



# Evaluation of Community Engagement: Towards a National Nature Reserve in the Flashes of Wigan & Leigh

Fraser How and Dr. Joanne Tippett  
RoundView & The University of Manchester

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## Acronyms

**LNR:** Local Nature Reserves

**NNR:** National Nature Reserve

**NRN:** Nature Recovery Network

**SSSI:** Site of Special Scientific Interest, a formal conservation designation



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## Executive Summary

This report evaluates a community engagement process developed and trialled in a DEFRA-funded pilot to move towards declaration of the Wigan and Leigh Flashes as a National Nature Reserve. The authors designed and delivered a substantial part of this engagement activity, the sessions focussed on visioning. The pilot ran between November 2020 and March 2021. There are additional reports on the overall project and ecological analysis by the Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside Wildlife Trust and Greater Manchester Ecology Unit.

It was seen as important to engage community members from the start of the journey to develop a National Nature Reserve (NNR), to increase likelihood of effective, long-term change due to increased community buy-in and capacity building.

The programme was designed as a six-session visioning and skills development course, and offered to three cohorts (actively involved, young people and wider community).



### Objective: Enrich and support the case for National Nature Reserve status in the Flashes

The engagement activities have helped to build the case for a new NNR, with the core citizen science contribution to understanding the ecology of the area supported via the community perspectives and ideas developed in the broader visioning workshops. It was important to have project officers involved in the community visioning process as well as the site selection process, to act as a conduit between the technical and community interests.

### Objective: Inform and support nature recovery in the wider landscape

The workshops have created a rich repository of ideas and information to support collaboration and change, which is available for participants and partners to draw on for future projects and activities. Visioning within a systems-based framework of sustainability helped participants to see the bigger picture, and develop ideas beyond their patches.



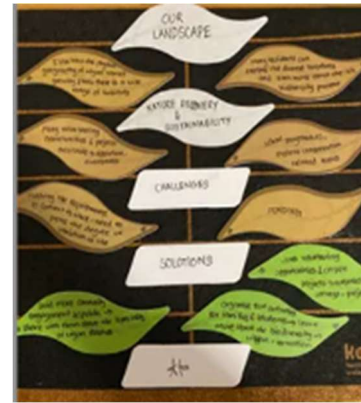
### Objective: Evaluate quality of data and insights from engagement process

1. **Hear everyone's voice:** The project achieved a relatively good reach within communities, with 250+ participants, but some key stakeholders and vulnerable groups were under-represented. Participants felt 'heard', and that their ideas were making a difference. They reported experiencing a broad range of benefits.
2. **Structure effective thinking and creativity:** The process was effective under the circumstances (remote delivery during lockdown) and is worth replicating and developing further. In particular the combination of a structured workshop process, supported by a participant pack of hands-on engagement tools, was well received.
3. **Link information across time and space:** Existing citizen science and previous engagement data was synthesised. However, more could be done to join-up knowledge from previous activity and other sectors, such as public health.

### 'Good engagement': lessons, guidelines, strategy

The project has built a wide network of people with improved capacity to support nature recovery through practical action and monitoring, through its excellent skills development programme and innovative visioning workshops with their inclusive and creative process

- Building capacity and skill base is helpful for long-term outcomes for nature as well as for participants
- A two way flow of learning between project officers and community members builds deeper understanding and links beyond project timelines
- Increasing levels of involvement and agency are associated with a range of wellbeing outcomes
- Due to the complex nature of system change, effective engagement / coproduction is likely to be a critical success factor, rather than a 'nice to have'
- All stakeholders need to have their perspectives included, not just around how to do things, but *what* to do, the direction of travel needs to be co-produced



Taking advantage of synergistic opportunities and joined-up working remains largely dependent on individuals' insights and creativity, rather than being systematically built in to organisational and partnership work. This creates a massive opportunity for positive change.

