engagement with nature projects.
- 5.50 Over half of respondents (61 per cent) to the survey also claimed to have become more knowledgeable about nature. The focus groups suggested that some groups and group leaders were experienced horticulturalists, suggesting that a relatively basic and entry-level or starter package would not be a significant learning opportunity.
- 5.51 Figure 5.11, meanwhile, presents responses in relation to the impact of the package upon their group and community. Here, responses were also positive in relation to the impact of engaging with the programme.

Figure 5.11: Impact on the group and community



N=142

5.52 The majority felt that the work had a positive impact on the group (87 per cent), and that the community was stronger as a result of the project (78 per cent). What is more, the data suggests that the programme has engaged groups with nature projects and that the engagement will be sustained. The majority (91 per cent) suggested that their group would continue to work on nature projects after the end of the package.

Sustaining impact

5.53 Over half (60 per cent) also stated that they will apply (or had already applied) for further funding or support in order to sustain their engagement with nature projects. Indeed, focus group participants spoke of having applied for additional packages after the first, as well as progressing to the development package or even engaging with wider funding sources to sustain activity. The findings from interviews with NLHF management (below) also suggest that package holders are expressing interest in the capital grants scheme. This suggests that there is a clear desire amongst participating groups to continue their engagement with nature projects:

'For me, [I] went on to get another two grants from a postcode lottery. I think it was two. We called it from the earth to the table. So we're actually going to grow vegetables and then cook the vegetables and then give a recipe book of how to grow and how to eat the vegetables. So it spurred us on to do other things in a wider sense, as I say. And the Housing Association want to develop a plot next to us as allotments. So I think it's spurred on. It's just sort of, like, a little shoot into a big bush (or something).' **(KWT Package Holders Focus Group, 2021)**

5.54 Focus group participants also offered how their activities were developing and how they aim to sustain their engagement with the wider community:

'Yeah, just we are planning to have some open days when that's allowed. Just so we can, we can maybe do us a seed swap that may be not until next year, but we want to develop some of those kinds of ideas as well. [We want] to let the local people come into the community and into the allotments, have a look around, learn things, [and] maybe buy excess vegetables or some flowers or herbs they've grown. And, yeah, so we do intend this kind of open out the scope of the allotment to the local people.' **(KWT Package Holders Focus Group, 2021)**

5.55 The management staff, meanwhile, noted their intention to remain in contact with the grant holders for at least five years. Over the period they aim to engage with the groups to evaluate the impact on them over a period of time, as well as monitoring the degree to which the groups are sustaining their engagement with the spaces. Moreover, staff will seek to encourage groups to develop their engagement further and apply for other grants, including other schemes within LPfN:

'Next year we'll go back to the urban area packages and encourage them to move on from a starter package to a development package or to contact the [National Lottery]. We've got to keep in touch with them anyway, so we'll keep on suggesting that. For those, we definitely want them to carry on and do more.' **(Management Interview, 2021)**

6. Stakeholder Views

6.1 The level of stakeholder involvement with the LPfN programme was varied. Generally, stakeholders were not involved directly in delivery. Involvement and engagement tended to be at a policy level and/or as a member of an applications panel. A few were involved in facilitating and supporting a specific element of the programme, such as helping to devise elements of the programme and supporting the application for funding the scheme. However, there was no involvement with detailed “on the ground” implementation of the scheme.

Rationale, objectives, and programme design

6.2 The rationale was articulated in a variety of ways, with a strong consensus on the context for the programme. However, there was a marked contrast in emphasis between the community focus of the programme and the focus on nature/climate. For some, for example, the programme was ‘[...] *at the heart of a response to the nature/climate crisis*’ (**Stakeholder Interview, 2021**). For others, however, the aim was primarily:

‘To improve people’s nature experiences in the places where they live and work. [It] also has a recreational purpose [...] local action on the jewels in the crown.’
(Stakeholder Interview, 2021)

6.3 More generally, several stakeholders expressed scepticism towards the logic of the approach adopted by LPfN. Many suggested that the programme was unlikely to achieve any significant impact on nature and biodiversity, and that a large-scale programme ‘*that can be seen from space*’ (**Stakeholder Interview, 2021**) is required (rather than the smaller-scale and varied approach of the LPfN).

6.4 One stakeholder, for example, in relation to the KWT scheme specifically, warned that they had seen community planting come and go and that these all too often fall into disrepair. Furthermore, the community planting programme does very little to promote connectivity. It was felt that there was too much emphasis on planters, which ‘*trivialises the scale of space that is required*’ (**Stakeholder Interview, 2021**).

6.5 However, these comments may have assumed that the small-scale KWT packages were the core of the LPfN, rather than a specific component designed to attract and encourage engagement for the first time. More generally, it is possible that the unclear communication of the rationale and logic of the programme, coupled with

the inability to engage with and experience the breadth of the programme, may be limiting the extent to which stakeholders can support and help to develop the programme. However, it is outside of the scope of the current research to identify this for certain.

