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Evaluation of the Local Places for Nature Programme from April 2020 to March 2025: Final report

wavehill
Social and economic research
Ymchwil cymdeithasol ac economaidd

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Glossary

Keep Wales Tidy (KWT)

KWT is an environmental charity dedicated to protecting and enhancing the natural environment across Wales. Their mission is to create a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable Wales for current and future generations. They deliver the Community Packages Scheme, which is part of the LPfN programme.

Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs)

Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) are collaborative groups made up of local authorities, local organisations, and community members working together to protect and improve nature in their local areas. Their main goal is to make nature more accessible and valued by everyone, especially in places where access to green spaces is limited. LNPs support a wide range of activities, including planting wildflowers, creating community gardens, enhancing parks, and encouraging biodiversity. LNPs receive funding from the LPfN programme to employ a Coordinator and to implement projects. They also source some further funding to support their activities from other sources.

Local Places for Nature (LPfN)

LPfN is the programme which is the subject of the evaluation discussed in this report. It seeks to support communities in creating ‘nature on their doorsteps’ and is delivered on a range of different levels from local authority to local community as discussed in this report.

National Lottery Heritage Fund (‘Heritage Fund’)

Funded by the National Lottery, Heritage Fund is the largest dedicated funder of heritage in the UK, supporting projects that help people explore, preserve, and celebrate the nation’s diverse heritage. The organisations managed both the LPfN Capital Grants Fund and Breaking Barriers scheme during the period being reviewed by this report.

Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)

The NRAP is the official biodiversity strategy and action plan for Wales, developed by the Welsh Government to reverse the decline in biodiversity and build a more resilient natural environment.

One Voice Wales (OVW)

OVW is the national representative body for community and town councils in Wales. It provides a unified voice for over 730 local councils, supporting them in delivering effective, accountable, and community-focused services. They employ an LPfN Co-Ordinator to support applications from local communities and Town and Community Councils.

Realist Evaluation

Realist evaluation asks three key questions about programmes or interventions: What works? For whom? In what circumstances? Instead of just asking "does it work?", realist evaluation recognises that programmes work differently for different people in different contexts. It focuses on understanding the underlying mechanisms (how and why something works) and the contexts that activate or block those mechanisms.

The core formula is Context + Mechanism = Outcome (CMO).

For example, a programme to support individuals into work (the outcome) by providing training that builds their confidence (mechanisms), might work well for motivated, recently unemployed people (context: high motivation, recent job loss) but fails for long-term unemployed individuals (different context: learner helplessness, multiple barriers).

In realist evaluation, “if–then–because” statements set out how a programme is expected to achieve its results. They describe the conditions that need to be in place, the outcomes that should follow, and the reasons those outcomes occur. This approach turns broad ambitions into specific, testable ideas about what works, for whom, and why, helping to explain why a programme may succeed in some settings but not others.

Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)

WCVA is the national membership body for voluntary organisations in Wales, working to strengthen the voluntary sector and help it make a bigger difference together. It supports charities, community groups, social enterprises, and volunteers across Wales. The WCVA manages both the LNP and Coastal Capacity Building schemes which are part of the LPfN programme.

1. Introduction and background

The Welsh Government's Local Places for Nature (LPfN) programme seeks to support communities in creating 'nature on their doorsteps' and is delivered at different levels, from local authority area down to individual communities. The programme was developed initially to target areas with limited access to nature, including areas of deprivation. This remit has widened over time to include improving and creating green spaces, where accessible, in other areas of Wales.

Wavehill was commissioned by the Welsh Government in February 2024 to evaluate the LPfN programme delivery up to the end of March 2025. This is the final report for the programme evaluation. This final report follows an interim evaluation report published in June 2025 (Griffiths and Cunnington-Wynn, 2025) and two previous evaluations of the programme, published in 2021 and in 2023 (Powel, Burgess and Parkinson, 2021; Johnson and Vousden, 2023).

This evaluation builds on existing evidence about the performance and outcomes of the LPfN programme. Previous evaluations have primarily focused on programme management and delivery. Their ability to assess outcomes was limited by the timing of the research, with many projects still in delivery, and constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic which included a pause in any project activity and restrictions in site access for engagement with participants.

In contrast, this evaluation has focused on identifying and exploring the impacts of LPfN in ways that were not previously possible. Specifically, it examines:

- The social impacts of LPfN projects at both the community group and wider community levels
- The extent to which LPfN has acted as a mechanism to encourage communities, individuals, and organisations to support and value nature
- Whether and how LPfN support has influenced behaviours and attitudes towards nature among those involved.

The focus has been on providing a deeper understanding of the programme's contribution to social outcomes, complementing earlier work and offering insights to inform future policy and delivery.

It should be noted that this evaluation has not considered the impact of the programme on biodiversity and the delivery of ecosystem services which are the subject of a separate study to be commissioned by the Welsh Government.

1.1 Overview of the programme and the schemes

Since its launch in 2020, the LPfN programme has focused on creating nature-supporting spaces within communities, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas. The programme is flexible in the activities it supports promoting a 'community-led' approach.

LPfN is a broad programme delivered via the following five separate schemes:

1) The Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) Scheme, managed by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA). This scheme supports LNPs in every local authority and national park authority in Wales to build a network that will engage people and communities, businesses and decision-makers in practical action and strategic planning for a healthy, resilient and nature-rich Wales. It includes funding for expert staff, the development and delivery of plans for capital working in the area and access to the Challenge Fund which supports collaborative actions.

2) The Community Packages Scheme, managed by Keep Wales Tidy (KWT). This scheme provides a range of pre-paid packages to community groups to deliver projects, including community food growing. Packages include native plants, tools, and other resources. Project officers also support the design of projects and the installation of packages.

3) The Coastal Capacity Building Scheme, also managed by WCVA with the funding distributed via the relevant LNPs. This scheme aimed to build stakeholder capacity in coastal communities by bringing together partners to tackle the climate emergency, restore natural habitats, and strengthen local networks for sustainable action. The projects supported through the initial contract period completed their work in March 2025.

4) The LPfN Capital Grants Fund provided funding to enable communities to restore and enhance nature in Wales and was managed by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (hereafter referred to as 'Heritage Fund'). The scheme was closed to applications in July 2024 with no active application windows at the time of writing in August 2025.

5) The Breaking Barriers Scheme, also managed by Heritage Fund, provided revenue funding to break down barriers that excluded and disadvantaged communities in Wales face when accessing nature.[Footnote 1] The scheme closed for applications in March 2023 with no active application windows at the time of writing.

Further details on these schemes can be found in Annex A. Modest revenue funding is also provided to One Voice Wales (OVW) to employ an LPfN Co-Ordinator to support applications from local communities and Town and Community Councils.

Footnote [1]: This is the wording used by Heritage Fund to describe the fund. See Local Places for Nature – Breaking Barriers | The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Excluding the Welsh Government's internal management costs, the total value of the programme from April 2020 to March 2025 (five financial years) was just over £66m with the LNP scheme representing 73% of that sum (please refer to section 1.4).

1.2 Key findings of the interim report

As noted above, this final report builds on the findings of the interim evaluation report. The interim report included a Theory of Change developed for the programme. The theory underpinning LPfN is that creating nature/green spaces should lead to increased individual and community support for nature. By providing people with opportunities to engage with nature, they would be more likely to value nature and support efforts to protect and restore it.

The interim report concluded that the theory underpinning the LPfN programme is well-founded, robust and broadly supported by academic research. As part of developing the theory of change, potential barriers to achieving the intended outcomes were also identified. These included site accessibility and funding constraints, such as balancing capital funding for works with revenue funding to employ staff and support community activities. Community groups (and key individuals within those groups) were identified as being central; their knowledge, skills and experience were identified within the theory of change as being essential to achieving the intended outcomes.

The report identified that a substantial amount of activity took place across the LPfN schemes, with volunteers playing a prominent role in project delivery. Available data—primarily from case studies, project reports, and participant feedback—suggested a range of positive outcomes at the local level. These included increased community engagement with nature, enhanced green spaces, and improved opportunities for volunteering and social interaction. Some projects also reported perceived benefits for wellbeing and local biodiversity, although these were not systematically measured. The interim report also identified several key factors common to projects considered 'successful' within the Community Packages scheme specifically. Those factors included:

- Strong community engagement and a sense of ownership of the project and/or the site where the activity was taking place among participants.
- Effective collaboration and involving multiple stakeholders in order to draw on a range of skills and abilities and be less reliant on one organisation and/or a few key individuals.
- The tailored support of a scheme coordinator, including, for example, being able to be more 'hands-on' with some projects where needed.

Changes in key project personnel, such as teachers or community leaders, were identified as negatively impacting projects. Volunteer fatigue also affected engagement, especially when long-term support was lacking.

For the programme as a whole, the interim report found that funding and projects were unevenly distributed across Wales. For example, some coastal areas did not participate in the Coastal Capacity Building Scheme, and capital funding from the Heritage Fund was concentrated in particular parts of the country. The demand-led nature of the schemes may have contributed to this uneven distribution.

Overall, the evidence reviewed within the interim report was limited in robustness, being largely anecdotal, case study-based, and self-reported. Much of the data was also specific to individual projects, restricting its usefulness for assessing programme-wide performance. Consequently, it was not possible to determine conclusively whether the outcomes in the theory of change were being achieved.

1.3 This report

The focus of the final phase of the evaluation was on further engaging with projects supported by LPfN schemes to collect more consistent and independent evidence of the outcomes that have been achieved. As introduced further in the following section, a realist evaluation approach was used for this final phase. Rather than simply asking "does it work?" a realist approach asks three key questions about a programme: What works? For whom? In what circumstance? The focus was on understanding the underlying mechanisms (how and why something works) and the contexts that activate or block those mechanisms.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 sets out the methodology for the final phase of the evaluation
- Section 3 presents the evaluation's findings on the outcomes achieved by LPfN projects, and explores how and why these outcomes were generated for the individuals and communities involved
- Section 4 then sets out the conclusions before Section 5 notes the recommendations of the evaluation.

Additional information is provided in the annexes of the report including the additional introduction to the LPfN schemes and further detail of the realist approach which has been a central part of this final phase of the evaluation.

1.4 Key programme funding and outputs

As mentioned above, programme funding amounts provided by the Welsh Government shows that between April 2020 and March 2025, the LPfN programme has received £66 million in funding. Table 1.1 highlights the amount of funding provided within each LPfN scheme, per financial year.

Table 1.1: LPfN scheme expenditure (Welsh Government funding) per financial year

Scheme	Financial year 2020 to 2021	Financial year 2021 to 2022	Financial year 2022 to 2023	Financial year 2023 to 2024	Financial year 2024 to 2025	Total	% of grand total
LNP	£2,660,932	£5,680,892	£9,335,149	£12,969,680	£17,295,926	£47,942,579	72.6%
Coastal Capacity building	Scheme not active	Scheme not active	Scheme not active	£348,041	£536,077	£884,118	1.3%
Community Packages	£1,807,821	£1,761,833	£1,454,780	£2,449,831	£3,781,004	£11,255,269	17.0%
Heritage Fund Capital Grants (including admin)	£1,065,641	£1,077,918	£874,523	£700,640	£1,041,587	£4,760,309	7.2%
Breaking Barriers (including admin)	Scheme not active	£362,000	£616,000	Scheme not active	Scheme not active	£978,000	1.5%
One Voice Wales	Scheme not active	£30,621	£45,000	£65,175	£54,936	£195,732	0.3%
Total	**£5,534,394**	**£8,913,264**	**£12,325,452**	**£16,533,367**	**£22,709,529**	**£66,016,006**	

Source: Welsh Government

To note – over the five-year period there was also an investment by Heritage Fund of £746,542. This was a 15% contribution towards the total capital element of the scheme costs.

The following outputs have been recorded for the programme over the five-year period. These figures were collated by the Welsh Government from reports submitted by the schemes. They are likely to be conservative estimates, as adjustments have been made to account for potential double counting. As such, they represent ‘at least’ what has been achieved by the schemes during this time. These figures provide an illustration of the number and variety of green spaces that the LPfN programme has created and the involvement of volunteers in creating these spaces.

- Pollinator habitat sites: 3,114
- Community food growing sites: 1,113
- Community orchard cultivation native fruit: 1,025
- Tiny forests dense and diverse woodlands the size of a tennis court: 19
- Habitat creation schemes at railway stations/transport interchanges: 78
- Therapeutic sensory gardens delivered with health charities and NHS: 110
- Green spaces enhanced or created: 2,467
- Increase wildflower planting (exclude pollinator sites under modest measures above): 1,021
- Sites with changed mowing practices to improve biodiversity: 1,128
- Volunteer support and community engagement (number of volunteers that helped to establish a green space): 14,750

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

A theory-based evaluation approach was used as a basis for this evaluation. The approach is centred on a well-defined 'theory of change' for the programme, developed as part of the initial stages of the evaluation, as set out in the interim report. Once the theory is established, it is tested through multiple evidence sources.

This evaluation considered the LPfN programme through the lens of a 'realist approach' which is a type of theory-based approach. Realist evaluation is a way of understanding what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why. Instead of just asking "Did this programme work?", realist evaluation digs deeper. It looks at the context (the setting or situation), the mechanism (how the programme works), and the outcome (what happened). It is especially useful for complex social programmes such as LPfN because it recognises that people and places are different, and that change happens in different ways. It is also particularly relevant to LPfN due to the range of delivery mechanisms across the LPfN schemes that are working towards the same outcomes. Further detail about the realist approach can be found in Annex B.

A mixed-method approach was used for this evaluation drawing together a range of sources of information including:

- Monitoring data and case studies collected by the schemes
- Interviews with scheme and project staff
- Surveys of scheme participants
- Site visits to projects to engage directly with those delivering and participating in activities.

These approaches combine qualitative insights (stories and experiences reported in project reports and collected during site visits and interviews) with quantitative data (numbers and statistics provided by monitoring data and a survey) to build a more complete and reliable evidence base which can be used to make judgements about the programme.

