



# Local Places for Nature evaluation 2021–22

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## Summary

### 1. The Programme

- 1.1 The Local Places for Nature (LPfN) programme was established in December 2019 with the primary focus of ‘creating nature on your doorstep at scale and pace’. LPfN aims to engage communities to participate in the process to create and significantly enhance green spaces to support ‘nature on your doorstep’, rather than communities being passive recipients or observers of nature. The programme seeks to encourage and fund community groups, on a ‘bottom-up’ basis, to engage in small-scale growing in spaces within their communities. It targets urban and peri-urban areas and public spaces that lack access to nature, and deprived and disadvantaged communities in particular. However, the definition of deprivation, while drawing on standardised definitions and measurements, remains relatively flexible.
- 1.2 A number of ‘modest measures’ have been identified for the programme, which are intended to make a local impact in communities across Wales:
- Increase wildflower planting; creating 2,000 pollinator habitat sites
  - Restore or create 200 community orchards, cultivating native fruit
  - Increase community food growing opportunities by creating 1,000 community food growing sites including the provision of allotments
  - Encourage wildflowers and improve biodiversity by changing mowing practices of local authorities (& other public authorities) and increasing meadow areas on sloping land
  - Increase local tree planting, including street trees, orchards and small woodlands
  - Reduce the use of pesticides
  - Create 100 dense and diverse woodlands, each the size of a tennis court
  - Improve public access to drinking water
  - Create 50 habitat creation schemes at rail stations and transport interchanges
  - Sensory gardens for therapeutic purposes, delivered in partnership with health charities and the Welsh NHS.
- 1.3 Three schemes (or strands) fall under the overall LPfN programme. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) administers the largest (with a budget of £6m in 2021–22), through its role with Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) Cymru, a nature recovery network with coordinators in every Local Authority (LA) and national park authority (NPA) across Wales. The budget is distributed directly to LNP coordinators, enabling them to plan and deliver large projects that will have a bigger impact on the area’s biodiversity. Members within each LNP vary but can include environmental organisations, community groups and

individuals. In the 2021–22 financial year, a ‘Challenge Fund’ was also introduced where LNPs can access further project funding through a competitive application process.

- 1.4 The Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) scheme distributes ‘Starter’ and ‘Development’ packages to community groups in order to deliver ‘nature on your doorstep’. KWT also provides practical support on the ground. Each of the prepaid packages includes native plants, tools and other materials to help groups create their own community garden for nature. Starter packages are small, requiring around half a day of training for volunteers, provided by KWT. The larger development packages take about 20 days to complete. Priority is given to projects in urban, peri-urban or deprived areas with limited access to nature, as well as under-represented groups which engage with the scheme. These include those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, groups representing disabled people and those from deprived backgrounds. This strand received £1.8m of funding in 2021–22.
- 1.5 The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) strand is a capital grant scheme intended to enable communities in Wales to restore and enhance nature targeted at the 50 per cent most deprived areas of Wales based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). It also supports community growing projects anywhere in Wales. Its budget in 2021–22 was £900,000 with a further £41,000 provided to One Voice Wales for the delivery of its role engaging with town and community councils (TCC).

## **2. Research Aims and Methodology**

- 2.1 The Welsh Government commissioned Wavehill to undertake an evaluation of the LPfN programme for the financial year 2021–22, building upon the evaluation for year one of the scheme.<sup>1</sup> The research questions for the evaluation were:
  - To identify what impacts the LPfN programme has had so far on creating 'nature on your doorstep' and in creating, restoring and enhancing biodiversity.
  - To identify the impacts of the LPfN programme on local communities and the individuals involved in the projects.
  - To identify to what extent the three schemes and the programme as a whole are delivering the objectives of LPfN. Can improvements be made, from the perspective of project applicants, scheme managers and stakeholders?
- 2.2 Due to the timing of the evaluation of year one of the programme (covering the 2020–2021 financial year) its potential to provide evidence of the impact of the programme was limited. Therefore, where possible, the current evaluation aimed to examine the projects covered in both 2021–22 and the previous year of delivery (2020–2021), particularly in terms of projects whose impacts may take longer to develop.
- 2.3 A mixed methods approach was adopted, which included:
  - A workshop in January 2022 in which individuals with expertise and knowledge of nature and biodiversity and/or community issues discussed what the scheme’s success should look like.
  - Semi-structured interviews with five management and delivery staff in the three delivery bodies and supporting organisations (January–April 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> [Evaluation of Local Places for Nature Programme: Year One \(2020–2021\) \(gov.wales\)](#)