Strategic “fit” and rationale

- 6.6 Stakeholders linked the programme to the Convention on Biodiversity,¹⁴ as well as the National Plan for Wales,¹⁵ where it relates to well-being and climate priorities. Another interviewee highlighted the strong links to the Well-being of Future Generations Act, suggesting that it manifests itself in the local partnership elements of the programme with links to other areas.
- 6.7 There was a recognition that the nature crisis and the climate crisis are two sides of the same coin. In terms of a wider understanding of the context, the declaration of a climate emergency by some local authorities was seen to be a key motivation for the programme.
- 6.8 It was also noted that local authorities have control over considerable amounts of land, which provides a significant opportunity to manage change in practices. The programme consequently presented opportunities to effect change across Wales. This was not explicitly linked to the work of LNPs through LPfN, suggesting a potential lack of awareness of the operational details of the programme amongst stakeholders.
- 6.9 In terms of other Welsh Government programmes, all interviewees referred to the National Forest programme¹⁶ and the need to ensure coordination. Key for stakeholders was that the LPfN programme was not isolated, but rather linked to complementary programmes where possible.
- 6.10 Stakeholders also noted that the pandemic has thrown a new light on how little funding and action exist for the nature emergency in comparison to the health emergency.

¹⁴ [Convention on Biological Diversity](#)

¹⁵ [Future Wales: the National Plan 2040 \(Welsh Government\)](#)

¹⁶ [National Forest for Wales \(Welsh Government\)](#)

Design

- 6.11 One interviewee referred to the cohesion between the schemes, highlighting how members of KWT, the WCVA and the NLHF cross-reference applications, seek advice and sit on one another's panels. This was assumed to be a particular strength of the design of the programme.
- 6.12 A key factor was the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local partnerships in enabling the programme to operate. The role of the WCVA and KWT in coordinating these partnerships was also seen to be a key factor in allowing the programme to progress.
- 6.13 However, a few interviewees expressed a fear that an overreliance on the third sector reduces the stake of local authorities. In their view, there needed to be a balance between the public and third sectors. One interviewee suggested that there was a risk that the programme relied too much on the goodwill and capacities on the ground, linking this with disappointment at a lack of uptake in the scheme by some nature-based NGOs.
- 6.14 There was also some concern surrounding the sustainability of some projects in terms of aftercare, and that some good proposals had not come forward because of worries about the costs of this. More generally, there was a tendency to favour sustainable and secure, rather than short-term, project funding, with volunteers being tasked with the sustainability.

Delivery

- 6.15 Stakeholders, distanced from operational delivery and limited in their engagement with the spaces being created due to the pandemic restrictions, limited their comments in relation to delivery.
- 6.16 One interviewee stated that it can be difficult to promote ideas, with a need for 'pulses' of communication, rather than a [sic] '*big bang up front*' (**Stakeholder Interview, 2021**). Additionally, the interviewee suggested that calling all three schemes the same thing did not help, as some people may have been confused and unable to find the scheme that suited their needs the best. However, this issue was not raised during the wider fieldwork for this evaluation.

- 6.17 Some project sites place QR codes on boards to promote understanding, support and contacts and encourage activities. This was thought to be a particularly innovative and useful approach to raising awareness and knowledge.
- 6.18 Some stakeholders also emphasised a wider changing relationship with nature as a result of the pandemic, suggesting the opportunity for the LPfN programme to tap into the demand:

[Before COVID-19] there was a lot of emphasis on social prescribing of mental health and access to nature, but there are difficulties in providing this to deprived areas [...]. [But] people discovered the connection to nature because of lockdown — we have been inundated by people needing to engage with nature.'

(Stakeholder Interview, 2021)

Impact and legacy

- 6.19 Discussions in relation to the impact of the programme also tended to be rooted in theoretical arguments relating to the logic and approach of the programme. Stakeholders claimed, for example, that the level of action is not such that it will respond to the nature and climate emergency. In their view, the Welsh Government was approaching this challenge from the wrong end. This may suggest, however, that stakeholders have not fully appreciated the scale of the intervention, and appear to expect a bigger and more ambitious programme than that which LPfN aims to be. However, identifying whether this was the case was outside of the scope of the current research.
- 6.20 Some also suggested that by integrating a focus on well-being, community cohesion, and action with a focus on the climate, ecosystem and nature, the result was likely to be a diluted and less effective response to all challenges, rather than a constructive response to one.
- 6.21 On the matter of sustaining engagement, there was a high degree of confidence that volunteers would continue to support efforts on behalf of nature, contradicting others who had questioned the likelihood of this happening. However, it was noted that goodwill, a good team of volunteers, reasonable costs, and a degree of land security would also support sustainability.
- 6.22 Indeed, the sustainability of the impact was a key concern for several stakeholders. A few suggested that schemes should avoid short-term contracts that parachute support into an area and *'disappear after two years'* **(Stakeholder Interview, 2021)**:

'By moving on they are not building local capacity. In reality, there should be tighter rules, confidence in local-level plans for [the] long term, plus diverse resources for long-term plans.' **(Stakeholder Interview, 2021)**

- 6.23 In terms of how the programme might be run differently, a few stated that the scale of land ownership is a critical factor, and private companies can be major influencers, arguing that in order to restore whole ecosystems, larger coalitions of partners are needed.

7. Conclusions

Discussion of Findings and Common Themes

Rationale and design

- 7.1 The three schemes are deliberately designed to reach different groups and appear to accomplish slightly different outcomes. There was evidence to suggest that, though different, the strands complement one another. Together they have the potential to effect change on a variety of scales, and in relation to a range of communities and individuals, as well as encouraging sustainability and prolonged engagement.
- 7.2 The WCVA's support for LNPs was thought to be particularly well designed to improve the management of nature spaces and increase access to them for the local communities. In being LNPs across Wales, they have the capacity to effect change across the country and on a scale on which the KWT packages or capital grants schemes cannot.
- 7.3 The focus on urban and peri-urban areas was thought to be less relevant to the LNPs. Rural coordinators in particular noted the more dispersed nature of deprivation and the wider travel and living geographies of rural people. It was more difficult to justify the locations of activity within the strict scope of the programme.