### Recommendations for community engagement in nature recovery

- Think in terms of stakeholder *and* community engagement, rather than just community engagement, and consider how to support two-way social learning
- Include capacity-building in the skills of engagement into the process, including opportunities for reflection and community involvement in evaluation
- Create a map of 'pathways / opportunities for engagement' at different levels
- Deliberately consider and work towards broader accessibility of 'shared maps' in terms of language, structure and format, to enhance usability and inclusivity
- Build an 'information and process' infrastructure to operationalise data from engagement between projects, across sectors and over time, to maximise learning
- Find ways to support community-based initiatives over time in the face of ever-changing funding landscapes and personnel, including consideration of new layers of community-led organisation that cross-cut more local or focused groups
- Consider coproduction as a top-level objective in itself, comparable to Nature recovery and Wellbeing, rather than just as a path towards them – with an associated need for appropriate and sufficient resource to foster such meaningful engagement

### Recommendations for the NNR process

- Have roles that bridge between community and technical aspects
- Clearly set the process of developing an NNR within the broader process of creating a nature recovery network – this extends the restoration activity and helps community members feel their activities and local sites are linked to the reserve
- For urban areas: signposts outside the reserve can combine information about nature recovery, and nature-based solutions such as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, with signposts to the reserve. This can improve community awareness of local nature and the actions they can take, as well as local access to the reserve
- Consider effective involvement / coproduction as a key criteria of refined criteria for developing NNRs, given its central importance for system change
- Consider using the evaluation questions articulated in this work to seed future community engagement standards, which can guide ongoing learning



# Introduction

This report evaluates a community engagement process developed and trialled in a DEFRA-funded pilot to move towards declaration of the Wigan and Leigh Flashes in Greater Manchester as a National Nature Reserve (NNR). The pilot ran between November 2020 and March 2021. There are separate reports on the whole project (Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside Wildlife Trust 2021 and Greater Manchester Ecology Unit 2021). This report focuses in on the hows and whys of 'good engagement' in this project and beyond. The authors designed and delivered a substantial part of the engagement, the elements focused on visioning, and were asked to provide an evaluation of what had worked or not, to inform and guide future initiatives.

## Context

Figure 1 Aerial photos of coal mines in area (source Wigan and Leigh Archives)

The coalfields of Wigan and Leigh fuelled the industrial revolution, and the landscape is shaped by extraction of coal and its associated transport infrastructure. Today, the former collieries are a cluster of Sites of Special Scientific Interests (SSSIs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).

They are home to nationally significant populations of rare species, such as bitterns, willow tits and spotted orchids, and are on the doorstep of 2.8 million people.

In an area of high deprivation following the closure of the mines (Bickershaw and Parsonage Collieries closed in 1992), these sites provide an essential resource for health and wellbeing.



Critically, it was seen as important to engage community members from the start of the journey to develop an NNR, including in the data-gathering to inform decisions around site selection for the proposal. Involving a wide range of participants and community members from these early stages has not been a common approach in the process of declaring NNRs, and thus evaluation of this process can develop learning and extract key lessons.

The rationale for such early involvement is to increase likelihood of effective, long-term change towards nature recovery and improved outcomes for people, through:

- building local ownership and stakeholder buy-in, thus encouraging more active involvement in protecting, managing and sharing information about the reserve;
- improving the science and knowledge base by bringing in new perspectives and coordinating a wide-scale citizen science input; and
- building skills, confidence, connections and wellbeing amongst participants, which builds capacity for action, including increased volunteer conservation and monitoring.

The planning for a potential declaration of an NNR offered an opportunity to increase and enhance community and stakeholder involvement, building on long-term work by the partners and recent activity of the Carbon Landscape project (funded by National Lottery Heritage).

This map shows the Flashes in the context of the Carbon Landscape, which acts as the green lungs and an essential wildlife corridor between the urban areas of Manchester and Liverpool, especially in the face of species' need to migrate in response to climate change.

In the context of the current commitment to wide scale restoration and nature recovery across 30% of the country's land, this pilot was also an opportunity to explore the potential for mobilising greater community involvement in landscape-scale restoration.

Looking wider, such engagement can build a richer picture of the local area and enable access, communication and activities that better meet community needs.