It is important to stress that LPfN is a broad programme, encompassing schemes that deliver a wide range of activities. While this breadth has made it challenging to collect evidence that reflects every activity, the evaluation sought to include projects representing different types of work, such as community gardens and initiatives to increase pollinator habitats. The focus here is on projects that engage local communities and the outcomes they deliver, but the programme also includes actions led by local authorities that do not involve direct public participation—such as changes to grassland management on municipal sites. These actions, while less visible to residents, can still improve local biodiversity and contribute to healthier, more attractive environments, which in turn support community well-being. They are not however part of this evaluation.

2.2 Methods undertaken for the final report

The final phase of the evaluation focused on engaging with individuals involved in projects through a survey and by visiting a sample of projects supported. This approach aimed to provide more consistent and independent evidence of the outcomes achieved. The research undertaken also sought to collect information to identify the mechanisms that explain how and why those outcomes were being achieved. There are however important limitations to the approach and the data gathered which are noted below.

2.2.1 Survey of project participants

A survey was used to capture insights from a broad range of individuals involved in LPfN funded projects, including staff, volunteers, participants in activities and members of the public who may be passing by or accessing the sites outside of project delivery. This approach was chosen for its ability to collect consistent, comparable data across multiple locations, while also offering flexibility in how the surveys were distributed and completed.

As well as those directly involved, the survey was intended to reach people who might not be involved in formal aspects of project delivery, such as casual visitors, residents, or first-time participants. This approach was also chosen because neither Welsh Government nor scheme leads held comprehensive contact lists for all participants, and the survey could be widely shared to support data collection.

To ensure wide reach and relevance, surveys were disseminated through LPfN scheme managers, who were asked to distribute them across the various projects they supported. This included both digital and paper-based formats where appropriate, allowing for inclusive participation across different demographics and access needs. A snowball approach was used to distribute the survey as broadly as possible. Scheme managers initially shared the questionnaire with project officers and leads, who were then asked to pass it on to others involved in delivery, including staff, partnership members, volunteers, and colleagues. Recipients were also encouraged to forward the survey to anyone else who had participated in the project. This approach is commonly used when the target group cannot be reached directly.

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions, giving respondents space to reflect on their experiences, attitudes to nature, and perceptions of the sites.

In total, there were 178 responses to the survey. The distribution of those responses per LPfN scheme and the role of the respondent are shown in Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

Table 2.1: The role of survey respondents in a LPfN project

Role of the respondent	Number	% of total
A volunteer involved in the project in some way	56	31.5%
Employed by the project or a member of staff or partner involved in the implementation and/or delivery of a project	72	40.4%
Someone that has been supported by the project in some way (taken part in training or events for example)	37	20.8%
Someone who has not been directly involved in the project, but has visited or used a site that has been created and/or developed by the project	3	1.7%
Other	10	5.6%
Total	**178**	

Table 2.1 shows that a large group of survey respondents were involved in a project in a professional capacity (40.4%). A relatively large proportion of respondents were either volunteers (31.5%) or had been supported by projects in some way (20.8%). The survey did not however capture data from many that had not been directly involved in a project (1.7% of respondents) illustrating the challenges of engaging that group in this type of research. It is however also a consequence of the snow-ball approach used for the survey which limits the level of control of responses, particularly the further down the chain of involvement.

It should be noted that a proportion of those involved with a project in a professional capacity were involved in multiple projects (N=26 out of 72).

Table 2.2: The number of survey respondents per LPfN scheme

Scheme	Number	% of total
Breaking Barriers	7	3.9%
Coastal Capacity Building	6	3.4%
Community Packages	125	71.3%
Heritage Fund Capital Fund	17	10.1%
LNPs	20	10.1%
Don't know	3	1.7%
Total	**178**	

Table 2.2. shows that the response to the survey was dominated by those involved in projects funded by the Community Packages scheme. This is not surprising as it matches the higher number of projects funded by that element of the LPfN programme between 2020 and March 2025 (compared to the other schemes):

- Community Packages funded over 1,000 projects
- LNP scheme funded over 125 projects
- Capital Grant Scheme funded 69 projects
- Breaking Barriers Scheme funded 11 projects
- Coastal Capacity Building funded 11 projects

Where respondents lived is also important to note. There were 177 responses to this question. Most respondents lived in 'countryside or small village' (38%, 67 out of 177) or 'large village or small town' (36%, 64 out of 177) which could have influenced responses to several questions in the survey. For example, green spaces could be more prevalent in rural locations but also possibly less accessible due to limited public transport. The other respondents said that they lived in the centre of a large city or town (9%, 16 out of 177) or the suburbs of a large city or town (16%, 29 out of 177). The survey findings set out in this report need to be considered in this context.

2.2.2 Site visits and interviews

The purpose of the site visits was to engage with a sample of projects in more depth. Contact details for potential visits were provided by scheme managers, but this was not always possible—for example, contact details were not available for Heritage Fund schemes: Capital Grants and Breaking Barriers. In such cases, publicly available information was used to approach organisations funded by the schemes.

As part of the visits a researcher from the evaluation team participated as a volunteer (if appropriate) and engaged with those that were present including volunteers and/or visitors to the site. Interviews were also undertaken with the project and/or site manager in question ahead of the visit.

Prior to the site visits, a total of 21 interviews were conducted with project and site managers working across the sites and strands of the LPfN programme as part of this element of the research. The number of interviews per LPfN scheme was as follows:

- Community Packages: 6 interviews
- LNPs: 6 interviews
- Breaking Barriers: 4 interviews
- Capital Grants: 3 interviews
- Coastal Capacity Building: 2 interviews

The Coastal Capacity Building Scheme was delivered by the LNPs so there was overlap between those interviews (four of the LNP interviews were working in 'coastal' areas). Further, some of contacts had been engaged earlier in the evaluation (n=5) and so, to limit the burden of participation, were not included in this phase.

The intention was to have a greater balance in the number of interviews per scheme. However there were challenges with engagement where staff responsible for the project had left the organisation. These challenges were particularly relevant to engagement with Heritage Fund Capital Grants, Breaking Barriers and Coastal Capacity Building projects. The purpose of these interviews was initially to explore the feasibility of potential site visits and to gather initial insights to help shape the focus and logistics of the fieldwork. The conversations however also helped identify key themes, site-specific contexts, and any project impacts that could inform the broader evaluation approach.

However, the interviews themselves also yielded valuable insights into successful sites that had received funding. These interviews highlighted perceived outcomes as well as examples of good practice, community engagement, and environmental improvements, offering a foundation for identifying sites that could serve as case studies for further fieldwork. They also explored how and why outcomes were generated with project and site officers, in line with the realist evaluation approach.

The projects where site visits would take place were selected to capture the diversity of geographic and social contexts in which the programme operates. The sites were chosen to include a balanced mix of urban, rural, and peri-urban locations to explore how the programme operates across varying landscapes and community settings.

In practice, organising site visits proved challenging and time-consuming. A key reason was that many projects had ended, meaning no activity was taking place during the available window. In some cases, planned visits were also cancelled due to poor weather. Where a selected project could not be visited, an alternative with similar characteristics was identified and an attempt was made to arrange a visit. The intention was to visit up to 30 sites; however, this could not be achieved within the available timescale together with the constraints already noted.

In total, 16 site visits were undertaken with 84 interviews completed with those participating in activities during the visit (an average of just over 5 interviews per visit). The distribution of site visits per scheme and number of interviews undertaken during the visit is shown in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3: The distribution of projects visited as part of the LPfN evaluation

Scheme	Number of visits	Number of interviews
Breaking Barriers	2	8
Coastal Capacity Building	0	0
Community Packages	6	40
Capital Fund	2	6
LNP funded projects	6	30
Total	**16**	**84**

The lack of Coastal Capacity Building projects visited reflects the nature of these projects, which did not always involve a physical ‘site’ to visit.

A small number of additional telephone interviews with project managers and participants were undertaken where site visits were not possible to complement and if possible, address gaps in the information collected. For these interviews, emails were sent to a selection of projects and organisations that had been supported to request that they participate in an interview (as the project manager) and/or provide contact details for individuals that have participated in the project so that they could be interviewed. Supported projects and organisations were also asked to re-distribute the survey link to project participants (as introduced above) with a view to increasing the number of respondents to the survey.

The approach increased the number of responses to the survey, but had only limited success in terms of generating additional interviews:

- Two volunteers in projects funded by a Heritage Fund Capital Grant
- One volunteer involved with a Breaking Barriers project

2.2.3 Literature review

Additional resource was allocated to a literature review in response to the lower than anticipated response to the primary research undertaken for the evaluation, as introduced above. The purpose of the review was to identify research that had explored similar issues to those considered in this evaluation. The findings of that research could then be compared to the primary research undertaken for the evaluation during the analysis.

2.2.4 Analysis and interpretation

The analysis and interpretation phase was undertaken through the lens of a 'realist evaluation' (see Annex B). Within this evaluation analysis, following the initial analysis of the data collected, the theory of change informed a series of 'explanatory statements' that explain how and why outcomes are achieved by projects. A framework (first developed in Dalkin and others, 2015) was used to create and test these statements which broke down each statement into 'Context', 'Mechanism', and 'Outcome' (CMO), and expressed using an "if–then–because" format to show the reasoning behind it (see Annexes B and C for more detail). For each statement, the available data, including the interim evaluation report, literature review, survey data, site visit interviews, and telephone interviews, was then reviewed to determine whether relevant evidence was found to support or challenge these statements.

The quantitative and qualitative data collected were analysed separately using distinct methods. Quantitative data collected via the survey was subject to statistical analysis, including the calculation of frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations to identify patterns between variables. Where appropriate, subgroup analysis was conducted to explore differences in responses by demographic characteristics or project type.

For qualitative data gathered through interviews and open-ended survey responses, a systematic thematic coding approach was used. Responses were reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes, concepts, and insights, allowing for the comparison of perspectives across different projects and participant groups.

The mixed-methods approach enabled the evaluation to triangulate findings, strengthen the validity of the results, and provide a richer understanding of how and why outcomes were achieved. Findings from the different types of analyses were compared, integrated and triangulated to explore support or challenge for the explanatory statements, when the findings of the literature review were also considered. Data triangulation involves drawing on multiple sources or types of data to examine the same issue. Bringing together insights from surveys, interviews, observations, and the literature review helped check and strengthen the findings from the evaluation, giving a fuller and more reliable picture.

3. Key findings: LPfN project outcomes and how & why they are achieved

This section is organised into three main parts. The first part assesses what outcomes participating in LPfN projects has led to for the individuals concerned. The second part considers what the evidence suggests about how and why those outcomes have been achieved. Finally, the third part explores the implications of the findings from a policy and programme management perspective.

The findings draw on survey data, interviews, site visits, and relevant research literature. However, it is important to be aware that the findings presented here are based only on those projects and feedback from the people who engaged with the research undertaken for this evaluation. As such, the evidence does not represent the full breadth or diversity of the LPfN programme, and findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Nevertheless, the findings provide valuable insight into the outcomes generated by LPfN projects operating at a community level.

As set out in the previous section, the total number of responses to the survey was 178, though the number of responses to individual questions varied. Some questions were only asked of certain groups, and not all respondents answered every question. The number of responses is therefore noted in the discussion that follows and should be considered when interpreting the findings.

When reference is made to ‘project participants’ in the discussion below, this term includes not only volunteers but also those involved as beneficiaries, supporters, visitors to the site, and others engaged with the project. For simplicity, unless specified, the discussion does not distinguish between these groups; all are considered ‘participants’ in the context of a project. It is also important to note that staff, as well as participants, can be considered potential ‘beneficiaries’ of an LPfN project, as their involvement in activities may also lead to changes in their views, attitudes, or wellbeing.

3.1 Part 1: What were the personal and community outcomes of the LPfN projects?

One of the findings set out in the interim evaluation report was that LPfN schemes are supporting a substantial amount of activity across Wales and literally thousands of sites have been created or improved (please refer to section 1.4). The focus of this discussion is on what that has meant to the people and communities involved.

Respondents to the survey who were employed by the project or were staff or partners involved in the implementation and/or delivery of a project (hereafter referred to as ‘staff’) (N=69) were asked to select the emerging impacts they had observed in communities as a result of their project. The three most frequently identified outcomes, by some margin, were ‘improved community engagement with local green and natural spaces’, ‘enhanced community mental wellbeing’, and ‘increased social interactions and connections within and between communities, for example through events and group activities’.

Table 3.1: Response to the question: What emerging impacts have you observed in communities, if any, as a result of your project? Selected from options provided.

Outcome	N	%
Improved community engagement with the local green and natural spaces	48	70%
Increased social interactions and connections within and/or between communities e.g., through events and group activities	47	68%
Enhanced community mental wellbeing	42	61%
Strengthened partnerships among community groups	36	52%
Reduced barriers to community engagement with local green and natural spaces	32	46%
Increased understanding of sustainability issues and how to take action e.g., climate change, waste reduction, or conservation efforts	28	41%
Enhanced community physical health	23	33%
Facilitated underrepresented groups and communities to access other support where required e.g. support and services to support physical and mental health.	12	17%

N=69 (staff only question)

Engaging local communities, and sometimes specific groups within those communities, has been a key feature of LPfN projects. The interim evaluation found that many projects involved volunteers and local groups, with strong community ownership and collaboration emerging as key factors for successful delivery. Case studies and interviews discussed in the interim report also indicated that projects frequently worked with specific groups within communities, such as schools, local associations, and targeted initiatives aimed at underrepresented groups. The three main outcomes identified by project staff responding to the survey (discussed further later in this section) all depend on a project's ability to engage with the local community and encourage participation. Understanding who has participated in projects, and why, is therefore important and is explored as this section progresses.