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government should consider relaxing the definition and geographical focus of some LNP work. This will enable the LNPs to effect change across a wider area which, though not necessarily urban or peri-urban and deprived, is (nonetheless) used by residents of deprived localities.

- 7.4 The legislative context should also be appreciated as a key motivating factor for local authorities. LPfN appears to complement and provide a means of meeting the statutory requirements of several key pieces of legislation, such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) and the Environment (Wales) Act (2016), as well as wider strategic priorities.
- 7.5 A key weakness within the WCVA's scheme appears to be the risk to the LNPs and their staff if wider funding is not sustained. With their funding scheduled to come to an end in 2022, the long-term role and capacity of the LNPs are in doubt. Whilst no specific recommendation can be made, the Welsh Government should,

nonetheless, remain aware of the risk to the LNPs, the dependency on wider funding streams, and the challenges that this poses for longer-term planning.

Recommendation 2: The lack of clarity surrounding the wider financial support for the LNPs/coordinators was a key barrier to long-term planning. LNP coordinator funding was a threat to the programme, with a risk to continued delivery existing through the LNPs if the wider funding does not continue. The Welsh Government should explore ways in which to provide certainty of funding and continuation to LNPs.

7.6 The NLHF capital grants programme, meanwhile, was deemed to be particularly effective in supporting wider master plans for the regeneration of particular areas in very specific and bespoke ways. The flexibility of the scheme had allowed many applicants, particularly town and community councils, to access capital funding for key, albeit often preparatory, work on sites that were designed to enable access and engagement with communities.

7.7 In theory, the grants were also able to act as a means of developing spaces that had benefitted from the KWT pre-paid packages, though to date, only enquiries have been made. This potential represents a means of supporting the sustainability of groups' engagement with nature.

Recommendation 3: The link between the KWT and NLHF schemes should be understood as a means of supporting the sustainability of the programme and the continued engagement of groups with nature projects. It may prove to be beneficial to explore the most effective means of encouraging relevant KWT package applicants to move towards further development of their sites through the capital grants scheme. This may consist of smaller taster grants, including a small grant component within the KWT development package, or even wider support in relation to constituting a group and upskilling members to manage grants.

7.8 A key weakness in the design of the NLHF capital grants scheme, however, was the lack of full cost recovery, which, it was felt, would enable medium-sized and large third sector organisations to engage with the programme. Funding uncertainty and an effective requirement to subsidise the programme were felt to be barriers to their engagement.

Recommendation 4: The Welsh Government may make the NLHF programme more attractive to medium-sized and large third sector organisations, as well as encouraging their engagement, if the organisations were able to recover the full costs of running projects.

- 7.9 The KWT packages sought to engage groups with nature projects, particularly new groups. The first year of the programme has provided proof of this concept, with a range of groups, including newly formed groups, engaging with the packages. More generally, the scheme appears to play a valuable role in initiating engagement with nature and encouraging the groups to develop their activities either with a development package or by approaching the NLHF capital grants scheme.
- 7.10 However, stakeholders questioned the extent of the impact of the KWT packages, given the small scale of the interventions, upon nature and biodiversity. Whilst the scepticism is understandable and the specific impacts on nature are yet to be measured, this evaluation suggests that the KWT strand of the scheme should be understood alongside the others. It should be understood as a component that appears to be more people- and community-focused, with the installation of capital assets, the provision of equipment, and assisting first-time groups in taking their initial steps as its key successes.
- 7.11 Established groups (experienced in nature projects) as well as town and community councils are also accessing the packages. This was largely due to their accessibility and attractiveness as an easy way in which to receive investment in equipment and materials. The established groups appear to be using the packages to add to and enhance existing nature spaces. The programme, therefore, is not always supporting the creation of new spaces for nature, but rather sometimes enhancing existing spaces or attracting new groups to engage with nature.
- 7.12 The automatic approval of town and community councils has also led in some instances, data suggests, to packages being installed in rural and in non-urban/peri-urban areas of deprivation. Package applicants themselves were largely of the view that nature spaces were relatively accessible in their localities. This may be a subjective issue related to respondents' perceptions, but it remains that the scheme is likely to be engaging with a wider range of spaces than it was established to target.

Recommendation 5: More could be done to maximise the perceived strengths of the KWT scheme, namely its capacity to attract new groups in urban and peri-urban areas of deprivation. The KWT management team may wield more control and influence over the nature of groups receiving the packages, as well as placing more emphasis on urban and peri-urban areas of deprivation, if all town and community councils were not automatically approved for packages.

7.13 Whilst the packages stimulate engagement with nature and are already leading to community and individual impacts, the scheme itself is essentially a capital installation scheme. KWT management have few means, beyond the limited engagement of project officers on site with volunteers, by which to develop skills and support effective engagement with the spaces to generate the anticipated well-being and community benefits. However, the project officers have, albeit currently not funded to do so, the potential to offer more support to volunteers to develop skills and share good practice that may help to secure the anticipated well-being and community benefits.

7.14 All schemes are thought to have benefitted from an increasing demand to access more spaces of nature. The aftermath of the lockdown may prove to be a unique opportunity to engage people with nature-based, biodiversity-based, environmental and conservational volunteering.

Recommendation 6: The Welsh Government should consider the unique opportunity and the spikes in demand and interest that may result from the lockdown. Actions within the post-lockdown period, particularly if effectively communicated, may have the potential to yield more impact and attract more interest than in other periods. The Welsh Government should use this opportunity to secure more value for investment in or the promotion of programmes (such as LPfN) that seek to engage people with nature-based volunteering.