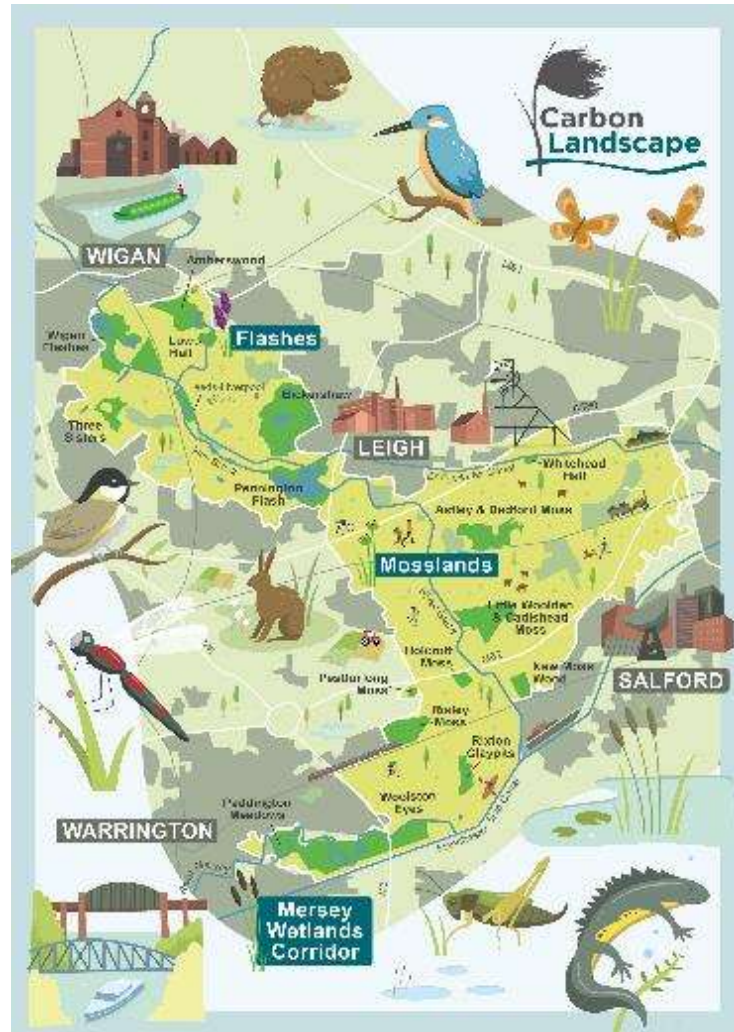


Figure 2 Map of Carbon Landscape (source project partnership)

## Community engagement programme

The 'community engagement brief' for this work was both specific and broad-ranging:

1. **Consult, involve and 'skill-up' communities** in order to:
  - a. **Provide and enrich evidence for the NNR** application, and
  - b. **Inform and support nature recovery** in the wider landscape
2. **Demonstrate and inform 'good' community engagement practice** in the general context of nature recovery and wellbeing (in particular the Nature Recovery Network).

The programme was designed as a combined visioning and skills development course. A core programme of six sessions was offered to three different cohorts of community members (the actively involved, young people, and the wider community around Bickershaw Country Park, the most recent site to see concerted restoration effort following the closure of the colliery in the 1990s). Over 250 people in total engaged in these sessions.

Figure 3 Screen shot of virtual tour with Dr. Mark Champion

The 'visioning' part of the process involved three workshops (three for each cohort) in which ideas were shared, discussed and recorded. These were complemented by a virtual field tour of one of the key sites (and where the demonstration restoration was being carried out as part of this pilot); and sessions dedicated to skills development: wildlife surveying and practical conservation.



The sessions took place online due to the Covid pandemic (apart from practical conservation skills). The cohort of young people were also offered the opportunity to be involved in creating a documentary: 'New Voices in Nature Recovery'. The sessions built over time and participants were encouraged to attend the full course, but the process was designed to allow for flexibility in this regard, so that people could come in and out at different stages. A digital noticeboard was set up for collecting and sharing ideas (shown below).



Figure 4 Screen-shot of the digital noticeboard

## Structure of this report

First there is a discussion of how we might assess the quality of community engagement, and the method and data sources used for this evaluation. Then this thinking is applied to review the aims of the community engagement brief, focusing first on the informing the case for an NNR, then on nature recovery in the wider landscape. This is followed by an evaluation of the quality of data and insights from the engagement process overall, drawing out ideas to guide future activity.