Changes in views and attitudes

The discussions with participants during site visits highlighted how LPfN projects can influence how some participants think about nature and biodiversity, although the extent of that change varied. In several cases, participants described a shift from a general interest in the local environment to a stronger sense of responsibility for the local environment. This was particularly evident where projects combined practical activity with learning opportunities or highlighted the presence of important species (this was evident for five of the sites visited) giving an indication of how and why this outcome was achieved which is explored further later in this section.

For example, at one site, the discovery of a protected species prompted participants to undertake specialist training and adopt an informal stewardship role, regularly monitoring habitats and sharing knowledge with others. This is also an example of a project being flexible enough to respond to an emerging situation.

> "[Participating in the project has] made me think more about the health of rivers and lakes and what looks clean might not be." Project participant

Smaller but meaningful changes were noted by some participants in everyday practices and perceptions. They described adopting pollinator-friendly habits, such as leaving dandelions in place and/or learning to approach conservation tasks more carefully to avoid harming wildlife.

> "When we're working it's easy to damage things, so I've learnt to be more careful." Project Participant

In community growing projects visited, participants highlighted how food production activities helped them and their families appreciate the role of nature in daily life, with comments about teaching children where food comes from and the importance of seasonal growing.

> "It's helping raise a generation of people who know where their food is coming from." Project Participant

The online survey enabled outcomes to be explored at a larger scale. A substantial proportion of respondents perceived that their involvement had benefited them in several ways including improving their understanding of nature and biodiversity (70%) and increasing their appreciation of nature and biodiversity (69%) (N=114). This question was asked to all survey respondents, and the findings were consistent with those from the site visits.

To explore views and attitudes towards nature and biodiversity further, survey respondents were subsequently asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements, with the response shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Response to the question: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements. Local green and natural spaces are…

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Good places for mental health and wellbeing	86%	13%	1%	0%	0%
Provide good opportunities to see nature	68%	27%	4%	0%	0%
Good places for children to play	55%	32%	11%	3%	0%
Places that encourage physical activity and exercise	54%	37%	8%	2%	0%
Good places to meet other people	53%	35%	11%	2%	0%
Within easy walking distance	52%	42%	3%	2%	2%
A high enough standard that people want to spend time there	46%	39%	13%	3%	0%

N=114 (all respondent question)

The response was positive for all statements and particularly in respect of whether local green spaces are good places for mental health and wellbeing with 99% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. This is a personal outcome discussed further later in this section. The extent to which views have changed on these issues is however important from an evaluation perspective.

A key finding of the theory of change process (as set out in the interim report) was that the profile of the individual being engaged by LPfN projects was important in terms of the outcome that their involvement would achieve. If participants already held positive views about nature and biodiversity, there was little room to change their attitudes further. Instead, the LPfN schemes reinforced and strengthened these existing positive views. Conversely, if participants had negative or indifferent attitudes toward these issues, the schemes had greater potential to create meaningful attitude change although achieving such an outcome was likely to be more challenging.

Survey respondents were therefore asked whether their views on the statements above had changed because of their involvement with a LPfN project. The majority (64% - 72 out of 114) said that their views had indeed changed suggesting a positive impact because of participation in a LPfN project. However, of those reporting change, most identified it as happening 'to some extent' (46%, 52 out of 114), with only 18% (20 out of 114) saying their views changed 'a lot'. Further, a substantial group of respondents (33% - 38 out of 114) did not identify any change in their views because of the LPfN project with the remainder not being sure.

These findings indicate that, within the sample, LPfN projects are (although the data is self-reported) having a measurable positive impact on participants' attitudes towards nature and biodiversity, with nearly two-thirds reporting some degree of change in their views. This positive finding is supported by site visit evidence, where participants also described a shift from general interest in the local environment to a stronger sense of responsibility for it for example. However, the nature of this change appears to be primarily reinforcement and deepening of existing perspectives, rather than fundamental attitude transformation. Most participants who experienced change described it as happening "to some extent" rather than “a lot”, suggesting that the projects are refining and strengthening pre-existing positive views rather than achieving the more challenging objective of converting sceptics.

The substantial proportion of participants who reported no change in their views likely reflects a ‘ceiling effect’—these individuals entered the programme already holding strong positive attitudes towards environmental issues, leaving little room for further attitude development. This pattern suggests that future efforts to achieve greater attitudinal change may require more targeted engagement with less-engaged groups which is something the discussion will return to later in Part 2 where the mechanisms that generate the outcomes are considered.

Changes in behaviour

A key question is whether the changes in views and attitudes identified actually lead to changes in behaviour, which the theory of change developed for LPfN indicates is necessary to achieve the programme’s objective of increasing support for nature.

Throughout this report, a recurring theme is the importance of understanding the profile of those who have participated in LPfN projects when assessing project outcomes and that was one of the objectives of the survey of participants.

All survey respondents who answered the relevant questions, which all respondents were asked (N=114), reported that they were already using green and natural spaces to some extent before joining LPfN projects. Most could also be categorised as relatively heavy users, with 88% (100 out of 114) saying they spent time in green and natural spaces at least once a week on average before their involvement, including a large group (44) who said they did so every day. This is an important indicator of the survey respondents' profile—the evaluation's sample of LPfN project participants were, in general, already frequent users of green and natural spaces. However, it is important to stress that the limitations of the survey mean this may not be fully reflective of all LPfN projects or participants.

Given this profile, it is perhaps unsurprising that a majority of survey respondents (63%, 67 out of 107) reported no change in their behaviour regarding time spent outdoors after participating in an LPfN project. For this group, there was little room for further positive change in behaviour—a 'ceiling effect'. Importantly however, this is not to suggest that there were no positive outcomes for this group. As discussed in the sub-section that follows, the survey identified a range of broader outcomes including personal well-bring and the development of new skills. This suggests that LPfN should not be considered just as a programme that is solely focused on facilitating a change in behaviour. For this group, evaluation findings highlight that outcomes were more focused on gaining improved skills, a better understanding of stewardship and ecology, and stronger community connections and civic participation. This should be an addition to the Theory of Change for the programme developed as part of the interim report.

Over a third of respondents (37%, 40 out of 107) reported that their reasons for visiting green or natural spaces had changed since their involvement with an LPfN project. The most common reason for visiting these spaces—'recreation and relaxation'—remained unchanged, with a slight, non-significant increase after participation (from 80 out of 114 before to 86 out of 114 after).

A more notable shift was observed in eco-friendly daily habits: 60% (68 out of 113) of survey respondents that answered the question—'Since your involvement, have you changed any of your daily habits to be more eco-friendly?'—answered 'yes', with examples including increased recycling, waste reduction, and use of sustainable products. Most described these as small changes (43%, 49 out of 113), while 17% (19 out of 113) reported 'many' habits had changed. Still, 40% (45 out of 113) said their habits had not changed, mirroring the pattern seen with changes to attitudes.

Site visit evidence supported the finding that some participants experienced behavioural change. In those instances, discussions suggested that LPfN projects influenced everyday choices, such as spending breaks outdoors and incorporating regular volunteering or gardening into routines.

> "The garden is a tranquil and relaxing space… it's far more beneficial than having my lunch at my desk." Project Participant

For some, this meant moving from occasional participation to ongoing stewardship, with increased frequency of involvement. Several participants described taking on regular maintenance tasks, such as clearing paths, managing vegetation, and installing habitat features. In some cases, this extended to more specialised actions, including monitoring protected species and maintaining ponds to encourage amphibians:

> "I was one of the lucky ones who got to go on the water vole course… I learnt all about the habitat and now I check for signs and share what I've learnt with others." Project participant

There was also evidence of behavioural change relating to gardening and habitat practice, with some participants reporting the adoption of pollinator-friendly habits and the creation of features like bug hotels and bird boxes:

> "We've learnt all about bees too and now I don't kill off my dandelions as they're one of the first pollinators." Project participant

Food-growing projects encouraged behaviours linked to sustainability, such as teaching children about where food comes from and harvesting and sharing produce:

> "People can just come and pick vegetables when they're ready." Project participant

While these examples cannot be generalised, they illustrate the types of behavioural changes that may occur when projects provide hands-on opportunities, visible ecological benefits, and social reinforcement. The site visits also allowed the reasons why these changes had occurred to be explored, which is again discussed further in Part 2.

Broader personal and community outcomes identified

A key element of the theory of change for LPfN was that participation in projects or visiting green/nature sites more generally lead to other broader personal outcomes for the individuals in question, especially on their personal well-being.

This concept is supported by research. Findings from the most recent People and Nature Survey (Wales) show that 69% of respondents believe spending time in local green and natural spaces supports their mental and physical health and wellbeing, while 63% said these spaces offer valuable opportunities to meet other people. There is also a well-established evidence base demonstrating that place-based environmental activity and the creation of nature spaces can positively influence social behaviours and foster greater community engagement and civic participation (for example, Kiss and others, 2022).

Research frequently highlights that community-centred approaches, which mobilise local green assets and infrastructure, help individuals build meaningful connections with others and feel empowered to act within their local areas. For example Mihirini and Chettham, 2024 explores the opportunities that creative, nature-based activities offer for mobilising social connections via community-centred approaches to improve individual and collective wellbeing.

Examples found in existing research include initiatives that involve local volunteering and collective action such as those supported by LPfN, often resulting in increased civic participation. Residents may work together to plan, create, or maintain green spaces, and this participatory approach has been shown to strengthen social cohesion and foster a sense of local pride. For example, the creation of a community garden can lead to the formation of volunteer groups that continue to meet regularly, marking a shift in social behaviour and building community organisational capacity (see, What Works Centre for Wellbeing, 2021).

The survey of LPfN participants for this evaluation reflects similar findings to those in the wider literature. Respondents perceived that their involvement in an LPfN project had benefited them in a range of ways, with improved mental well-being being the most frequently identified benefit (74% of respondents to the question, N=114). Other commonly reported benefits included gaining new knowledge or skills such as gardening (63%), meeting new or different people (59%), and improved physical health (49%).

These positive findings support the programme's theory of change. However, it is again important to note that survey respondents were already regular users of green/nature spaces prior to joining LPfN, suggesting that many were likely already experiencing some of these benefits before their involvement. As such, again, participation in a LPfN project may have enhanced or deepened these outcomes, rather than generating entirely new ones for most participants. But, as noted previously, this is not to suggest that there were no positive outcomes for that group. As discussed further later, the survey identified that participants had developed new skills and that their understanding of the benefits of green/natural spaces may have evolved because of their participation. The following quotes comes from a survey response and illustrates this finding:

> "I was very much aware of the green and natural spaces in the area, but the project has opened my eyes and the eyes of many others to the possibilities of how these spaces can be enhanced and used to encourage a better connection with nature and for improving mental and physical wellbeing." Project volunteer (survey response)

The discussion with participants during site-visits further highlighted a range of motivations and personal benefits experienced by those involved, with themes appearing consistently across different types of projects. These benefits often reflect the combined influence of being outdoors, engaging in purposeful activity, and connecting with others.

Social connection was the most frequently mentioned benefit during site visit discussions. Participants valued the opportunity to meet new people, make friends, and feel part of a community suggesting a potential motivation for participation which the discussion turns to in Part 2 of this section.

> "The company, the wellbeing, it's good for my mental health being outside, the fact we're doing something good to help and it's good when people thank us for what we're doing. It gets me motivated to get out of the house and I've made some good friends." Project participant

> “Two things, good company, great people they work hard and seeing the difference our improvements are making.” Project participant

For some, these interactions helped reduce feelings of isolation and provided a sense of belonging.

> "It's increased my confidence to socialise a bit more, before I didn't really socialise and I'd be in my room most of the time. It's increased my motivation to get up now in the mornings, I do my best to set my alarm and get up early, it's definitely helped with that." Project participant

> "Here is just one big family really. We all help each other when we need something and it's a place where you can just come and air your worries and talk to people. We notice when people haven't been down to the site who would usually be there and we phone them to make sure that they're ok. We really look out for each other." Project Participant

> "It's company for me and for my son who has learning difficulties. Life can get quite lonely when it's just us and so it means that I can get out and meet people and do an activity together." Project participant

Learning new skills was another strong theme. Participants described gaining practical knowledge in gardening, planting, and habitat management, as well as confidence in using tools and trying new activities. These experiences were often linked to participants also feeling a sense of achievement and personal growth.

> “Meeting other people, today as a Welsh learner I'm learning some gardening terms in Welsh and learning other things too.” Project participant

> “I wanted to learn about gardening and to be out of the house doing something, seeing people in the community.” Project participant

> “I’ve never been practical, and this has given me more confidence to do things like this.” Project participant

Mental wellbeing benefits were widely reported, with participants noting that spending time outdoors and engaging in meaningful activity helped reduce stress and improve mood. Some described these sessions as a vital part of their coping strategies for anxiety or depression.

> "They've changed me, I've been welcomed, they had a brief outline of my mental health and it doesn't matter. They've made me feel a little bit better about me, I'm autistic too. It makes me feel happier being outside." Project participant

> “It’s good for my mental health being outside… and it’s good when people thank us for what we’re doing.” Project participant

> “I work on the ward and it’s nice to get away, it’s peaceful here off the ward as it’s chaotic on the ward.” Project participant

Physical health benefits were also widely mentioned, particularly in relation to exercise and fresh air. For some, the physical aspect of volunteering was an important motivator.

> "It's good exercise… as well as the clearing and doing the steps." Project participant

Finally, a large group of participants spoke about a sense of purpose and motivation, describing the satisfaction of contributing to something positive for their community and the environment.

> "We get out and feel we're doing something useful for nature." Project participant

> "A sense of achievement when you've finished things." Project participant

All of the above were strong themes and widely reported by participants during the site visits. Whilst the limitations of the research for this evaluation need to be noted, the findings are supported by both participant accounts and wider research evidence which is positive.