- Semi-structured interviews with representatives from sixteen (of the twenty-one) LNPs from across Wales (February–April 2022).
- An online survey of KWT successful grant applicants – the survey received 105 responses, a response rate of 13 per cent (April 2022).
- Interviews with six NLHF projects and grant recipients and two LNP coordinators to inform case studies about the projects they have developed.
- Analysis of documents produced by each of the schemes showing the data they have collected through their application process and monitoring of progress during the year.

2.4 Limitations to the methodology need to be considered when interpreting the findings. These include:

- Due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fieldwork phase of the evaluation in Spring 2022, the majority of engagement was with project leaders who are part of the various strands of LPfN, rather than with the wider participant groups and communities.
- The surveys for the LPfN evaluation were at risk of a self-selecting response bias because those who had stronger feelings (either positive or negative) might have been more likely to respond. Furthermore, due to UK GDPR stipulations, surveys were distributed to project leads via the scheme managers within KWT and the NLHF. Consequently, relationships with the scheme manager may have influenced the project leads' decision to respond.
- An online survey was distributed to grant recipients of the NLHF strand of the programme (alongside the KWT survey noted above), but the low response rate (only five responses) meant that no analysis could be undertaken. Insights of the scheme delivery and its impact therefore relied on management interviews and interviews with 2020–21 projects completed at the time of the fieldwork (Spring 2022); only one of the projects funded in 2021–22 had been completed by that time.

### **3. Key Findings and Recommendations**

#### **Participation and Outcomes to Date**

- 3.1 The evaluation found that the three strands of LPfN continue to act in a complementary manner, based on the capacity of organisations to carry out the different interventions. These range from small-scale groups that participate in the KWT scheme to constituted organisations that access NLHF grants and, finally, the LNPs which are located within LAs and NPAs.
- 3.2 The positive impacts upon groups and participants generated through their involvement in organising and developing a project remain clearer than the 'nature outcomes' of those same projects. This finding is consistent with the year one evaluation report and is to be expected because of the length of time it takes to deliver (and see) nature outcomes, while some of the community objectives of LPfN can be achieved more quickly. Compared to the other strands of LPfN, the KWT strand is well advanced regarding the number of separate projects that have been completed and the available outputs that can be displayed for both years of the project, at the time of reporting.
- 3.3 A key finding is, however, that year two of the programme has seen improved levels of engagement with groups that are furthest from nature. The KWT scheme has made a concerted effort to engage with disadvantaged or under-represented groups at the

application stage, but needs to ensure that their participation can be evidenced later. Almost 90 per cent of KWT packages went to locations in urban and peri-urban areas. Meanwhile, LNPs are increasingly engaging better with 'non-traditional' organisations that are not usually involved in nature recovery schemes. These findings suggest that LPfN is developing a role in engaging with those who would not normally be part of environmental and nature-based schemes.