The next section explores coproduction as a move beyond engagement and lessons learned both in terms of evaluating engagement, with the potential to inform community engagement standards in NNR development in the future. The conclusion includes recommendations for the Wigan and Leigh pilot, and for engagement in the NNR development process and nature recovery more broadly.



# The visioning process: insights & data gathered

What is 'good' engagement, and how would we know it if we saw it?

The clearer and more specifically defined the purpose of the engagement is, the easier it is to answer that question. In this case, the consultation and data-gathering aspect of the programme to inform the NNR process is the most straightforward to address: Were the insights and data gathered helpful or significant? Then additionally—within the focused context of the NNR proposal—how did the range of activities within the programme support the gathering of useful and pertinent information?

For the next aim—community input into the broader nature recovery process—again we can look at the data gathered, and consider how it might be used, to assess how well this objective has been met. This is only part of the story however, as community input into nature recovery and wellbeing reaches far beyond any one consultation event (or series of events). This leads directly to the third aim of demonstrating and informing high quality community engagement (for nature recovery and wellbeing). This is a complex question that needs some careful unpacking. The authors have previously developed and published a model of an effective 'coproduction' process (Tippett and How 2020). This describes characteristics and practices associated with a coherent approach to engagement and collaborative working between diverse stakeholders, based upon systems thinking principles and over two decades of practical fieldwork. We draw on this framework to facilitate our appraisal of this programme. Concepts are introduced from this work as needed in the analysis below.

## Method: evaluating community engagement

This report develops a process for *how* to evaluate community engagement, and offers a synthesis of an iterative process of evaluation throughout the pilot. Opportunities to reflect upon the engagement were built into the process at two levels. Participants were asked directly for feedback, in particular for suggestions for improvement for the following cohort, as well as developing ideas for future engagement. There was also an element of capacity building in the skills of facilitation and engagement built into the programme. Assistant facilitators were drawn from the wider project team as well as participants from early cohorts, who volunteered to help in future rounds. The discussions before and after each session with these assistant facilitators provided a further valuable pool of reflections and learning.

Sources of data for this evaluation include:

- field notes and reflections by the lead facilitators of the visioning sessions (and authors of this report);
- reflective discussions with assistant facilitators and project partners;
- an in-depth interview conducted by Tippett with Steve Atkins and Mark Champion, who ran the citizen science and conservation elements of the course;
- transcripts of interviews used for the 'New Voices' documentary; and
- participant feedback gathered during the sessions (using a mix of tools, such as Mentimeter surveys, zoom chat and images of Ketso Connects shared via Padlet).

In total, 232 comments in the form of written feedback were collated. The data was then analysed and coded, and charts were created showing the themes to emerge in the analysis alongside the relative proportions of different types of responses (e.g. elements that the

participants found to be helpful, or areas for improvement). The charts can be seen below (Figures 16, 17, 18, 19). They give insights into patterns, which are explored further through participants' comments. Quotes from participants are shown in their own words, and are noted with quotation marks.

There are some limitations to this evaluation process. Given the challenges of conducting the workshops during a pandemic, there was less opportunity to collect feedback on the process than might have been the case in face-to-face workshops (for instance, connection and logistics issues arising from working from home meant that some people dropped out of zoom meetings before the end of sessions, when feedback was gathered). It would have been helpful to have a further round of reflection and feedback on the emerging analysis with community members and project officers after the initial series of workshops, if time had allowed. Whilst there was an opportunity to interview a few key players at the end of the pilot, personnel changes meant that this process was also somewhat fragmented.

Changing job roles and short-term contracts for project officers is a common issue, and such transience makes it more challenging to foster social learning and building of tacit knowledge over time. This points to the value of distributing learning and opportunities for evaluation across a wide cohort, including community members themselves, as has been attempted here, albeit with room for improvement. This is an important lesson for the nature of coproductive processes, evaluation itself needs to be iterative, reflective and consistently built into the process. Facilitators *and* participants have a role to play in shaping the process.

The next sections evaluates the visioning process within this pilot.