Outcomes for diverse and underserved communities

Research has frequently highlighted disparities in access to and engagement with nature across different demographic groups. Visitors to environmental sites are more likely to be white and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, often due to better proximity to green spaces and fewer financial or logistical barriers (see Groundwork UK, 2021, Natural England, 2017 and Arts Council England, 2021). The 2024 Public Health Wales Biodiversity Action Plan highlights that 'people in Wales do not have equal access to nature and green spaces,' with individuals in the most disadvantaged areas often facing the greatest barriers but also having the most to gain. Further, data from the 2019 National Survey for Wales showed that considerably fewer individuals experiencing material deprivation participated in outdoor recreation (70%) compared to those not experiencing deprivation (84%) (note that the more recent National Survey for Wales data does not include this question about outdoor recreation).

The LPfN programme was initially developed to target areas with limited access to nature, including areas of deprivation. This remit has however widened over time to include improving and creating green spaces, where accessible, in other areas of Wales.

The Communities Packages scheme gave specific priority to projects with strong community involvement and towns, cities, deprived areas and spaces with little or no access to nature. As discussed in the interim report, the panel set up to review applications for support used the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) for this purpose prioritising applications from the most deprived parts of Wales. Data available for the grants awarded between April 2022 to March 2023 showed that 35% of grants were awarded to groups in the 30% most deprived wards in Wales.

The scheme that is most clearly targeted at diverse and underserved communities in Wales was Breaking Barriers which provided revenue funding to support projects to work with those communities. The projects supported are discussed in the interim report including one of the largest grants which was provided to a project aiming to improve mental health and

community cohesion among minority ethnic groups through sustainable, nature-based activities. The grant supported project staff and volunteers who engaged over 1,000 participants in activities like household waste reduction, outdoor recreation, and cultural heritage visits.

The survey was not able to engage with large enough number of participants in projects supported by the Breaking Barriers scheme to undertake any specific analysis on participants. The number of Breaking Barriers projects where site visits took place (2 visits and 8 participants interviewed) was also small meaning that care is needed when interpreting the findings. Participants spoken to during visits to those project sites did however identify similar themes to those discussed earlier in the section, such as connection to others and benefits to their health.

The following are examples of the comments made:

> "It's social contact too as I'm new to the area… you can see there's a lot of love for the gardens." Project participant
>
> "I'm fairly new to the community, it's for my mental health… to help with my depression and isolation." Project participant
>
> "[Taking part in the activity has] Increased [my] gardening knowledge, just being more active and more involved in the community." Project participant

This provides some positive insights into the benefits of projects aimed specifically at those with previous limited access to nature.

Whilst the primary research for this evaluation has not been able to robustly explore outcomes generated specifically by projects implemented in diverse and underserved communities, research literature finds that the benefits of nature-based interventions are particularly evident in these communities. A growing evidence base links increased exposure to green space in urban areas with improved physical and mental health outcomes, particularly for communities experiencing health inequalities (World Health Organisation, 2021).

The health and wellbeing impacts of urban green spaces are often most pronounced in communities experiencing higher levels of socioeconomic deprivation. A World Health Organisation review (2017) found that the most significant improvements in physical and mental health, as well as social cohesion, typically occur among lower socioeconomic groups, where baseline health and environmental conditions are often poorer. This suggests that even small-scale interventions, such as the creation of a new park in a densely populated inner-city area, can have a proportionally greater impact on residents' stress levels and overall wellbeing than similar developments in more affluent areas.

Physical activity outcomes are also particularly relevant in these contexts, as increased access to green space can support efforts to reduce obesity and related health conditions that are more prevalent in low-income communities. Further evidence links new or improved green space access with reductions in stress and improvements in mood among those who previously had limited opportunities to engage with nature (for example, Geary and others, 2023).

Therefore, the small amount of primary engagement with Breaking Barriers' sites, in combination with available literature, indicates that activities such as those delivered by LPfN have the capacity to make a real difference in underserved and diverse communities. This evidence suggests greening projects in such areas can improve social cohesion, with shared green spaces acting as neutral venues where people from different backgrounds can connect and interact.

3.2 Part 2: Mechanisms: How and why did LPfN projects achieve the positive outcomes identified?

The discussion now moves on to consider how and why the outcomes identified in LPfN projects have been generated.

A key concept in the realist evaluation approach, which underpins this analysis, is that it is not the intervention itself that directly causes outcomes. Rather, outcomes result from individuals' responses to the resources and opportunities provided by the intervention—in this case, the LPfN project. The combination of a programme's resources and an individual's response to them is termed the 'mechanism', and it is this mechanism that ultimately determines the outcome. The following discussion assesses the evidence gathered about LPfN projects and their outcomes through this lens, seeking to identify the mechanisms that led to the positive outcomes previously discussed.

'Explanatory statements' are included at the end of each sub-section. They provide a concise summary and explanation of how and why an intervention is expected to lead to specific outcomes, based on underlying assumptions about context, mechanisms, and change. As explained in more detail in Annex B, one of the approaches used for presenting such statement is the "if…then…because" which is what is used below. More detailed versions can be found in Annex C.

A reminder that when reference is made to 'project participants' in the discussion below, this term includes not only volunteers but also those involved as beneficiaries, supporters, visitors to the site, and others engaged with the project.

Understanding the motivations of participants and providing the right opportunities

Understanding what motivates people to participate in an activity or a project helps explain who engages and why, revealing whether a programme is reaching its intended audiences and has the potential to achieve its goals. This suggests that alignment between participant motivations and the opportunities provided by a project is a key mechanism for achieving LPfN outcomes. When motivations—whether individual or organisational—match the opportunities available, participation and positive outcomes are more likely.

For this reason, understanding motivations is crucial for designing projects that attract and retain participants. The evaluation findings suggest projects are most effective when they offer opportunities that feel meaningful – discussed further below. Without successfully engaging people who are willing and able to take part, no actions will occur, sites will not be developed, and intended outcomes will not be achieved. This is particularly important for LPfN projects,

which can rely on participants and physical activities to create and improve green or nature spaces.

The survey asked the project participants to identify what motivated them to engage in activities involving green and natural spaces (N=69).

Table 3.3: Response to the question: What motivates you to volunteer or participate in activities involving green and natural spaces? Options provided and multiple responses allowed

Option	Number	Percentage of respondents
To improve my local area	56	81%
I enjoy spending time outdoors	55	80%
Interest in giving back to the community	53	77%
To improve my physical and/or mental health	44	64%
Desire to learn more about nature and sustainability	42	61%
To meet new people and make new friends in the community	37	54%
Passion for environmental conservation	36	52%
To learn new skills	30	43%
Desire to grow my own food	27	39%
Lack of good quality green and natural spaces in my local area	9	13%

N=69 (volunteers and those supported only question)

The three strongest motivations were improving the local area (81%), enjoying time outdoors (80%), and giving back to the community (77%). This suggests that LPfN projects (or those within the evaluation sample at least) are particularly successful at attracting people who want to contribute to their local communities while also enjoying personal benefits from outdoor activities. Perhaps importantly, these community and personal motivations appear to be stronger than purely environmental motivations for this group.

The mechanism suggested by the evidence here is the opportunity that LPfN projects offered participants to be involved in activities that are perceived to be improving the local area which matches participants' motivation to be involved in such activities.

Personal wellbeing was also important, with 64% motivated by physical and mental health benefits and 54% seeking to meet new people. Learning motivations were notable although slightly more mixed across participants, with 61% wanting to learn about nature and sustainability and 43% hoping to develop new skills.

Environmental conservation ranked lower as a primary motivation (52%), indicating that community and personal benefits were at least as important to participants as environmental ones. The lowest-ranked motivation was a lack of good quality green and natural spaces locally (13%), which may reflect the locations of survey respondents (as noted in Section 2, a large proportion of respondents were based outside urban settings).

During site visits, there were clear and consistent themes when participants spoke about why they were involved including the satisfaction of improving local spaces and giving something back to the community, echoing the survey's top-ranked motivations.

> “Volunteering’s a way to give back, I’m amazed at what’s been achieved.” Project participant

> “Just to protect and improve the environment and the wildlife.” Project participant

The personal benefits identified and discussed in the outcomes section —including developing social connections, learning new skills, and improving mental wellbeing—were also clear motivators for involvement.

This suggests that the mechanism at work here is the creation of opportunities for social connection—through group activities, volunteering, and community events—which triggers increased wellbeing, retention, and a sense of belonging among participants. These social bonds not only support individual wellbeing but can also, if sustained, underpin longer-term stewardship and community cohesion.

It is interesting—and important—to note the apparent relationship between motivations and outcomes identified by survey respondents. The data suggests that the things which most strongly motivated people to participate in LPfN projects (such as improving the local area, enjoying time outdoors, and giving back to the community) are closely aligned with the most frequently reported outcomes (improved community engagement, enhanced wellbeing, and increased social connections).

This alignment implies that the LPfN projects are successfully delivering on what matters most to their participants, reinforcing the value of understanding and designing for participant motivations. It also suggests that when projects are able to tap into these motivations, they are more likely to achieve meaningful and valued outcomes for those involved. However, this relationship may reflect the self-selecting nature of the sample—those who are motivated by these factors may be more likely to participate and to report positive outcomes in these areas.

These findings are however supported by other research. For example, the importance of feeling connected to one’s local environment has been highlighted in research by the National Trust (2019), which found that a strong sense of place attachment is associated with a greater likelihood of individuals engaging in activities that protect and enhance their local area over time. This connection to place not only supports individual and collective wellbeing but also underpins longer-term environmental stewardship and sustainable community development. A lack of connection to nature, or to one’s local environment, can reduce both individual and community engagement with environmental issues (see Lynette and others, 2024).

Explanatory statement:
If projects provide opportunities that align with prevalent motivations (improving the local area, being outdoors, giving back), then participation and valued outcomes are more likely, because people see the offer as meaningful and worth their time.

Engaging ‘the right’ participants and allowing projects to evolve

Throughout this report, a recurring theme is the importance of understanding the profile of those who have participated in LPfN projects and activities. Engaging with the ‘right’ participants is a key mechanism because it ensures that projects reach those who can most benefit but also those that can contribute the most to achieving the aims of the project.

The definition of ‘the right’ participant (or indeed, community) will vary depending on the specific objectives of the project and/or scheme. For example, if, as was the case for Breaking Barriers scheme projects, the objective is to engage with communities currently underserved in terms of access to nature, individuals of that profile need to be ‘targeted’. Projects and activities also need to be designed with that profile of participant in mind. In other instances, there may be a greater focus on improving a specific site or indeed creating a new site. In those instances, a project may need to focus, in the first instance at least, on engaging with (or ‘attracting’) participants/volunteers that can help to achieve that objective—those that can help to get the necessary work done. The evidence gathered by the evaluation suggest that those people are likely to often be motivated by wanting to make a difference in their local community. Again, projects are likely to be more effective if the activities (including engagement strategies) are designed with those people in mind.

An important finding of this evaluation is that, for the sample of individuals that engaged with the evaluation, participants already hold, in the main, positive views about nature and the environment. If the primary objective is to increase the proportion of the population with positive views, these individuals may not be the ideal target group (although there are benefits to reinforcing positive attitudes, as discussed earlier). Achieving that objective may require a more targeted approach—focusing on projects that can engage those who currently hold negative or indifferent views about nature and the environment. The same rationale applies if the objective is to increase the use of green or nature spaces among those who currently do not do so; these groups need to be specifically targeted. Breaking Barriers was a specific LPfN scheme that aimed to do this. The evaluation interim report highlighted how Breaking Barriers funding was awarded to organisations with established engagement with the specific groups they aimed to engage.

However, projects need to exist in order to achieve these objectives—new green or nature spaces must be created, or access to existing spaces improved. The most effective way to do this is to engage those most motivated to get involved and support a project, which, according to the evaluation, are the individuals currently participating in LPfN projects. While the data collected for this evaluation has its limitations, the findings suggest that creating opportunities for people to contribute to projects that benefit their local community is an effective way to attract such individuals. It is also important to consider the need for suitable sites where projects can take place, which is a fundamental assumption underpinning the LPfN scheme.

It is also clear from the project case studies and examples reviewed as part of this evaluation that LPfN projects are likely to be most effective if they evolve over time with a number of examples in the interim report describing how LPfN grant funding had been used be organisations to progress their broader objectives or ‘mission’. For example, the initial priority

could be to undertake the physical and practical work needed to improve access to a site. Once that work is done, the focus may however shift to attracting users to the site, especially individuals and groups with previously limited opportunities to engage with a green/nature space. Allowing projects the time and opportunity to evolve is therefore important as is the ability to support projects being delivered by organisations at various stages in their broader 'mission'. The progression pathway available within the Community Packages scheme—from Starter Packages to Development Packages—provides a good example of how projects and groups can be supported to evolve their activity. The potential for groups to also 'progress' to Heritage Fund Capital Grants for larger scale projects when those schemes were open should also be noted.

It is frequently reported in research literature that interventions are more effective when they are based on a clear understanding of their target audience's characteristics, and the behavioural and identity factors likely to influence engagement (see: World Health Organisation, 2017 and Public Health England, 2020).

Data on the number of volunteers involved in certain schemes was available (as outlined in the interim report), providing a useful starting point for understanding engagement in the programme. However, there was limited robust data on the characteristics of those participants and the evaluation has been unable to address the issue. Strengthening the data available about volunteers and participants more generally as part of any future monitoring and evaluation process would enable a fuller analysis of who is taking part in LPfN projects and across the programme, helping to build a clearer picture of its reach and impact.

Explanatory statements:

- If the objective is to shift attitudes and behaviours among people who are currently indifferent or negative towards nature, then engagement must prioritise engaging individuals in that group, because participants may otherwise, although positively motivated, already tend to hold pro-nature views, limiting the scope for change within that cohort.

- If early project phases prioritise recruiting participants with the skills and availability to complete physical site works (even if they already hold positive views), then new or improved green/nature spaces are more likely to be delivered effectively, because initial tasks depend on practical labour and site-focused effort.

- If subsequent phases intentionally shift outreach towards underserved or disengaged groups, then use, equity of access and sustained community impact increase, because tailored engagement addresses barriers and invites new users once a site is ready.