7.15 All schemes have also been challenged by strict deadlines. Whilst the capital grants scheme can offer more flexibility to its grant holders, the other two funding branches have faced an increased administrative burden and workload as a result of the short lifespan of the demonstrator fund, and need to produce second-year plans alongside administering a difficult year of delivery.

Delivery

- 7.16 All schemes have been significantly affected by the pandemic. The impact on the procurement and availability of deliveries, equipment and materials, as well as the backlog of work delaying the engagement of contractors with some sites, has delayed work. In the case of the KWT scheme, project officers have supported delivery, whilst the other schemes have had to delay follow-on work.
- 7.17 Importantly, the numbers and demographics of participating individuals may differ if and when the pandemic and the related control measures diminish in impact. It is thought that the 18–44 and 75+ age categories of participants may have faced significant barriers to participation due to shielding and vulnerability or childcare and caring responsibilities.
- 7.18 Most impactful, however, is the significant restriction to volunteering and individual or community engagement across all schemes and sites. Given the core aims of the programme, the impact that has been evidenced within this report must be understood within this context, and in all likelihood, a wider and bigger scale of impact may have been possible had the lockdowns not restricted engagement with the spaces to the extent that they have.
- 7.19 Furthermore, key stakeholders are likely to have been restricted from engaging with the programme to some or a greater extent due to the impact of the pandemic.
- 7.20 Some LNP coordinators suggested that disadvantaged communities were difficult to engage with nature programmes. The evaluation team felt that this perception should be challenged. The view contradicts the rationale of the programme to some extent, as well as the experiences and successes of the KWT scheme in engaging such communities and groups. The view also contrasts with the perception of NLHF capital grants scheme management, who suggested that town and community councils are effective in engaging with local communities.

Recommendation 7: The programme should seek to facilitate the sharing of experiences and good practice in relation to engaging disadvantaged communities. More specifically, LNP coordinators should seek to engage with KWT and NLHF scheme management, as well as the town and community councils involved in the capital grants scheme, or engage in wider reflection of their own engagement practices.

7.21 KWT package holders expressed dissatisfaction in relation to the source of many of the components of the packages received. Many items have been sourced from outside of Wales due to scarcity and a lack of capacity to meet significant orders. KWT scheme managers suggest that, where possible, items be sourced locally. The scheme does, nonetheless, represent an opportunity to invest in local economies, and the more that is spent in Wales, the more that local communities will benefit. Moreover, the environmental cost of longer delivery distances may offset some benefits secured by the packages once installed.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government may wish to consider the supply chain that supports the scheme. The Welsh Government and the KWT scheme management may, for example, seek to give due notice to key suppliers in Wales to encourage an expansion of capacity to meet demand. Assurance of the long-term sustainability of the programme, as well as coordination with wider Welsh Government nature schemes, will give further confidence to suppliers in Wales to invest in being able to supply the ongoing demand.

A further option may be for programme management to include within the development packages a capital grant for discretionary spending for the groups. This latter approach may further support the development of groups and encourage, even on a small scale, groups and individuals to develop experiences and skills related to grant management and expenditure. This expenditure is more likely to be spent within the locality and offset the concerns surrounding the sourcing of materials. Programme management should also explore and consider the benefits of employing facilitators to work within groups.

Impact

7.22 Due to delays in the delivery of the programme and the early stage at which this evaluation took place, it is not yet possible for the full impacts of the programme to be observed. Despite this, the data suggests that the KWT packages are having a positive impact on individuals and communities. Moreover, the data suggests that groups are planning to sustain their engagement with nature projects.

7.23 The project officers were widely thought to be valuable assets for the scheme. Their support in delivering some projects due to barriers to volunteer engagement was thought to be vital in some instances. In future, however, it is less likely (if the impact of the pandemic diminishes) that they will be needed to support as much of

the delivery of projects. However, their site visits were thought to involve the sharing of good practice and information with volunteers and groups. This element may be key to developing the skills and knowledge of often first-time nature volunteers. What is more, their expertise may be a means by which the scheme can support groups in sustaining their engagement and developing their work and projects.

- 7.24 Project officers are also likely sources of insight into the groups and individuals engaging with the programme, as well as the communities being targeted. They consequently represent key sources of knowledge and experience.

Recommendation 9: Programme management and KWT scheme management should explore and consider the benefits of increasing the resource and time available for project officers to work with groups. Management should also seek to maximise opportunities to share knowledge and engagement practices with and amongst project officers and other schemes.

- 7.25 It was widely felt, however, that due to the delays to delivery as well as the fact that many of the community impacts of the spaces will not be visible or measurable until at least spring 2021, beyond the completion of works and the establishment of new practices, the work of the LNPs was difficult to gauge. The monitoring data suggests, however, that these latter aspects are being delivered.

- 7.26 Though likely too early at this stage, concern and uncertainty were, nonetheless, expressed in relation to the methods and tools that may be employed in order to measure and monitor the impact of the LNPs' work upon individuals and communities.

Recommendation 10: The Welsh Government should consider supporting the LNPs and their staff with tools and training to be able to capture data that will enable an effective evaluation of the impact of their activities upon communities. In practice, this may mean sharing good practice and tools such as surveys or case study examples between coordinators. If standardised tools could be developed, this would greatly support efforts to compare the impact across LNPs in the future.