## **Objective: Enrich and support the case for National Nature Reserve status in the Wigan Flashes**

The engagement activities have helped to build the case for a new NNR, with the core citizen science contribution to understanding the ecology of the area supported via the ideas and perspectives shared in the broader visioning workshops.

Declaration of an NNR centres on conservation considerations, with defined criteria requiring robust and detailed scientific evidence and a relatively narrow scope for interpretation. It must demonstrate potential for “preserving flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features of special interest in the area and/or for providing opportunities for the study of, and research into, those features” (National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949). The most directly relevant part of the community engagement in relation to demonstrating this potential was the citizen science component, which brought together granular data from multiple citizen science recordings of wildlife and historical data sets around species. This process, coordinated by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (2021), led to the creation of a series of maps showing the location of key species in the landscape, and the relationship between these sightings and various landscape designations, such as SSSIs and Local Nature Reserves (see Figure 5 for an example).

The project built skills and interest in a new group of people to carry on with this surveying and recording, an important resource for long-term management, as well as future research and learning about nature recovery in the area. In addition to the core session introducing surveying and recording in each series of workshops, over 60 people participated in a six-week course that was developed in response to demand as part of this pilot. Many of these participants were new to volunteer recording.

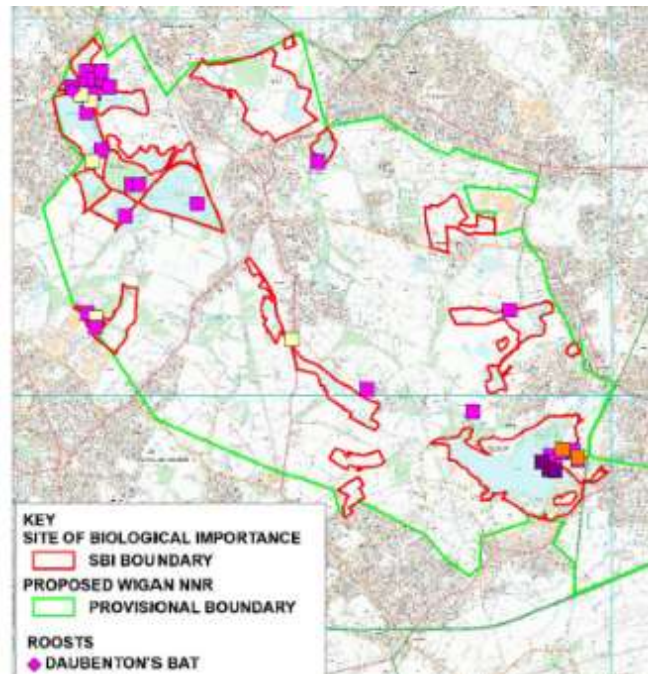
The provision of opportunities for public enjoyment of nature and/or open-air recreation was added to the role of NNRs in 2006, thus such potential benefits are now important for building a case. The visioning process led to a richer understanding of the heritage and character of the landscape, as well as community values and aspirations for the area.

Figure 5 Ecological mapping to inform site selection (Source Greater Manchester Ecology Unit 2021).

Thinking about the NNR and how it sits in the landscape has been an emergent process, as clearly defined boundaries of the potential NNR were not known at the start, just a broad, fuzzy area of where it could be.

The final stage of finalising site boundaries for the application was quite a technical process, carried out with a small group of partners (most of whom had been involved in the visioning process or citizen science and building of the evidence base).

This involved looking at the evidence about key species, existing designations, such as SSSIs; reports of land condition and land-ownership (related to ability to ensure long-term conservation management).



Understanding of the heritage and community values arising from the visioning workshops, the more qualitative information about place and how people value and use the sites, was brought into these discussions about site selection through a social learning process. This was encouraged by the fact that the project officers who carried out the scientific mapping, and were involved in the discussion of boundaries, attended some of the community visioning workshops. An additional factor was having the visioning workshop facilitators attend the meetings to decide the boundaries. They were thus able to act as an informal conduit for key issues and ideas developed through the process of community engagement.