- If projects intentionally shift targeting over time—from site builders to underserved users—then both site creation and equitable engagement improve, because different participant groups are activated by different opportunities at different stages.

A flexible, tailored approach

Building on the discussion above, the evidence gathered for this evaluation suggests that the flexibility to tailor activities to local needs and participant characteristics is likely to be an important mechanism for success in LPfN. This adaptability, linked to the need to allow projects to evolve discussed in the previous sub-section, triggers greater relevance, engagement, and ultimately, more positive outcomes.

A wide range of activity has taken place in a variety of settings as part of LPfN as identified by the primary research discussed in this report but also via the project reports and case studies reviewed for the interim evaluation report. The site visits alone included community gardens, urban green spaces, woodland areas, hospital gardens, and wetland or nature restoration projects. Activities observed included clearing overgrown areas, installing steps or benches, and creating wildlife habitats. At other sites, participants were tending raised beds, planting vegetables, and maintaining allotments. Some projects incorporated structured group sessions, such as gardening clubs, craft workshops, and guided nature walks, while others offered open-access spaces for use by local residents. There were also examples of projects linked to health and wellbeing initiatives, providing quiet, restorative environments for hospital staff, patients, and visitors.

As set out in the outcomes section, the evidence indicates that positive outcomes were being generated across these diverse settings and activities supporting the findings of the case studies and project reports reviewed within the interim report. Whilst there has not been a detailed comparison of the different approaches, this suggests that there is therefore no single approach to achieving the outcomes intended by LPfN. Indeed, this flexibility for communities (groups/organisations that have applied for LPfN support) to be able to meet programme objectives in a way that also supports local needs/opportunities is likely to be an important mechanism.

The breadth of activities supported by the LPfN programme is a direct result of its community-led, non-prescriptive design, its delivery through multiple schemes with distinct objectives, and its focus on meeting diverse local needs. This approach is also designed to encourage innovation, collaboration, and adaptation to local contexts, enabling the programme to contribute to a wide range of outcomes for both nature and communities. For example, the interim report highlighted how LNP projects reported adapting or tailoring their activities to the geographical and ecological needs of each area, as well as the landscape of local community and partner organisations (see Section 4.1 of the interim report).

Wider research supported this finding. By understanding the barriers individuals or communities face in connecting with and protecting nature, interventions can be more appropriately tailored. For example, research into urban environmental stewardship has found that interventions are more successful when they acknowledge and support individuals' emotional connection to place, consider local social networks, and engage with perceptions of nature conservation (Enqvist J., and others, 2017). In contrast, in more rural settings, it is often reported that it can be more effective to engage landowners, work through trusted local organisations, and provide clear information on both the environmental benefits and perceived costs of participation (Lute M.L., and others, 2018). Whilst there is no universal

model that works across all contexts, it is important that interventions are flexible and allowed to be designed to work with the target audience to build engagement and foster long-term environmental responsibility.

Explanatory statements:

- If LPfN projects are given the flexibility to tailor activities to local needs and participant characteristics, then they are more likely to achieve relevant and positive outcomes, because adaptability ensures that interventions resonate with local priorities, barriers, and opportunities, increasing engagement and effectiveness.

- If communities and applicants can design projects that fit their own circumstances and needs, then a wider range of activities and settings will emerge, because a non-prescriptive, community-led approach encourages innovation, collaboration, and adaptation to local contexts.

- If projects are allowed to evolve over time in response to participant feedback and changing local circumstances, then engagement and impact are more likely to be sustained, because evolving projects can remain relevant and continue to meet the needs of their communities.

A mix of activities and enabling participants to progress

A range of personal benefits identified by the evaluation has been set out in the outcomes section including developing social connections, learning new skills, and improving mental wellbeing. The data suggests that these have been generated by the creation of opportunities for social connection—through group activities, volunteering, and community events—which triggers increased wellbeing, retention, and a sense of belonging among participants. These activities, coupled with the motivation of the individual to address these issues, are the mechanism here. These social bonds not only support individual wellbeing but can also, if sustained, underpin longer-term stewardship and community cohesion.

Research with participants for this study has also found that additional outcomes are generated when individuals can progress from their initial involvement with a project, (such as undertaking basic site maintenance tasks) to more advanced activities, like participating in a training course on conservation. This was particularly evident where projects combined practical activity with associated learning opportunities. This is likely to be important particularly in terms of generating a positive outcome where participants already hold positive views about nature and the environment which was generally the case for the participants participating in the survey for this evaluation. This suggests that in these instances, projects can build on that foundation and support a strengthening of views and an increase in positive behaviour. The evidence collected by this evaluation has demonstrated that this is possible.

The mechanism likely to be at work here is the combination of practical activity and learning opportunities provided by LPfN projects, which triggers a shift in some participants from general interest to a stronger sense of responsibility for their local environment. For example, at one project, the discovery of a protected species prompted participants to undertake specialist training and adopt an informal stewardship role, regularly monitoring habitats and sharing knowledge with others.

Explanatory statements:

- If projects engineer inclusive, regular opportunities for social connection, then wellbeing and ongoing engagement increase, because belonging and shared purpose make participation rewarding and habitual.

- If practical activities are paired with learning, then participants are more likely to develop stewardship behaviours, because confidence, skills, and a sense of responsibility are activated.

- If projects provide progression pathways (e.g., from basic maintenance to accredited training or leadership roles), then skills, confidence and long-term stewardship strengthen, because participants can deepen involvement and see personal development.

Local context and capacity

Capacity building was identified in the interim report as both a core mechanism and a key outcome of the LPfN programme. Local organisations—particularly community groups—were highlighted during the development of the theory of change as central to achieving programme outcomes, with their knowledge, skills, and established networks enabling effective delivery and sustained impact. The LPfN schemes are essentially demand-led, meaning they depend on the capacity of local organisations to engage with the schemes and submit applications for support. If organisations do not engage and apply, no activity will take place. Thus, the capacity of local organisations to apply for support and deliver projects effectively is essential and likely represents a key mechanism within the programme.

The capacity of local organisations was also a feature of discussions for the interim report with scheme staff on the 'key success factors' of LPfN projects, which included the importance of:

- Knowledge, skills and experience of the delivery organisation (or a key individual) in general
- The ability to effectively engage with the local community including local volunteers
- Links to and ability to collaborate with other local organisations.

Capacity-building activities were a feature of several LPfN schemes, including the LNPs, Coastal Capacity Building, and Breaking Barriers, providing training, support, and opportunities for collaboration. KWT staff also supported groups to develop and implement their Community Packages supported projects. These activities sought to strengthen the ability of local organisations to deliver and sustain projects, although the evaluation focused more on project outcomes at the community level than on the process of capacity building itself.

The survey did, however, identify some outcomes related to capacity-building support:

- Support provided useful resources or tools that would not otherwise have been available, reported by:
    - 13 out of 14 LNP project respondents
    - 5 out of 5 Coastal Capacity Building Scheme respondents
    - 5 out of 9 Capital Grant scheme respondents
    - 29 out of 39 Community Packages respondents

- Support helped build stronger partnerships or improve collaboration, was reported by:
    - 12 of 14 LNP project respondents
    - 4 out of 5 Coastal Capacity Building Scheme respondents
    - 5 of 9 Capital Grant scheme respondents
    - 23 of 39 Community Packages respondents

For the Breaking Barriers scheme, 'increased community cohesion' was the only one of the options available selected by staff as being apparent to them (4 respondents) when they were asked to identify the most significant benefit of the grant funding for their group or organisation.

The rationale for providing capacity-building support is clear: as identified in the theory of change developed for the programme, the capacity of local organisations cannot be assumed. The uneven distribution of LPfN projects across Wales, as highlighted in the interim report, could indicate that capacity is uneven across the country. Alternatively, it may reflect differing levels of need for support.

A key feature of the realist evaluation approach is the need to consider the context in which interventions are implemented. Local need for support and the capacity of local organisations are important contextual factors that can influence how and why interventions succeed or face challenges. Another crucial factor is the opportunity or potential for an LPfN project to be implemented in a given area—for example, whether there is a site locally that could be developed as a green or nature space. If no such site exists, the potential to implement an LPfN project to improve local access is inevitably limited. This issue has not been explored in detail as part of the evaluation beyond the development of the theory of change for the programme. However, the logic is clear, and the realist evaluation approach suggests that this is an important contextual consideration when assessing where and why LPfN schemes are effective. This is also linked to the capacity of local organisations to identify such sites and make them available for development.

Explanatory statements:

- If local organisations have the knowledge, skills, and networks to engage with LPfN schemes and apply for support, then projects are more likely to be delivered effectively and sustained over time, because organisational capacity enables groups to access resources, mobilise volunteers, and collaborate with others.
- If LPfN schemes provide capacity-building support (such as training, resources, and partnership opportunities), then local organisations are better equipped to deliver and sustain projects, because they gain access to tools, knowledge, and collaborative networks that would not otherwise be available.
- If local organisations lack the capacity to engage with LPfN schemes or identify suitable sites, then fewer projects will be implemented in those areas, because the demand-led nature of the programme means activity only occurs where organisations are able to apply and deliver.

Timescales and sustaining sites, activities and outcomes

The sustainability of outcomes beyond the lifetime of LPfN support is an important consideration. The sites that have been created or developed need to be sustained, and activity needs to continue. If this is not the case, there is a risk that outcomes that have been achieved will not be sustained. For example, if views have been changed but that has not yet translated into behaviour. Or where the behavioural change has not yet become fully embedded.

Time has been identified as a key issue in this evaluation, especially constraints created by a lack of time to implement projects. The interim evaluation found that limited project timescales were a recurring barrier to deep community engagement, relationship building, and the sustainability of outcomes. Both project staff and coordinators highlighted the importance of allowing sufficient time for projects to develop, for relationships to be established, and for behaviour change to become embedded. The report also notes that some outcomes, particularly those related to behaviour and community cohesion, may only emerge or become sustained after the formal end of project activities.

The most common barriers to effectively engaging with the local communities identified by staff responding to the evaluation survey were delays in project delivery, including issues from bad weather, (20 out of 67 respondents to the question) and not having enough time to fully engage communities (19 out of 67). This suggests that time, or specifically the lack of it, is a key factor in terms of what a project can achieve in respect of engaging with the local community. Time is also, therefore, likely to be a key mechanism for achieving positive outcomes.

Extending the lifetime of projects by providing additional funding is one option for addressing this although constraints on this from a funding perspective need to be acknowledged. Sustaining a project beyond the lifetime of the LPfN funding via other means is another, discussed further below.

In terms of sustaining the sites developed with LPfN support, the evidence collected for this evaluation is limited and self-reported, but it does provide some insight. Staff responding to the survey (N=69) were asked whether their project or activity was continuing after the end of LPfN funding. In this context, “continuing” could mean the ongoing use and maintenance of a capital asset, or the continuation of activities through new funding or volunteer support. Responses were generally positive: 68% (47 out of 69) reported that the project or activity was continuing in its entirety, and a further 25% (18 out of 69) said that some elements were being sustained. Only a small minority reported that activities had stopped (or would do so) or were unsure (4 out of 69).

However, it is important to note that these findings could reflect the sample of those who responded to the survey. Respondents are more likely to be involved in continued work, as they received the survey or are still in touch with the project, whereas projects where activities may have stopped are less likely to have received or responded to the survey. This is an important caveat, as it may mean that the findings overestimate the true rate of project continuation. Again, this is potentially a gap in monitoring data for the LPfN programme; there is no robust data on how many projects continue beyond the end of LPfN support.

The challenges experienced by the research team in engaging with projects for site visits, as set out in Section 2, also need to be considered here. Specifically, it was difficult to engage with some organisations that had been funded to implement LPfN projects where those projects had come to an end. While it is not clear whether this was because activity at those sites had ceased, the possibility needs to be considered and represents a risk that may warrant further attention.

When project staff were asked in the survey how continuation was being achieved, having additional funding or a funding strategy in place was frequently mentioned (32 responses), although this is contingent on such funding being available. The most common explanation was however a reliance on community engagement and volunteer support (39 responses), underlining the central role of volunteers in LPfN projects. However, this also highlights a risk identified by project managers interviewed for the interim evaluation report: projects and activities can become overdependent on volunteers and are therefore susceptible to issues such as volunteer fatigue. The hundreds of volunteers involved in the implementation of LPfN projects is highlighted in the interim report.

Interviews with project and site managers undertaken in association with the site visits suggested that sustainability depends on a combination of factors: the presence of physical assets that encourage ongoing use (where they were part of the project), the capacity and commitment of volunteers, and strong partnerships with other local organisations. While many projects appear to have laid solid foundations, it was also apparent to those being interviewed that challenges remain. These include maintaining leadership capacity within the local community and ensuring continuity of funding. Volunteer fatigue, changes in key personnel, and limited long-term funding were also identified as barriers to sustainability by interviews with scheme staff undertaken for the interim evaluation report.

Literature on environmental stewardship also emphasises that sustainability depends on both physical and social factors. Sites are more likely to be maintained when they are accessible, valued by the community, and supported by ongoing engagement opportunities and

governance structures (McLeod and others, 2025). Evidence also points to the importance of visible signs of impact and continued investment in volunteer networks to reinforce ownership and pride (National Trust, 2019) which links to the previous finding that, within the evaluation sample at least, a large group of participants are engaged because they want to make a difference to their local community. That is their motivation, and the visibility of that impact is therefore important. Therefore, the literature suggests that social reinforcement is also a key mechanism: regular group activities and visible improvements to local spaces trigger a sense of pride and shared responsibility, making pro-environmental behaviours more habitual and valued.

As discussed in the outcomes section, there is evidence that suggests that LPfN projects have contributed to increased awareness, skills, and connection to nature among participants, with many reporting improved understanding of biodiversity, practical knowledge in gardening and habitat management, and a stronger appreciation of local green spaces. These findings indicate that the programme has created conditions that could support longer-term pro-environmental behaviours. However, the extent to which these behaviours are sustained over time is not clear from this research and would require an assessment of outcomes for participants in projects over the longer term.