Sustaining impact

- 7.27 The data suggests that the KWT package holders plan to sustain their engagement with nature projects on the whole. There is evidence that some package holders are applying for additional packages and moving on to the development packages. KWT's role in supporting this development is key and may require additional

resource if the scale of progression grows in time; in other words, if more starter package groups look to move on to development packages, KWT will likely need to offer more support and guidance.

- 7.28 There was evidence also of KWT package holders expressing an interest in developing their spaces in a more bespoke manner and doing so by seeking to access the capital grants scheme. This report has recommended that the Welsh Government seek to develop the link between the schemes and support the transition from one to the other (see Recommendation 2).
- 7.29 The LNPs and the NLHF schemes, meanwhile, have incorporated their sustainability plans into their designs and planning. Furthermore, the local authorities and (for many capital grant holders) the town and community councils offer a resource to support continued engagement with the spaces.
- 7.30 However, little is known about the impact of the pandemic upon volunteer groups, and whilst still in touch with project leads in many instances, the extent of the impact on the capacity of groups to engage and assume the maintenance of sites is uncertain. A risk exists, therefore, that the pandemic may have proven to be too challenging for the groups responsible for sustaining activities and spaces, or that the work of doing so may now prove to be too burdensome. The prospect of prolonged pandemic control measures may further jeopardise volunteer groups' capacity to support and sustain the activities and spaces in the mid-term or long term.

Recommendation 11: LNPs and NLHF capital grant holders should consider monitoring or auditing the capacity of volunteer groups, particularly those who are expected to assume responsibility for sustaining and maintaining spaces.

- 7.31 In relation to possible developments in the future, as well as sustaining the impact beyond the lifespan of the programme, contributors suggested that bringing wider partners in to support delivery would offer a range of benefits. These may be medium-sized and large third sector organisations, or private sector partners that may offer a means of subsidising activities.
- 7.32 More generally, and particularly with regard to changing practices such as mowing, hedge trimming, or encouraging wildflowers and biodiversity, the programme may secure wider and more significant impact on nature if such practices are shared widely. Longer-term potential exists with regard to influencing planning regulation or

less formal engagement with private landowners in order to encourage similarly beneficial practices to be adopted.

- 7.33 Finally, and in relation to the management of all three schemes and the programme, there is considerable evidence that the demonstrator fund has encouraged a critical and constructive learning process. Effective internal evaluation cycles have been evidenced throughout the programme. Coupled with the considerable practical experience of delivering within a particularly challenging context, the management and delivery teams appear to be well placed and informed to improve and refine the programme during the 2021–2022 year.
- 7.34 A key challenge, however, may be the need to engage with wider stakeholders who appear to be sceptical of the programme. Exposure to both the achievements and the impacts of the programme, as well as the logic of its small-scale but widespread approach, may help to generate wider support and engagement with the programme and its objectives.

Key Research Questions

Has the programme helped to create ‘nature on your doorstep’ in urban and peri-urban areas? And if so, in what ways?

- 7.35 Due to delays in the delivery of the programme and the early stage at which this evaluation took place, it is not yet possible for the full impacts of the programme to be observed. Despite this, the data strongly suggests that all three schemes, though delayed by the impact of the pandemic, have created or will create new spaces of ‘nature on your doorstep’. All three schemes have achieved this. Due to the nature of the KWT packages, more data is available for this, which suggests that KWT packages are used to enhance and develop existing spaces.
- 7.36 The spaces created, however, are not exclusively in urban and peri-urban areas. The automatic approval of more than 200 KWT packages for town and community councils, many in rural locations, has restricted the ability to focus exclusively on urban or peri-urban areas. KWT’s proposed plans for the 2021–2022 period, however, aim to focus more explicitly on these areas, as well as targeting specific minority and disadvantaged groups.

7.37 Moreover, the data available did not allow any judgement in relation to the quality of the nature spaces, and to whether the packages were improving the nature spaces (or to the extent thereof). Even where there is an abundance of accessible nature spaces, therefore, the scheme may (or may not) be improving the quality of those spaces. Future evaluations or management teams may wish to explore this element, as it may represent an important and added value.

7.38 LNP coordinators and capital grants schemes define rural and peri-urban areas of deprivation more loosely and give consideration to the groups that will access and benefit from the sites, not simply their geographical location. This more nuanced interpretation of urban and peri-urban areas should be maintained to enable the schemes to capitalise on a key strength of their design, namely their flexibility.

What impact has the programme had upon individuals and groups involved?

7.39 The data suggests that the KWT packages have had a positive impact on individuals and groups who have engaged with the work and spaces. Respondents confirmed the logic of the programme by reporting improved physical and mental well-being as a result of the activities.

7.40 Respondents also noted wider impacts such as a desire to continue their engagement with nature projects and to support other local and national nature programmes.

7.41 However, the pandemic has limited the engagement with the spaces and, consequently, the scale of the impact. A logical assumption, therefore, is that the programme may secure the impact with more people and groups once the lockdown restrictions are lifted and the levels of engagement can increase.

7.42 The LNPs and capital grants schemes, meanwhile, were significantly impacted and largely delayed by the pandemic. Engagement with volunteer groups had not started to a significant extent, beyond involving communities in plans and designs for the spaces. The impact on individuals and groups in relation to these schemes is therefore more likely in the longer term.

How sustainable is the engagement of the groups with local nature?