Figure 6 Mapping Community Engagement (Source Great Manchester Wetlands Partnership 2014)

Such two way flow of learning between project officers and community members builds deeper understanding, and helps create links that endure past project timelines. Ongoing linking of insights from engagement was important in this pilot. Several of the project team were involved in the development of the Carbon Landscape Project (Carbon Landscape Steering Group 2016). In addition to published information, they were able to draw on tacit knowledge developed in this process, such as the dialogue that went into the mapping shown here.



A weakness of this pilot in terms of community engagement was that the technical and somewhat constrained nature of selection of sites for the potential NNR was not as clearly explained to participants as it could have been. There was a lot of discussion in the workshops about areas that participants would like to see included in the NNR, as they would create wildlife corridors between known ecological 'hotspots'. Not all of these areas identified as important by the community were included in the final proposal, due to issues with land ownership and / or because they weren't (yet) considered to be of sufficient national significance in terms of conservation value. A lesson is the need to communicate more clearly at the start about the key stages of the process, its scope and its limits.

However, participants on the visioning process *were* encouraged to see the potential NNR in the wider context of creating a network for nature recovery from the outset. This will be an important element of the ongoing communication and work with local communities, when the map of the final proposed collections of sites is shared. Many of the sites identified as important, but not included in the NNR proposal, can be included as key links in the emerging Nature Recovery Network (a new way of approaching biodiversity management set out in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan HMG, 2018). This wider geographical approach offers an opportunity to explore the potential for further restoration and habitat creation in-between ecological 'hotspots', such as those included in the NNR proposal.

## Objective: Inform and support nature recovery in the wider landscape

Discussions in the online workshops ranged widely, considering energy and resource use as well as opportunities to manage for biodiversity in the land in-between the core nature conservation sites, including road verges, gardens, parks and school grounds. This breadth is reflected in the following quote from the 'New Voices' documentary (Carbon Landscape Partnership 2021) from a young participant:

*"The way I want to see Wigan and Leigh's future is: more accessible places for communities, sustainable buildings, more wildlife and less carbon emissions in the environment and lots of diversity, heritage, accommodations and thousands of destinations to visit."*

A common theme to emerge was that many people in the area are not aware of the existence of the rich landscapes on their doorstep, nor that they are able to visit them.

Figure 7 Recent interpretation board in the Flashes (Source Carbon Landscape Partnership).



Figure 8 Sustainable Urban Drainage System, coal shale in background (Source author's own)

It also became clear in the discussion that the general public were not likely to be aware of the ecological purpose and value of interventions such as Nature Based Solutions. Providing information about the multiple benefits that these afford, including habitat creation, could offer a valuable opportunity to enhance awareness. This in turn could increase the likelihood of further restoration efforts in-between key conservation sites. Such information outside of the nature reserve also offers an opportunity to signpost people to the reserve.



It should be noted that a one-way provision of information is not sufficient, and this needs to be combined with ongoing engagement and learning. Indeed, several participants mentioned how much they valued learning about the natural flood management scheme in their area in the series of workshops with residents near Bickershaw (see Appendix A for a brief overview).

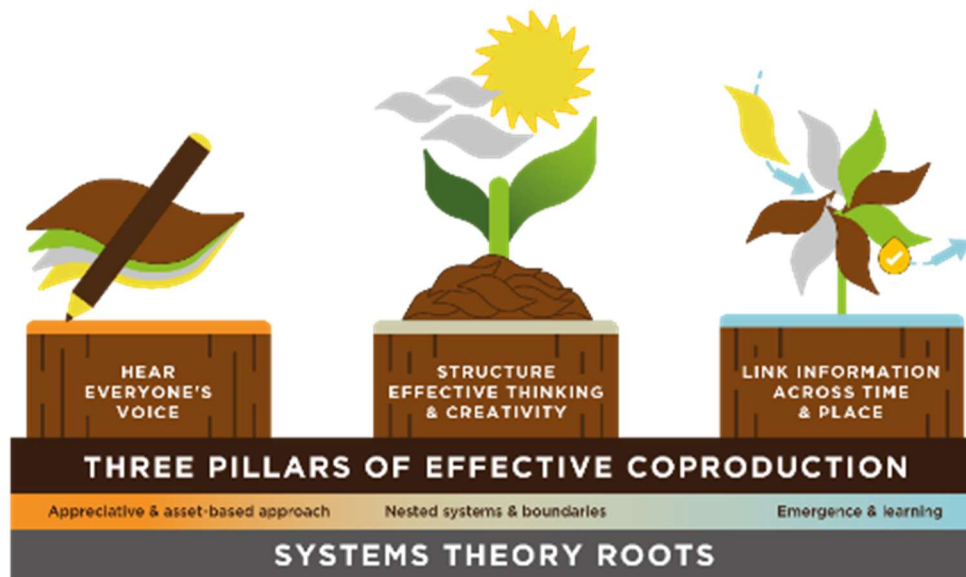
Data and insights for action were not the only aspects of value to emerge from the workshops. A key desired outcome was to build interest in, and capacity to support, ecological restoration and environmental action in the wider landscape. Feedback from participants suggested that they experienced many benefits from involvement that will support ongoing change: skills development, learning about the bigger picture, and a sense that participants are making a difference. Participants were encouraged to see themselves as potential agents of change, bringing ecological restoration and sustainability actions out from the core conservation sites into their gardens, schools and the connecting landscapes and areas. As the process was deliberately designed to build skills and capacity, they are also better able to contribute as a result of their involvement.