What would seem clear is that, to achieve sustained positive outcomes, prolonged engagement with green spaces and nature is likely to be important. Whilst the societal and environmental benefits of nature connectedness are well documented as discussed in this section, recent population surveys suggest that levels of nature connectedness in the UK remain below the threshold required to encourage sustained pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours (see: Richardson and others, 2019).

Looking at the issue in a broader scale, emerging research also indicates that, in order to maintain nature connectedness beyond the duration of a specific activity or intervention, programmes should be designed in alignment with the five recognised pathways to nature connection. These pathways offer a useful framework for informing the design and delivery of interventions that aim to strengthen and embed individuals' long-term connection with the natural world and include:

- Contact through the senses e.g., landscape design and art installations to prompt sensory engagement with nature,
- Emotion (feeling positive emotions as a result nature brings) e.g., the creation of spaces to enjoy 'the good things' in nature,
- Beauty (finding beauty in the natural world) e.g., creating plant boxes in high footfall areas to ensure that the natural world is visible to local people,
- Meaning (exploring and expressing how nature affects individuals) e.g., arts-based activity to celebrate the natural world, and
- Compassion (thinking about what an individual can do for nature) e.g., community management of a public wildlife friendly green space

See: Richardson and others, 2020

Explanatory statements:

- If projects have adequate time and continuity, then engagement deepens and behaviours are more likely to stick, because repeated contact and visible progress embed routines and commitment.

- If communities have both tangible improvements to local spaces and strong volunteer or partnership networks, then project benefits are more likely to be sustained, because the combination of visible change and social support triggers ongoing engagement and maintenance.

3.3 Part 3: Implications from a policy and programme management perspective

The findings set out in this section highlight that outcomes in LPfN projects are not simply the result of the intervention itself but are generated by the interaction between programme resources and the responses of participants within their specific contexts. This underscores the importance for policy and programme management of understanding and supporting the mechanisms that trigger positive change, as well as the conditions that enable or constrain those mechanisms.

The evidence suggests that participation is particularly strong when participant motivations align with the opportunities provided by projects. It is therefore important to be explicit about the intended outcomes. The LPfN programme was developed initially to target areas with limited access to nature, including areas of deprivation. This remit has however widened over time to include improving and creating green spaces, where accessible, in other areas of Wales. The Breaking Barriers scheme provides an example of how targeted approaches can activate mechanisms for engagement and inclusion in specific groups or communities.

However, the findings also suggest that projects may need to evolve over time and, if that is the case, the 'type' of participant that they need may also evolve. For example, a project may need volunteers to undertake the physical work needed to create or improve a site. In such instances, it is likely to be most effective to 'target' participants motivated by the opportunity to contribute to a project that will help improve their local community. When a site has been created, the priority may shift to maintenance and engaging with those that did not previously have access to a green/nature space in the local area. In such circumstances, projects would need to be allowed the flexibility and opportunity to evolve.

The range of activities funded is a key feature of LPfN and is a result of the community-led approach. This flexibility to design a project based on characteristics, needs and opportunities is important as is allowing groups to adapt their activities as their project evolves.

The evidence gathered also suggests that creating opportunities for social connection through group activities, volunteering, and community activities are a key mechanism for triggering wellbeing, retention, and stewardship. Simply creating or developing sites is unlikely to

achieve the intended outcomes. The evaluation has found that these features are current strengths of LPfN projects and should continue to be supported alongside the necessary practical work to develop and restore green and nature sites. The data also suggests that combining practical activity with learning and responding to evolving community priorities—will help maximise both engagement and impact. This was particularly the case for participants who already frequently accessed nature spaces before project involvement. The evaluation findings suggest that for these types of participants, the main impacts of the LPfN programme related to gaining improved skills, shifts from environmental interest to stewardship and stronger community connections.

Finally, the key mechanisms for sustaining outcomes beyond the lifetime of initial funding are the continued engagement of participants, the presence of valued physical and social assets, and strong community partnerships. This suggests that policy and programme management should consider how best to support maintenance, aftercare, and succession planning from the outset, ensuring that the mechanisms for ongoing engagement and stewardship are embedded in project design.

The discussion has also highlighted the importance of robust monitoring and data collection. Without reliable information on who is participating and whether and how projects, activities, and sites are sustained, it is difficult to assess whether mechanisms are being activated as intended or to target resources effectively. Strengthening monitoring systems to capture participant profiles, engagement patterns, and longer-term outcomes will be important for future programme development and for testing the assumptions of the realist approach.

4. Conclusion

The LPfN programme was established to create ‘nature on the doorstep’, supporting individuals and their communities by improving local access to green and nature spaces. This evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the programme achieved these aims, and to understand how and why outcomes were generated. It builds on previous evaluations by focusing on outcomes and mechanisms, using a realist-informed approach to explore what worked, for whom, and in what circumstances. It also aims to complement a separate study being commissioned by the Welsh Government examining the impact the impact of the programme and its schemes on biodiversity and the delivery of ecosystem services.

This final evaluation report builds on the interim report’s provisional findings and the theory of change developed for LPfN. The research tested and largely confirmed the theory, with the evidence collected supporting the premise that the creation of nature spaces can lead to increased support for nature and improved community wellbeing—though the extent of change depended on context, participant profile, and the presence of enabling mechanisms.

Overall, the evaluation concluded that the LPfN programme has demonstrated the value and potential of community and nature-based interventions to deliver personal and social benefits. These findings are consistent with a wider evidence base showing that access to green space can improve health, strengthen social cohesion, and foster pro-environmental views and behaviours. While the primary research for this evaluation did not clearly identify the impact of LPfN projects in disadvantaged communities, wider literature supports the potential for such projects and activities to have a substantial impact in these contexts. The evidence available does not allow for definitive conclusions about the scale or durability of the outcomes identified. However, it provides a strong indication that, under the right conditions, community-based LPfN-funded projects can create valued local spaces, strengthen community connections, and support positive engagement with nature.

It is important to interpret the findings of this evaluation with caution. The evidence base was drawn from a restricted and self-selecting sample of projects and participants, and much of the data was qualitative and self-reported. While the evaluation provides valuable insight into the types of outcomes LPfN projects can generate and the mechanisms and context that create that success, it cannot provide a comprehensive assessment of the programme as a whole. Nor can it offer definitive conclusions about long-term impacts, as most evidence relates to short- to medium-term outcomes. Despite these limitations, the evaluation offers important insights relevant to future policy and programme design.

Identified outcomes of LPfN projects

The evidence gathered for this evaluation suggested that LPfN projects contributed to a range of outcomes for individuals and communities. Those outcomes are also generated by a very broad range of projects and activities. Analysis of survey responses, site visits, and interviews indicated that increased engagement with local green and natural spaces was a consistent feature across the programme. Participants reported involvement in the creation, enhancement, and use of these spaces, which appeared to have generated a range of positive outcomes, both nature-related and for personal wellbeing.

Improvements in wellbeing were evident, with respondents frequently identifying nature spaces as beneficial for relaxation and mental health. Physical health benefits, such as increased time spent outdoors and opportunities for exercise, were noted, though these outcomes were generally found to be incremental rather than transformative. Projects also facilitated social connections, with participants describing opportunities to meet others and participate in community activities. These interactions may have helped to reduce isolation and foster a sense of belonging.

In terms of personal development, participants stated that they acquired new skills and knowledge, particularly in gardening, habitat management, and environmental stewardship. While many respondents were already regular users of green spaces prior to their involvement, participation in LPfN projects led, for a proportion, to the adoption of more environmentally conscious habits, including changes in gardening practices and increased attention to biodiversity. This demonstrated the potential for those who already held positive views on nature and the environment to 'progress' as a result of their involvement in a LPfN project, even if they are not necessarily the prime 'target group' for the programme.

In summary, while the LPfN programme appeared to have supported the development of local nature spaces, contributed to community engagement, and facilitated positive experiences for participants, these findings should be considered indicative rather than definitive. They are, however, broadly consistent with wider research on the social and wellbeing benefits of accessible green spaces. The extent to which these outcomes will be sustained over time, and the degree to which they are generalisable across all communities, remains uncertain. Further research, with more robust and representative data, would be required to draw firmer conclusions about the long-term impact of the programme.

Mechanisms and context for achieving the outcomes

The evidence gathered for this evaluation suggested important mechanisms and contextual factors that contributed to the outcomes observed in LPfN projects. While much of the discussion on mechanisms and context is based on the evidence gathered, some of it is also theory- and logic-based, supported through wider literature, where the necessary evidence was not available.

Alignment between participant motivations and the opportunities provided by projects was identified as an important factor in encouraging engagement and generating positive outcomes. Projects that offered activities perceived as meaningful—such as improving local spaces, volunteering, and learning about nature—were considered more likely to attract and retain participants. The report suggests that targeting those who are motivated by a project's objectives to be involved in its delivery is likely to be more successful in creating or enhancing a green space. Meanwhile, there may be a role for targeting those who have less previous experience with nature once the site has been established.

Flexibility in project design and delivery also appeared to be important, as did the ability to tailor activities to local needs and participant characteristics. In several cases, projects supported by LPfN evolved over time, shifting their focus as sites developed and as the needs of participants changed. LPfN projects could also be part of a broader plan or 'mission' on the

part of the organisation that was funded. Allowing projects to evolve in this way was identified as important in terms of generating the outcomes observed. Opportunities for progression for participating individuals, such as moving from basic tasks to more advanced roles or training, were identified as supporting sustained involvement and positive outcomes among participants.

Social connection emerged as a further mechanism, with group activities and volunteering providing opportunities for participants to build relationships and strengthen community cohesion. These social bonds were reported to underpin ongoing engagement and, in some cases, stewardship of sites beyond the initial period of project funding. The capacity of local organisations to deliver and sustain projects was also highlighted, with the analysis suggesting that organisational knowledge, skills, and networks were important contextual factors influencing project success.

However, again, these findings should be interpreted with caution for the reasons previously noted.

Implications

The findings of the evaluation have several implications for future policy and programme management. The analysis suggested that outcomes in LPfN projects were shaped not only by the interventions themselves, but by the interaction between programme resources, participant motivations, and local context. This highlights the importance of designing flexible interventions that can adapt to evolving community needs and priorities, and of supporting mechanisms that facilitate ongoing engagement and stewardship. These implications should be considered provisional, pending further research with more robust and representative data.

Final reflection

In summary, the LPfN programme has been found to have delivered meaningful benefits for people and communities by creating opportunities for engagement with nature, fostering social connection, and supporting wellbeing. The evidence gathered through this evaluation points to specific mechanisms that contributed to the observed outcomes - motivation alignment, flexibility, social connection, and progression. These mechanisms should be placed at the heart of future policy design and programme management to enhance effectiveness and impact. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be important to address current evidence gaps and to inform future delivery.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: target areas with low historical engagement

Options for identifying and supporting areas where LPfN activity has been limited should be considered. Building on the mechanisms for achieving outcomes identified in this report, this should include research to assess whether local conditions—including site availability and local organisational capacity—are conducive to LPfN delivery, and whether these can be developed or supported. Approaches should be adapted to local context, recognising that what works in one area may not work in another.

Where barriers exist, additional measures such as capacity-building or partnership development with local organisations that would subsequently deliver projects may be required. For example, opportunities could be explored to secure sites for green/nature space development in urban areas, making them available to local groups through the Community Packages Scheme.

Assessing demand for reopening the LPfN Capital Grants Scheme could also form part of this research. Support should not only focus on initial engagement but also provide opportunities for progression, enabling participants and organisations to take on greater responsibility and leadership over time. This approach would help address inequalities in access to nature and ensure that future delivery strategies consider both feasibility and sustainability, including mechanisms to support long-term engagement and stewardship.

Recommendation 2: make engagement of new participants an explicit programme objective

Assuming that increasing participation among those who currently do not visit green or nature sites remains an objective for LPfN, this should be made explicit across all programme elements and monitored accordingly. This would help address persistent inequalities in access to nature and ensure that the benefits of LPfN are distributed more equitably. However, this should not be at the expense of those already motivated to participate; both groups are important for project success. Programme guidance and monitoring should distinguish between reinforcing engagement among those already motivated and transforming attitudes and behaviours among new or less-engaged groups, with realistic expectations and tailored strategies for each.

Monitoring should include indicators such as the proportion of participants with little or no prior engagement with green spaces, recorded at registration or recruitment. To support this recommendation, the potential to introduce new elements within the Community Packages and LNP schemes should be explored, drawing on lessons from the Breaking Barriers scheme. This could include targeted outreach, culturally appropriate activities, and practical measures to overcome barriers such as transport, accessibility, and perceptions of exclusion. Evidence suggests that such approaches are most effective when combined with strategies

that foster nature connectedness and sense of place, supporting sustained engagement and behaviour change.

Recommendation 3: strengthen local delivery through experienced community organisations

Continued engagement with local community organisations should be encouraged, with flexible funding, autonomy, and support for alignment with their missions prioritised. Investment should be made in both physical assets (such as site improvements) and social assets (such as volunteer networks and partnerships) to underpin sustainability.

Consideration should be given to replicating the support provided via One Voice Wales to town and community councils for other third sector organisations working with excluded communities, to encourage and increase their participation in LPfN schemes. This role could also be integrated into LNP activities. In addition to financial support, capacity-building measures—such as training, governance advice, and peer learning—should be explored to strengthen organisational resilience and ensure that benefits are sustained over time. Support should also address barriers to participation, including volunteer fatigue, leadership succession, and site access.

Volunteer fatigue is an example of an issue that goes beyond the LPfN programme. As such, it needs to be discussed at a broader level that LPfN. However, the potential to draw on support that organisations such as WCVA (already involved in LPfN) provide to community groups to address this and other issues alongside LPfN activities should be explored.