- 7.43 There was evidence that all volunteers and groups were aiming to maintain their engagement with nature programmes, if not the LPfN programme specifically. Some KWT package holders were progressing to more starter packages and sometimes the development package.
- 7.44 KWT staff, meanwhile, were aiming to monitor the groups for a further five years to track and gather data on the sustainability of their engagement. The insight generated will enable KWT to highlight support requirements and capacity issues in the future.
- 7.45 LNPs had planned for specific groups and (in some cases) the local authority to support the maintenance of spaces and practices. Meanwhile, the capital grants projects were often components or the initial steps in a wider master plan for community councils or groups leading the work. These wider plans included bringing volunteers and groups to support the maintenance of sites, or engaging schools and nursing homes to ensure regular use of the spaces.
- 7.46 However, though in contact with scheme management teams and LNP coordinators, it is unclear as to what impact the pandemic has had upon volunteer groups and their capacity to engage following the pandemic. Furthermore, it is unclear as to what impact continued pandemic control measures, such as social distancing, will have upon the capacity of volunteer groups to sustain their engagement and support for the sites. It is recommended in this report (Recommendation 11) that LNPs and the capital grant leads monitor and even audit the capacity and requirements of volunteer groups, particularly those who are tasked with sustaining and maintaining the sites.

Annexe A: Summary of LNP Plans

LNP Plans 2020–2021	Environmental Growth on Your Doorstep	Greening the Public Estate
Anglesey	Purchase of small tractor and flail cutter for roadside verge conservation management and grassland management.	Establish areas of native wildflower meadow and native trees/shrubs around Anglesey Council offices and the library in Llangefni.
Blaenau Gwent	Hedgerow planting and management of other hedgerows across Blaenau Gwent. Wildflower meadow management in Blaenau Gwent.	Verge management and public communication for long grass and wildflower areas and associated benefits for pollinators in Blaenau Gwent.
Brecon Beacons NPA	Remove Japanese knotweed control along 9km of River Usk SAC & SSSI to allow restoration of special habitats. Reduction of Crassula dominance in Mynydd Illtyd.	Purchase of a seed harvester to collect native seed. Purchase of fruit trees to establish mini orchards. Planting of flowering shrubs around and under the existing trees. Establish a range of wildflower plug plants.
Bridgend	Habitat management, restoration and planting at Ogmore Washeries to become a key metapopulation site for butterflies.	NA
Caerphilly	Urban Green Spaces for Wildlife; Hedgerow Creation, Management and Restoration; Greening Public Buildings; Greening Strategic Gateway Entrance(s).	The project aims to enhance strategic Green Infrastructure across Caerphilly County Borough by targeting a plethora of improvements within country parks, cycleways, and other land managed by the local authority.
Cardiff	Improve the condition of 20ha meadow and create 1875m ² of new pollinator habitat through meadow management and increased pollinator-friendly planting at various sites.	Green walls will be installed at two council buildings in areas of poor air quality.
Carmarthenshire	NA	Previously unmanaged/hard-to-manage habitats on council-owned or council-managed sites will be restored or enhanced through the purchase of a specialist remote control flail mower.

LNP Plans 2020–2021	Environmental Growth on Your Doorstep	Greening the Public Estate
Ceredigion	In-stream woody habitat improvement along 2km of the Afon Ystwyth and 1km of fencing and tree planting along Afon Teifi. Improved grazing regime at Denmark Farm and better management of meadow.	NA
Conwy	Current mowing regimes will be amended to create areas of species-rich wildflower meadow and pollinator “parks” on current areas of amenity grassland on the council’s estate. The change of management regimes would increase floral diversity and the creation of sites will improve connectivity.	Areas of living biodiverse species-rich green wall will be created in a public place. Create a functioning micro-ecosystem where currently there is concrete and tarmac/impervious landscaping to the exterior of the building.
Denbighshire	A new tree nursery for Denbighshire, growing trees of local provenance to be planted at sites across the county by Denbighshire County Council, local community groups, and Bionet members working within Denbighshire.	Create at least 10 new wildflower meadows across the county of Denbighshire. Create new bee-friendly sites. Convert underused amenity grasslands (currently species-poor and cut short on a fortnightly basis) into wildflower meadows. Provide nectar sources and egg-laying sites for invertebrates.
Flintshire	Pollinators for Places will create two exemplar sites and 10 orchards across sites owned and/or managed by LNP members within the county of Flintshire through changes in management regime.	Reducing the use of chemical herbicides which are detrimental to biodiversity. Purchase a Foamstream non-chemical weed control to prepare future sites for wildflower seeding.
Gwynedd	Habitat restoration (incl. eradication of Japanese knotweed along Barlwyd river). Creation of wildflower meadows and other habitats. Building improvements at Gwaith Powdwr to benefit bats and other wildlife.	Circa 15ha meadow, grassland and wildlife habitats created and restored on various grasslands owned and managed by Gwynedd Council.