- 3.4 There is, though, some tension between the aims of the programme to create 'nature on your doorstep' in areas of deprivation and urban or peri-urban areas, and the disbursal mechanisms for the programme, which are Wales-wide. There are clear benefits to this funding being utilised in all parts of the country, illustrating LPfN's relevance in all areas. Yet, it is recognised that this creates challenges in meeting the criteria in more rural parts of the country (where there is likely to be better access to nature anyway) and that there will be decreasing opportunities in some areas, for example, greening the public estate, as the programme continues.
- 3.5 Those engaged with all three strands are broadly confident that the community elements of the programme are being met through the work that is currently being carried out, with project leads reporting that activities have supported the wellbeing of community groups and volunteers involved. Project leads across the strands are also positive about the early community engagement with the new nature locations currently being developed. Nevertheless, these findings remain anecdotal and will require more robust testing in future years to be confident that it is taking place.
- 3.6 Stakeholders with expertise in community engagement and/or nature suggested measuring increases in well-being amongst participants, improvements in the perception of an area and expansion of community group activity to support sites in project areas as suitable metrics. Those experts also noted that biodiversity impacts may be small where project sites do not link geographically to other sites. It is important to note that LPfN's main aim is to increase community engagement with nature sites. However, stakeholders suggested that wider planning to connect sites could provide some benefits to biodiversity at the same time.
- 3.7 Research on LPfN to date has focused on participants and those engaging directly with the programme. A part of the rationale for LPfN is that 'nature on the doorstep' aims to increase positive attitudes towards nature. Hence, it is important that future research better understands the broader awareness of LPfN projects and whether it is changing attitudes to nature. Once more projects are completed, there will be more opportunities to seek to engage with other members of community groups and volunteers who support the delivery of projects, as well as particular groups that project leads report they engage with. Further research could incorporate time to try and facilitate engagement with such individuals via project leads to get their views. Engaging with the community more widely may be more complicated and require more innovative methods. It may therefore be appropriate for the research to try and target particular areas within proximity to sites or try to put researchers in the field to consult with people who are engaging with or passing through particular sites.
- 3.8 Stakeholders with expertise and knowledge of nature and/or community engagement, however, noted the difficulty of attributing changes in public attitudes to individual projects or schemes. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government does need to try to understand whether population-wide attitudes to nature are changing and consideration needs to be given to which mechanisms can be used for collecting this data. The survey of LPfN project participants for this report shows strongly positive attitudes towards nature, but this vanguard group is not necessarily reflective of the wider public. Again, future evaluations

should thus consider how best to access wider public opinions than just those immediately engaged in LPfN projects.

- 3.9 **Recommendation 1:** Consideration should be given as to the best means of collecting data to show whether LPfN is changing attitudes towards nature across Wales. Further research should include those from communities who are already engaged with LPfN, particularly those from disadvantaged or under-represented groups, and those who live and work in nearby areas.
- 3.10 Expert stakeholders also raised issues with the uncertainty of the journey from nature-related outputs (activities) to outcomes. They argued that the number of LPfN sites (the output) represents the potential biodiversity value a site can deliver. Whether this value is achieved (the outcome) will depend on several factors; for example, ongoing site management and broader environmental factors. Those engaged with as part of this evaluation were generally confident that their sites could be maintained either by the groups that delivered the projects or through other plans for future maintenance – although this was noted to be dependent on staffing and/or volunteers. Again, this is something that future evaluations will need to consider.
- 3.11 Stakeholders also highlight that there are tensions existing between the smaller-scale practices of LPfN, and the potential biodiversity value which it represents, and the amount of work required to tackle the nature emergency.<sup>2</sup> As the larger projects reach completion, LPfN will need to illustrate the success through greater monitoring of outcomes rather than inputs. This will change the focus from space creation to demonstrating the increased biodiversity value of the projects.
- 3.12 **Recommendation 2:** As the programme continues, LPfN will need to focus on outcomes, rather than inputs, and needs to develop greater mechanisms for monitoring and illustrating the outcomes to show that the potential biodiversity value of sites has been achieved. This includes onward monitoring of early demonstrator projects from LPfN's opening years to illustrate their success, or learn any relevant lessons, as beneficial outcomes for nature may take time.

## Management and Delivery Issues

### *Delivery issues*

- 3.13 Discussions with those managing the delivery of the KWT scheme suggest that substantial time and effort go into supporting community groups in applying for and delivering the packages. Participants also reported that supply chain issues can mean that not all elements of the package are available on the day of the training, leading to delays and, again, additional costs. These are potentially substantial and unanticipated costs that are being absorbed by the KWT strand and affecting its delivery. This is an issue that needs to be monitored by the Welsh Government.