Recommendation 4: reinforce behaviour change through continued engagement

The LPfN programme should support opportunities for continued community involvement beyond initial site development. This includes volunteering, seasonal events, and visible signs of impact (e.g., flourishing sites) to reinforce a sense of ownership and pride. Where appropriate projects should offer clear progression pathways for participants, enabling them to move from initial involvement to more advanced roles or training. Engagement strategies should be regularly reviewed and adapted based on participant feedback and emerging evidence to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.

Evidence suggests that such activities are important for sustaining behaviour change and embedding pro-environmental norms, particularly when they strengthen nature connectedness and sense of place. To enable this, ongoing funding (including revenue funding) should be made available for ‘post-site development’ activities, such as communication strategies, targeted outreach, and inclusive events.

A specific scheme within the Community Packages programme or a dedicated priority within LNP activities should be considered for projects focused on sustaining engagement and stewardship. This approach would help ensure that LPfN’s benefits are maintained over time, particularly in communities where barriers to participation remain.

Recommendation 5: strengthen monitoring and evaluation across the LPfN programme

It is important to recognise the need for any monitoring and evaluation process to be reasonable and proportionate to the intervention and the capacity of the organisations in question. The new system proposed below should therefore be adequately tested against those criteria before being implemented. The potential to focus on a representative sample of projects in some instances should also be considered.

To address the limitations in data identified in this evaluation, a more robust, consistent, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation framework should be implemented across the LPfN programme. This should include a consistent set of well-defined performance indicators used by all schemes and projects, enabling assessment of both activities (e.g., number and profile of volunteers engaged, including demographic diversity) and outcomes (e.g., changes in attitudes, behaviours, and wellbeing) at programme level. Additional contextual and motivational data should be collected at application or project design stage to better understand target audiences and barriers to engagement. For example, a simple survey could be issued when participants first engage which asks baseline questions about their attitudes and behaviour relating to nature.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities by supported projects, following a Welsh Government framework, should capture key information during delivery, using digital reporting tools and participatory approaches where possible. Longitudinal follow-up monitoring should be used to assess long-term outcomes such as sustained behaviour change, site maintenance, and sense of place, focusing on a representative sample. Participatory and community-led monitoring approaches should be piloted to enhance ownership, data quality, and responsiveness to local needs. Regular learning reviews should be built into the programme cycle, using monitoring and evaluation findings to adapt programme design and delivery. Continued use of a realist approach to test and refine explanatory statements will support ongoing learning about what works, for whom, and in what contexts. This approach will improve accountability and provide the evidence needed to inform future policy and programme design, ensuring that LPfN continues to deliver equitable, sustainable benefits.

Annex A: A more detailed introduction to the LPfN schemes

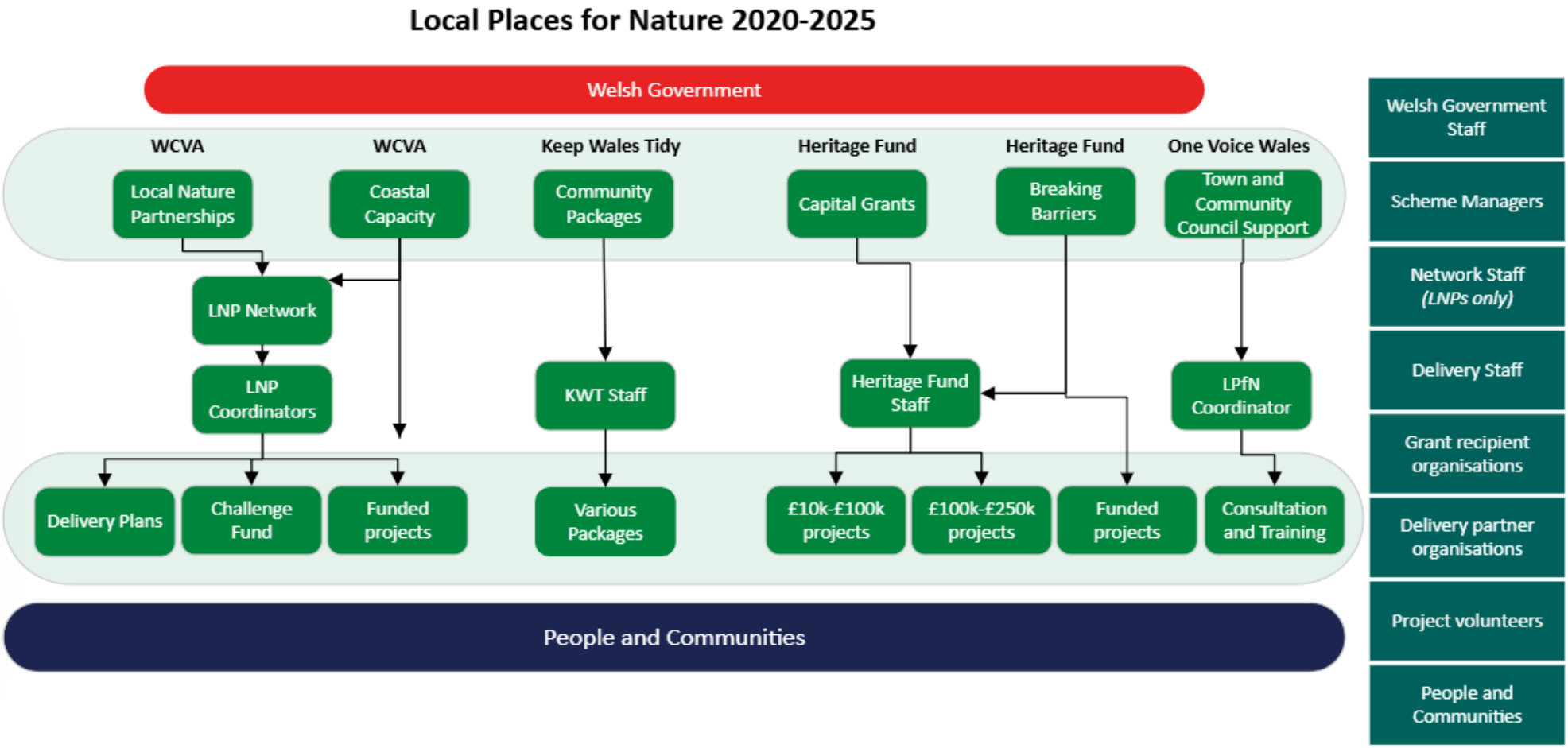
Figure AA.1 on the following page provides an overview of the separate delivery structure and activities within each of the LPfN Programme's five schemes as well as the role of OVW. The diagram demonstrates how the funding is delivered to projects, including the roles of scheme managers and delivery staff within each scheme, where applicable. Furthermore, it sets out the projects themselves and the links at this level with grant recipients and delivery partner organisations to deliver them, and how these projects engage with people and communities through volunteer involvement and wider community engagement with funded action.

Description of Figure AA.1: A flowchart titled "Local Places for Nature 2020-2025" showing the structure and funding pathways for each scheme within the LPfN programme. The Welsh Government is at the top of the chart as the funder of the programme. Below the Welsh Government, the organisations leading the schemes are shown: WCVA (Local Nature Partnerships and Coastal Capacity), Keep Wales Tidy (Community Packages), National Lottery Heritage Fund (Capital Grants and Breaking Barriers), and One Voice Wales (Town and Community Council support). Arrows indicate the flow of funds from these organisations. Arrows flow down from these organizations to boxes highlighting key scheme activities and staff including LNP Network and Coordinators, KWT staff, National Lottery Heritage Fund staff and the LPfN Coordinator (One Voice Wales). The next layer down is then the activity/support that is available via each of the schemes to people and communities:

- LNPs: Delivery Plans, Challenge Fund and Funded projects
- Community Packages: various packages
- National Lottery Heritage Fund Capital Grants: £10,000 to £100,000 projects and £100,000 to £250,000 projects
- Breaking Barriers: funded projects
- Town and Community Council Support: Consultation and Training

The graphic also shows the range of staff involved in the implementation of the programme: Welsh Government staff, Scheme managers, Network staff (LNP), Delivery staff, grant recipient organisations, delivery partner organisations, project volunteers and finally, people and communities.

Figure AA.1: Illustration of structure of the LPfN programme



Local Nature Partnerships Scheme

The objective of the LNP scheme is to build a nature recovery network that will engage people and communities, businesses and decision-makers in practical action and strategic planning for a healthy, resilient and nature-rich Wales. It consists of partnerships representing each of the local authority areas and National Park authorities (NPAs) in Wales (25 in total). Membership within each LNP varies but includes various environmental organisations, community groups, private sector businesses and individuals.

Each LNP has a member of staff who coordinates the partnership and the funds (the LNP Coordinator). Each LNP receives the same amount of revenue funding from the LPfN programme to contribute towards the costs of that officer. These roles are often also partially funded by the local authority in question to deliver a broader role.

Capital funding is allocated to the LNPs by the Welsh Government using an annually published formula (see: Local government revenue and capital settlement: background information for standard spending assessments 2024 to 2025) based on population numbers and the 'clumping' of the populations (i.e. the number of towns, villages and cities in the county). Using this method ensures the 'All Wales' coverage of the scheme. The National Park Authority LNPs are allocated the same amount of capital funding as the Local Authority LNP allocated the least amount of funding through the annualised formula. The LNPs use the capital funding to implement a 'Delivery Plan' which includes several projects. There is also a separate 'Challenge Fund' (also capital funded) for collaborative or innovative projects and pilots which is an annual competitive grant process open to the LNPs.

Additional revenue funding is also provided to support the LNPs to deliver the Section 6 biodiversity commitments, as outlined in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, which requires public authorities in Wales to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience. This funding is also being used to work towards the '30x30' biodiversity goal that aims to protect at least 30% of land, freshwater, and sea areas for nature by 2030. The '30x30' biodiversity goal is a global initiative aimed at protecting 30% of the Earth's land and sea areas by 2030. This target is part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which was agreed upon at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in December 2022.

The LNPs all have executive decision-making power over their own pot of funding and delivery activity. WCVA's role is:

- to manage the panel process that approves the LNP delivery plans alongside the challenge fund application and assessment,
- to facilitate the scheme delivery including the claims management, due diligence, payment and reporting
- and provide claims and monitoring data to the Welsh Government through regular reporting and management meetings.

It is also important to note that the LNPs can source funding to implement projects from sources other than the LPfN programme.

Coastal Capacity Building Scheme

Introduced in 2023, the Coastal Capacity Building scheme intended to build stakeholder capacity in coastal communities, recognising the importance of coastal regions for nature recovery and community well-being.

Managed alongside the LNP scheme by WCVA, it aimed to address post-EU funding gaps by bringing together partners in the coastal areas of Wales to tackle the climate emergency, restore natural habitats, and strengthen local networks for sustainable action. The scheme also sought to strengthen the connection between local coastal communities and nature, helping people understand the actions they can take to make a difference.

The scheme had an annual budget of £500,000 available for projects of five months or more, with a minimum value of £20,000. Funded projects had to be completed by 31 March 2025. Applications were made via the LNPs with partners able to apply by working with the relevant LNP Coordinator. The LNPs served as ‘lead applicants’ for the funding, coordinating efforts between various stakeholders.

Capital Grants Fund

The Heritage Fund Capital Grants Fund aimed to enable communities to restore and enhance nature in Wales. It provided capital grants of up to £250,000, targeting communities in the 50% most deprived areas in Wales, as well as supporting community food-growing projects and organisations or groups representing diverse ethnic communities. Projects were required to be able to maintain the asset long term and applicants were required to provide a maintenance plan as a supporting document to any funding application. Funding could not be used for the running cost of organisations or routine maintenance costs of existing assets. The scheme was closed to applications since July 2024 and remained closed at time of report writing, in October 2025.

Breaking Barriers Scheme

The second LPfN scheme delivered by Heritage Fund was the Breaking Barriers Scheme. It offered revenue-only grants of £30,000 to £100,000. These projects aimed to engage communities in nature-related activities, focusing on engaging ethnic minorities, refugees, Gypsies, and individuals and groups from deprived areas. At the time of writing, in October 2025, the scheme was closed to applications since March 2023.

As a revenue grant, the funding could be used for:

- Staffing costs
- Full cost recovery for the organisation
- Engagement activities and events with the community
- Information/training events for community members
- Taster events to enable communities to experience the benefits of nature
- Consumable items for events/'take homes' such as seeds, plug plants, peat free compost, gloves, biodegradable pots, small tools

- Visits to existing local places for nature in the area to demonstrate what is possible and to share ideas/expertise
- Volunteer expenses including travel costs, childcare, food and drink
- Planning possible nature projects in the area.

However, the funds could not be used to purchase capital items like laptops and phones.

The Breaking Barriers Scheme could also not be used to fund the development of a 'local place for nature'; this could be done through the other elements of the LPfN programme.

Community Packages Scheme

Delivered by Keep Wales Tidy (KWT), the Communities Packages scheme provides pre-paid packages to community groups to deliver projects. The packages range in size to support the delivery of small gardening projects as well as orchards and larger-scale actions. All packages include native plants, tools and resources and KWT staff handle orders and deliveries as well as supporting groups to install their new garden. Priority is given to projects with strong community involvement and towns, cities, deprived areas and spaces with little or no access to nature.

- Starter Packages are for small gardening projects. Any community or volunteer group can apply with no need for a bank account or constitution. There are two set Starter Packages to choose from: a Food Growing Garden or Wildlife Garden. Each one includes all the native plants, tools and materials needed; guidance on how to install the garden, and a small amount of Keep Wales Tidy officer time to provide extra advice and support.
- Development Packages are for community-based organisations looking to create larger-scale projects. A range of community organisations can apply – from social enterprises, youth groups and faith groups, to charities and registered social landlords. The two Development Packages (also a Food Growing Garden or Wildlife Garden) have been designed to not only give nature a helping hand but also benefit people's health and wellbeing. The aim is to bring communities together, encourage people to volunteer outdoors and create green spaces for everyone to enjoy. All packages include training, advice, practical help and support to install the new areas, as well as tools, materials and equipment to care for them long-term.
- Two types of Orchard Packages are available: community groups and organisations can apply for Community Orchard Packages, while schools can apply for School Orchard Packages. The packages contain the same items, but the support communities receive from Keep Wales Tidy is different depending on whether the applicant is a community organisation or a school.
- Introduced in 2024, Supersize Packages are designed for community organisations who have a huge area of empty, unloved space (roughly the size of two and a half tennis courts) that's available to transform into a thriving community garden, complete with orchard, food growing area and pond. A dedicated Keep Wales Tidy officer will help applicants plan and create their 'supersize' garden, but communities must commit to caring for it for years to come. Applications are assessed by a panel of experts and

priority will be given to projects with strong community involvement, those in towns, cities, deprived areas and spaces with little or no access to nature.