LNP Plans 2020–2021	Environmental Growth on Your Doorstep	Greening the Public Estate
Merthyr Tydfil	Extend access to and usage of an underutilised piece of land that formerly contained disused play equipment and was too wet to traverse. Mini nature reserve, wetland/bog with bird hides, and walkways. The site will be a “hot spot for nature”.	Cut and collect machines will be purchased to manage amenity grassland areas in a new way, producing species-rich grasslands that will improve biodiversity and provide Well-being Wildflower Webs.
Monmouthshire	Restore neglected grasslands. Enhance school grounds with trees, grassland enhancement, and pollinator planting. Castle Meadows (Abergavenny) tree planting to create a copse.	Purchase equipment to transform grassland management in towns and villages to improve soil structure and water retention. These areas have become critically important open spaces to the communities in which they live during the COVID-19 crisis.
Neath Port Talbot (NPT)	Changing the management approach of areas to allow native flora to flourish. At least 5000m ² of roadside verge in active planting and seeding pollinator-friendly vegetation in low-nature-value areas. Increase pollinator-friendly vegetation coverage across NPT. Installation of an exemplar retrofitted green roof.	The Talking Trees project will facilitate the planting of tree/shrub/hedgerow species in appropriate sites across the council estate which have been identified as being in need of greening, of low nature value and/or where local people will benefit.
Newport	Change the mowing regimes of areas of grassland across the city in order to encourage native wildflowers to flourish. These will include meadows, roadside verges, cemeteries, and parks.	Barrack Hill is an SINC site, but the woodland is a hotspot for fly-tipping. Support nature recovery through increased active conservation management and engagement with local residents.
Pembrokeshire	Increase the biodiversity of Mill Pond (reed management, silt traps, and removal of algal blooms/invasive aquatic plants). New dipping platform to enable water quality monitoring and citizen science. Lockable trailer, tools and equipment for a new “Green Team” of volunteers coordinated by the county council in partnership with town councils.	Transform several PCC land holdings with increase in biodiversity, particularly pollinators, other invertebrates, and small mammals. Rewilding of County Hall through 200m ² flower-rich grassland and balcony boxes. Parade Woodland improvements through planting and coppicing. Seven-acre Himalayan balsam/scrub clearance and creation of Riverside Pocket Park.

LNP Plans 2020–2021	Environmental Growth on Your Doorstep	Greening the Public Estate
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority	Fencing around a 5ha wet meadow and wet heath to restore marsh frit habitat. 60 heritage fruit tree varieties to create a new orchard on St. Brides Green and schools. On Riverside Field, a new meadow, pond and scrape area, 70m boardwalk, and stone path creating new wildlife-rich habitats. Reduced INNS infestation at two sites.	Restore 0.25ha of wildflower meadow at Manorbier (which is in poor condition due to its small size and awkward slope) using a mini flail mower. Mini flail mower collectors. Remove cut vegetation to help reduce the nutrient load and improve plant diversity.
Powys	Additional rhos pasture through restoration of degraded habitat at two sites. Rhos pasture supports a wide range of species but is an essential habitat for the marsh fritillary butterfly.	Greening previously neglected public land and creating a dementia-friendly urban community garden will green walls and habitat piles. The location is both highly visible and accessible to the community.
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Enhance nature on at least 70ha of wildflower meadow, wetland, open space, and grass verges, incl. 10ha of grassland, much of which are small, urban or roadside grassland spaces which are more difficult to access using traditional machinery.	The Trees for Parks project will facilitate the planting of trees in 17 appropriate parks and cemeteries across RCT.
Snowdonia National Park Authority	Four churchyard sites transformed into community nature spaces. Restoring Gwaith Powdwr Nature Reserve bat-roosting buildings (e.).	Undertaking access management project and invasive species control. Purchasing a tracked chipper for chipping woody material derived from woodland.
Swansea	Restoration, enhancement and creation of existing and new habitats. Strengthen connectivity and ecosystem resilience and improve the ecosystem service benefits that they provide for the local community.	Creation of a new urban forest, planting new native and semi-native trees, hedgerows and woodlands within a number of LA-owned sites, and the establishment of a native provenance tree nursery.

LNP Plans 2020–2021	Environmental Growth on Your Doorstep	Greening the Public Estate
Torfaen	Hedgerow planting and management. Wildflower meadow management. More species-rich, joined-up wildflower meadows in better management will benefit invertebrates, birds and mammals.	Grassland corridors to join up habitats and reduce fragmentation. Change current management regimes from amenity grassland to an annual cut and collect programme. Wildflower plug planting. More grass verges will be better managed for wildflowers, benefitting pollinators as well as a wide range of other wildlife.
Wrexham	Increase green infrastructure within Wrexham town centre, increasing canopy cover through the planting of six large street trees, introducing more pollinator-friendly planting and having a large flagship asset (wall or rain garden) determined after a feasibility study.	Establish improved grassland management valuable for wildlife across the county. Improve wildflower diversity through improved grassland management and establish exemplar sites with additional seeding. Reduction of herbicide use through wider use of Foamstream machine.
Vale of Glamorgan	LNP partners to amend meadow habitat management to improve biodiversity. Management of 35ha of grassland and creation of three small wildflower areas of 350m ² in car parks at Cosmeston, Porthkerry, and Dunraven Bay.	The project will involve construction of a 3.5m x 15m Green Living Wall structure on the central entrance tower of the BSC2 building. The building is located in a previous industrial area with very little to no green infrastructure.