### *Funding timescales*

- 3.14 There were common concerns about delivery across the three schemes, funding timescales being one of those. There were concerns within the LNP strand about the timetable for project delivery, within the financial year, which could often be disrupted by supply chain issues or the need to agree on consent or deal with multiple organisations. Projects in the KWT and NLHF strands were also impacted by supply chain delays; some of this was

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<sup>2</sup> [Wales Declares Nature Emergency – Cynnal Cymru – Sustain Wales](#)

thought to be associated with COVID-19 and the UK's exit from the European Union. The project's third year will reveal whether these issues are temporary.

- 3.15 The issue of single-year funding was raised by a range of interviewees, including those managing the schemes and LNP coordinators. Primarily, those issues related to the ability to effectively plan and project manage because of the need to meet single-year funding deadlines and complete them by the end of the financial year in March. The lack of confirmed funding for future years also appeared to lead to recruitment and retention issues amongst staff as it was not possible to offer longer-term contracts to existing or potential employees. It was also argued that multi-year funding would demonstrate longer-term commitment to tackling the nature emergency.
- 3.16 **Recommendation 3:** Where possible the Welsh Government should seek to make multi-year funding available for LPfN in order to support the implementation of long-term thinking about the programme and nature in general.

#### *Local Authority and Local Nature Partnership operation*

- 3.17 A number of LNP coordinators raised issues about their relationship with their host authority (LA or NPA). These included objections to projects from councillors and/or difficulties in engaging with other departments within the LA. This was considered important to ensure that LPfN activities did not happen in isolation from other LA services and processes. In some instances, changes to other LA processes and services were needed to effectively implement LPfN projects. For example, putting in protocols for large machinery use or ensuring streets are clean before large-scale grass cutting begins. There is therefore a need to consider how to raise awareness of the purpose of LPfN amongst councillors and the best way of ensuring 'buy-in' from other departments within the authority.
- 3.18 **Recommendation 4:** LNP coordinators should consider how to best develop and maintain relationships within their host authority, supported by best practice developed and shared across the network.
- 3.19 The membership of each LNP was found to vary across Wales, as did the manner in which they operate. This can influence their performance; WCVA monitoring data suggested that some LNPs were better organised and had access to a wider support network of partners. This indicates that more should be done to support LNPs to develop and engage actively within their partnerships. Inconsistency amongst the LNPs may also lead to imbalance in investment across Wales via the newly introduced Challenge Fund, which is distributed to larger LNP projects on a competitive basis.
- 3.20 **Recommendation 5:** Further support should be provided to those LNPs which WCVA monitoring data show not to be operating and delivering at the optimal level, using established best practice and identifying opportunities for improvements.

#### *Project pipeline and progression*

- 3.21 Within the KWT strand, many community group leads reported that they were more likely to support spending on nature both locally and nationally as a result of their engagement with LPfN, which is a positive outcome. Linked to this, responses to the KWT survey also revealed that many participant community groups were looking to further develop their engagement with nature, but not necessarily through LPfN. This suggests that there is a potential pipeline of further projects that other strands of LPfN could support, but raises concerns that such opportunities are not necessarily well understood and needed to be promoted to those already engaged in the programme (see recommendation below).

3.22 The NLHF strand has been successful in ensuring that proposals continue to be brought to panel and, the majority, approved. The positive benefit of engagement with potential applicants was highlighted as being important in ensuring the quality of the final application. The importance of direct work with TCC was also highlighted. However, there were fewer applicants in the second year of the programme, leading to potential concerns about the sustainability of demand for support from this strand. In the short term, a way to address this is through a continued focus on the pipeline through local stakeholders and organisations that have already accessed the KWT strand and may be interested in developing further projects, as noted above.

3.23 **Recommendation 6:** A clear project pipeline for the NLHF strand is required to ensure that sufficient applications are developed. The Welsh Government should support LPfN by developing a communications plan to highlight how groups that have already accessed other strands of LPfN can further develop, particularly through the NLHF strand.

Authors: Dr Ian Johnson and Dr Nikola Vousden

**wavehill**

Social and economic research

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

For further information please contact:

Aimee Marks

Social Research and Information Division

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Email: [ClimateAndEnvironmentResearch@gov.wales](mailto:ClimateAndEnvironmentResearch@gov.wales)

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