- Also introduced in 2024, Top-up Packages are for existing Local Places for Nature gardens. The Top-up Packages are completely free and include items needed to enhance green spaces previously supported. Applicants also receive expert advice from a KWT officers to help install the top-up items and discuss other ways to keep the garden thriving for years to come.

Annex B: More detail on the Realist Evaluation approach

Realist evaluation, first articulated by Pawson and Tilley (1997), is a theory-driven approach that asks: 'What works, for whom, in what contexts, and how?' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Westhorp and others, 2011). Instead of simply measuring whether an intervention works, a realist approach seeks to explain how outcomes are generated by underlying mechanisms in particular contexts (Punton and others, 2016). When the 'causal mechanisms' of an intervention are not understood, this can lead to situations where that intervention (or programme) is 'rolled out' to other areas or other groups of people, but the beneficial effects are not realised. Without an understanding of the causal mechanisms, the reasons for the failure are often not apparent. The realist evaluation approach seeks to address this A further introduction to the approach can be found here.

In a realist evaluation, interventions (in this case, the LPfN schemes and projects/activities that they fund) are seen as creating opportunities upon which people (or community, business, etc.) may choose to act if they are so minded and able. A fundamental concept is that it is not the intervention itself that causes the outcome but, instead, it is an individual's response to the resources and opportunities provided by the intervention that causes the outcome. This evaluation has sought to examine the LPfN programme from that perspective.

The importance of context

A key concept in realist evaluation is that it is not the intervention itself that causes the outcome but, instead, it is an individual's response to the resources and opportunities provided by the intervention that causes the outcome. That combination of a programme's resources and an individual's response to them is termed in realist evaluation 'the mechanism' and it is this mechanism that determines the outcome. Importantly, a realist evaluation also holds that an individual will likely respond to an intervention differently in different circumstances (or 'context'). The premise is that 'nothing works everywhere or for everyone'. Understanding context helps explain why outcomes differ across settings and guides adaptation for better results (see: RAMESES_II_Context.pdf)

Essentially, interventions create opportunities upon which people may choose to act. The success of an intervention therefore rests on the individual's reasoning and how their reasoning changes depending on their circumstances and external factors. The central formula is that outcomes arise when particular 'mechanisms' are triggered in specific 'contexts':

Context + Mechanism = Outcome (CMO)

Explanatory statements

Explanatory statements (also referred to as ‘theory statements’ in realist evaluation literature), are a concise explanation of how and why an intervention/programme is expected to lead to specific outcomes, based on underlying assumptions about context, mechanisms, and change. In the appendix that follows explanatory statements for the LPfN programme are set out using both the ‘CMMO’ framework and in the ‘if…then…because’ approach which is more user friendly and used in the main body of the report.

The CMMO framework (first developed in Dalkin and others, 2015) disaggregates the traditional "Mechanism" in the CMO model into “Mechanism (Resource)” and “Mechanism (Reasoning)”. Separating the mechanism into those two parts helps clarify the distinction between (1) what the programme provides (the resource); and (2) how participants respond to it (the reasoning). This clarity is especially useful when considering complex interventions such as LPfN where the same resource might trigger different reasoning in different contexts. Those versions of the statements are included here as they provide more detail than the “if…then…because” approach.

The more user friendly “if…then…because” approach has been widely adopted in realist research as a user-friendly way to express and test programme theories:

- If: This part describes the situation or intervention being introduced, including the setting and what the programme provides (Context + Mechanism - Resource)
- Then: This is the expected change or result that follows from the intervention (Outcome)
- Because: This explains why the outcome is expected — the reasoning, motivation, or response triggered in participants (Mechanism - Reasoning)

The approach is closely associated with Shearn and others, 2018.

Annex C: Explanatory statements

Below is a set of explanatory statements developed as part of the evaluation process. For each, the following is provided:

1. a CMMO version (Context – Mechanism (Resource) – Mechanism (Reasoning) – Outcome), and
2. a plain-English if–then–because version.

Understanding the motivations of participants and providing the right opportunities

If–Then–Because

If projects provide opportunities that align with prevalent motivations (improving the local area, being outdoors, giving back), then participation and valued outcomes are more likely, because people see the offer as meaningful and worth their time.

CMMO

Context (C): Projects operate in communities where many participants are already positively disposed towards nature, and are motivated by improving their local area, enjoying time outdoors, and giving back to the community.

Mechanism (Resource) (M-R): Projects offer opportunities that match these motivations (e.g., practical local improvements, outdoor activities, volunteering).

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M-Re): Participants recognise a close fit between what matters to them and what the project offers, feel their contributions are meaningful, and choose to engage.

Outcome (O): New sites are established and developed due to higher participation with valued outcomes such as improved engagement with local spaces, enhanced wellbeing, and increased social connections achieved.

Engaging ‘the right’ participants and allowing projects to evolve

If–Then–Because

If the objective is to shift attitudes and behaviours among people who are currently indifferent or negative towards nature, then engagement must prioritise engaging individuals in that group, because participants may otherwise, although positively motivated, already tend to hold pro-nature views, limiting the scope for change within that cohort.

CMMO

Context (C): The objective is to shift attitudes and behaviours among people who are currently indifferent or negative towards nature.

Mechanism (Resource) (M-R): Engagement efforts prioritise reaching and involving individuals from this group (e.g., targeted outreach, tailored activities).

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): These individuals perceive that the project is relevant to them, feel included and valued, and begin to reconsider their attitudes and behaviours toward nature.

Outcome (O): Greater potential for attitude and behaviour change within the target group, leading to increased pro-nature perspectives and actions among previously indifferent or negative individuals.

If–Then–Because

If early project phases prioritise recruiting participants with the skills and availability to complete physical site works (even if they already hold positive views), then new or improved green/nature spaces are more likely to be delivered effectively, because initial tasks depend on practical labour and site-focused effort.

CMMO

Context (C): Early project phases require physical site works that depend on practical labour and site-focused effort.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Projects prioritise recruiting participants with the skills and availability to complete these tasks (even if they already hold positive views).

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Skilled participants recognise they can contribute effectively, feel their involvement is essential for progress, and commit to site work.

Outcome (O): New or improved green/nature spaces are delivered effectively and on schedule.

If–Then–Because

If subsequent phases intentionally shift outreach towards underserved or disengaged groups, then use, equity of access and sustained community impact increase, because tailored engagement addresses barriers and invites new users once a site is ready.

CMMO

Context (C): Later project phases aim to broaden use and equity of access once sites are ready.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Outreach intentionally shifts toward underserved or disengaged groups through tailored engagement and barrier reduction.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): These groups perceive the project as accessible and relevant, feel welcomed, and choose to use and benefit from the space.

Outcome (O): Increased use, equity of access, and sustained community impact.

If–Then–Because

If projects intentionally shift targeting over time—from site builders to underserved users—then both site creation and equitable engagement improve, because different participant groups are activated by different opportunities at different stages.

CMMO

Context (C): Projects require both site creation and equitable engagement for long-term success.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Targeting shifts over time—from site builders in early phases to underserved users later—activating different opportunities at different stages.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Each group sees a clear fit between their interests and the project's evolving offer, feels valued, and engages accordingly.

Outcome (O): Both site creation and equitable engagement improve, leading to functional spaces and inclusive community benefits.

A flexible, tailored approach

If–Then–Because

If LPfN projects are given the flexibility to tailor activities to local needs and participant characteristics, then they are more likely to achieve relevant and positive outcomes, because adaptability ensures that interventions resonate with local priorities, barriers, and opportunities, increasing engagement and effectiveness.

CMMO

Context (C): LPfN projects operate in diverse communities with varying priorities, barriers, and opportunities.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Projects are given flexibility to tailor activities to local needs and participant characteristics.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Participants perceive activities as relevant and meaningful, feel their circumstances are understood, and engage more readily.

Outcome (O): Relevant and positive outcomes are achieved, including higher engagement and effectiveness.

If–Then–Because

If communities and applicants can design projects that fit their own circumstances and needs, then a wider range of activities and settings will emerge, because a non-prescriptive, community-led approach encourages innovation, collaboration, and adaptation to local contexts.

CMMO

Context (C): Communities and applicants have unique circumstances and needs that influence project design.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Communities and applicants can design projects that fit their own contexts through a non-prescriptive, community-led approach.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Local actors feel empowered, innovate, and collaborate, seeing the project as theirs and adapting it to local realities.

Outcome (O): A wider range of activities and settings emerges, reflecting local diversity and priorities.

If–Then–Because

If projects are allowed to evolve over time in response to participant feedback and changing local circumstances, then engagement and impact are more likely to be sustained, because evolving projects can remain relevant and continue to meet the needs of their communities

CMMO

Context (C): Local circumstances and participant needs change over time, requiring ongoing relevance.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Projects are allowed to evolve in response to participant feedback and changing conditions.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Participants see the project as responsive and valuable, remain engaged, and continue contributing.

Outcome (O): Engagement and impact are sustained over time, maintaining relevance and community benefit.

A mix of activities and enabling participants to progress

If–Then–Because

If projects engineer inclusive, regular opportunities for social connection, then wellbeing and ongoing engagement increase, because belonging and shared purpose make participation rewarding and habitual.

CMMO

Context (C): Projects aim to foster wellbeing and sustained engagement among participants.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Projects engineer inclusive, regular opportunities for social connection (e.g., group activities, community events).

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Participants experience belonging and shared purpose, making participation rewarding and habitual.

Outcome (O): Wellbeing improves and ongoing engagement increases.

If–Then–Because

If practical activities are paired with learning, then participants are more likely to develop stewardship behaviours, because confidence, skills, and a sense of responsibility are activated.

CMMO

Context (C): Projects seek to encourage stewardship behaviours alongside practical site work.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Practical activities are paired with learning opportunities (e.g., skills training, ecological education).

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Participants gain confidence, skills, and a sense of responsibility, motivating them to adopt stewardship behaviours.

Outcome (O): Participants are more likely to develop and sustain stewardship behaviours.

If–Then–Because

If projects provide progression pathways (e.g., from basic maintenance to accredited training or leadership roles), then skills, confidence and long-term stewardship strengthen, because participants can deepen involvement and see personal development.

CMMO

Context (C): Projects aim to build long-term capacity and leadership for nature stewardship.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Projects provide progression pathways (e.g., from basic maintenance to accredited training or leadership roles).

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Participants see opportunities for personal development, deepen involvement, and feel invested in the project.

Outcome (O): Skills, confidence, and long-term stewardship strengthen.

Local context and capacity

If–Then–Because

If local organisations have the knowledge, skills, and networks to engage with LPfN schemes and apply for support, then projects are more likely to be delivered effectively and sustained over time, because organisational capacity enables groups to access resources, mobilise volunteers, and collaborate with others.

CMMO

Context (C): Local organisations have the knowledge, skills, and networks to engage with LPfN schemes and apply for support.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Organisations can access resources, mobilise volunteers, and collaborate with others effectively.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Organisations feel confident and capable of delivering projects, seeing them as achievable and worthwhile.

Outcome (O): Projects are delivered effectively and sustained over time.

If–Then–Because

If LPfN schemes provide capacity-building support (such as training, resources, and partnership opportunities), then local organisations are better equipped to deliver and sustain projects, because they gain access to tools, knowledge, and collaborative networks that would not otherwise be available.

CMMO

Context (C): LPfN schemes aim to strengthen local delivery and sustainability.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Schemes provide capacity-building support (e.g., training, resources, partnership opportunities).

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Organisations feel equipped and empowered, recognising new tools and networks as enabling success.

Outcome (O): Local organisations are better able to deliver and sustain projects.

If–Then–Because

If local organisations lack the capacity to engage with LPfN schemes or identify suitable sites, then fewer projects will be implemented in those areas, because the demand-led nature of the programme means activity only occurs where organisations are able to apply and deliver.

CMMO

Context (C): Local organisations lack the capacity to engage with LPfN schemes or identify suitable sites.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Demand-led programme structure means activity only occurs where organisations can apply and deliver.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Organisations perceive participation as unfeasible, leading to disengagement and inactivity.

Outcome (O): Fewer projects are implemented in those areas.

Timescales and sustaining sites, activities and outcomes

If–Then–Because

If projects have adequate time and continuity, then engagement deepens and behaviours are more likely to stick, because repeated contact and visible progress embed routines and commitment.

CMMO

Context (C): Projects aim to embed behaviours and deepen engagement over time.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Projects have adequate time and continuity, allowing repeated contact and visible progress.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Participants see progress, feel routines forming, and commit more strongly because the project feels stable and rewarding.

Outcome (O): Engagement deepens and behaviours are more likely to stick.

If–Then–Because

If communities have both tangible improvements to local spaces and strong volunteer or partnership networks, then project benefits are more likely to be sustained, because the combination of visible change and social support triggers ongoing engagement and maintenance

CMMO

Context (C): Communities seek sustained benefits from local nature projects.

Mechanism (Resource) (M R): Projects deliver tangible improvements to local spaces and foster strong volunteer or partnership networks.

Mechanism (Reasoning) (M Re): Participants feel pride in visible change and supported by social connections, motivating ongoing engagement and maintenance.

Outcome (O): Project benefits are more likely to be sustained over time.