Annexe B: All Approved NLHF Projects

- a. *Wildlife and community growing*: Pembrey and Burry Port Town Council to transform four sites for places for nature (£50k, July 2020).
- b. *Mowing practices*: Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Local Nature Partnership to purchase mower for roadside verges throughout the boroughs (£47.5k, July 2020).
- c. *Community growing space and transform sites*: Bedlinog and Trelewis Community Council (£50k, Sept. 2020).
- d. Accessible community growing space and woodland garden in Vale of Clwyd Mind (£22k, Sept. 2020).
- e. *Natural growing spaces by Llanelli Town Council to extend and enhance nature in Crown Park* (£20k, Sept. 2020).
- f. *Wildflower meadow, sensory garden and wildlife trail*: Dolwen Field Committee, Llanwrtyd (£17.6k, Sept. 2020).
- g. *Mowing practices*: Monmouthshire Local Nature Partnership to purchase mowers to facilitate mowing practice change in open spaces and street verges in designated deprived communities (£94k, Sept. 2020).
- h. *Pollinators: Ray Centre (Aberaeron) will transform a tarmac yard and roof space into a place for nature* (£35.2k, 1 Oct. 2020).
- i. *Community growing: Clubhouse Committee (Mold) will provide a community growing space* (£29.4k, 1 Oct. 2020).
- j. *Mowing practices: Rogerstone Community Council (Newport) will transform open mowed space for nature and community use* (£21.3k, 1 Oct. 2020).
- k. *Pollinators and orchards*: Tywi Gateway at Bishops Gardens. Restore garden with plants for pollination, restore semi-ancient woodland, plant native apple trees, protect the otter holt (£22.9k, 29 Oct. 2020).
- l. *Pollinators*: Abergavenny Natur Grow Env (£15.2k, 29 Oct. 2020). Castle Meadows. 197 metres of new green corridors. Planters with visually stimulating pollinator-friendly plants.

- m. *Wildlife*: Johnstown Crassula eradication (£49.9k, 29 Oct. 2020). Eradicate invasive non-native Crassula from Stryt Las nature reserve and Aberderfyn nature reserve to protect wildlife including great crested newts.
- n. *Community growing, pollinators, and wildlife*: Pwllheli Town Council: Develop allotment at leisure centre, create outdoor learning space, plant wildflowers, and manage invasive species. The site is currently subject to neglect and antisocial behaviour (£15k, 29 Oct. 2020).
- o. *Pollinators*: Bryn Bach Park Sensory Garden (£11.1k, 29 Oct. 2020). Reclaimed formerly derelict land between a lake and a children's play area.
- p. *Community growing and pollinators*: Criccieth (£20.8k, 29 Oct. 2020). Create 2752.89m² of accessible green space (including a community allotment (25 plots) and butterfly garden to create a habitat corridor).
- q. *Community growing and pollinators*: Mumbles Community Council; Mumbles Urban Green Spaces will restore and enhance 1200m² of overgrown land adjacent to Oystermouth Castle to assist consolidation of the Margam to Mumbles pollinator corridor. The proposal also includes a community allotment to encourage and support those on low incomes, food bank users, vulnerable members of the community, and local residents (£39,927, Nov. 2020).
- r. *Green infrastructure*: Transport for Wales Green Routes. Collaborate with community partners, introduce measures to enhance biodiversity, and reconnect passengers and local communities with nature. Enhance 22 stations to create more green spaces including green roofs, green walls, planters, hanging baskets, bird houses, bug hotels, and butterfly houses. Create five community green spaces (each within 1km from a station). Community gardens will include allotments, orchards, and flower, herb and sensory gardens to attract pollinators (£100k, Nov. 2020).
- s. *Pollinators*: Amman Valley: A Water Garden For Tairgwaith Village. Create a water garden on a brownfield former pit spoil site adjacent to the villages of Tairgwaith and Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen (£13.4k, Nov. 2020).
- t. *Pollinators*: Therapeutic garden for life-limited children at Tŷ Hafan. A therapeutic/sensory garden for seriously ill children with disabilities/complex needs at Tŷ Hafan Children's Hospice. The project will convert a disused space

into a sensory garden and woodland space, made accessible for children in wheelchairs and beds (£72.4k, Nov. 2020).

- u. *Pollinators*: Temple Gardens, Llandrindod Town. The old rose garden at Temple Gardens is derelict and neglected and a place in which litter accumulates. Planting a wildlife and sensory garden and the erection of bird, bat and bug hotels will support pollinators and increase species and habitat diversity (£16k, Dec. 2020).
- v. *Community orchard and change mowing practices*: Peri-urban site within the 19th century walled kitchen garden at Margam Country Park. Create a community orchard with native varieties of fruit trees. Change machinery and mowing practices to create a wildlife-friendly meadow (£35.8k, Dec. 2020).
- w. *Pollinators*: Bryn Conservation Grazing. Restore and enhance 23ha of habitat and biodiversity at Bryn Tip Local Nature Reserve. Bryn is amongst the 30–50 per cent most deprived areas in Wales (£31.2k, Dec. 2020).
- x. *Pollinators, community growing*: Tŷ Croes Growing Together, Llanedi. Develop a wildflower corridor for the marsh fritillary butterfly. Create a community orchard (improving drainage around a scout hall) and develop a community growing space (£48.9k, Dec. 2020).
- y. *Community growing and community orchard*: Project Datblygu Gardd Cymunedol Tref Caernarfon. Develop grounds of Arfon Leisure Centre into community gardens. Develop allotments to be used by the Arfon Healthy Living Cafe and Learning Disabilities Teams to produce meals on wheels in the cafe kitchens in the leisure centre. Community orchard and sensory garden (£33.3k, Jan. 2020).
- z. *Change mowing practices*: Cwmaman Enhanced Grasslands mowing change regime project. Tractor unit and cut and collect machine to assist three town and community councils (Cwmaman, Llannon, Llanedi) to make changes to mowing practices. A set of scythes to allow community members to engage with sustainable grassland/meadow management (£76.7k, Feb. 2021).

aa. *Pollinators*: Cwmaman: Community Conservation. The project will restore a wildflower meadow with particular attention paid to devil's-bit scabious, vital to the marsh fritillary lifecycle. Create specially designed (pied flycatcher, barn owl, and dormouse) nest boxes and hedgehog boxes to be installed in parks, woodlands and gardens throughout the valley (£19.6k, Feb. 2021).