## **Objective: Evaluate quality of data and insights from engagement process**

This section goes into more depth into the consultation, dialogue and data gathering around nature recovery and wellbeing. It attempts to evaluate the quality of the data that has been gathered, and elucidates key principles underpinning the design of the visioning workshops.

What constitutes 'good quality' data from engagement? A basis for answering this is offered by the authors' previous work published in Town Planning Review (Tippett and How 2020), expressed as "Three Pillars of Effective Coproduction Processes":

Figure 9 Three Pillars of Effective Coproduction (Source Tippett et al 2021)



The real or ultimate value of the data, the outcomes of the visioning workshops, will depend upon how it is shared, used and developed over time. It is too early to comment on this as the data is only recently available. It is possible, however, to evaluate the quality of the data before its ultimate use can be ascertained.

With respect to this question, the three pillars suggest the following questions that can be used for evaluation:

- 1) **Hear everyone's voice:** Does the data sufficiently reflect the breadth of perspective, experience and needs of all stakeholders?
- 2) **Structure effective thinking and creativity:** Is there a full coverage of the issues and questions necessary to support effective dialogue and decision-making?
- 3) **Link information across time and space:** Is the information robustly and usefully linked to pertinent data elicited previously, in this and comparable contexts?

## Hear everyone's voice: Breadth of stakeholder and community perspectives and experience

The first question around whether breadth of perspectives has two aspects: **who was present**, and were all of those present **involved, heard and fully able to contribute?**

In terms of **who was present**, given that the pilot was conducted entirely during lockdown, it was a significant achievement that over 250 participants were engaged, and these ranged from those who were already involved, to people new to the project: *"We knew nothing about it to begin with"* to people who had not yet realised the wealth of nature and biodiversity available on their doorstep: *"Opened my eyes to so much more nature that is in the local area than I originally knew of."* A particular strength of this pilot was integrating the voices of young people into every aspect of the process. A range of project partners and organisations also participated. This diversity created a fertile space for dialogue and creativity, and allowed a wide range of views to be elicited and recorded.

A concerted effort was made in the design of the programme to reach a good variety of people in the community: first those who were already actively involved, such as 'Friends of'

groups; then young people aged 16 – 25; followed by the wider community around the most recent large site under active restoration in the area, Bickershaw Country Park. The extensive use of social media and efforts to contact organisations is detailed in the project report (Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside Wildlife Trust 2021 – see also the hashtag #iflHadAnNRR). The pilot built on earlier outreach work, such as the Youth Summit organised by the Carbon Landscape Team in summer 2020.

There was a conscious decision to start with groups and individuals who were already engaged, both as a means of building momentum and to acknowledge and make the most of their existing knowledge and experience. Following the public meeting introducing the project, and in each series of workshops, participants were asked to push the invite out to their networks and connections. Each round of visioning included a section asking about how to better engage with participants and how to widen the engagement, so that it could be tailored and improved for the particular context, building on the experience of local people.

In order to encourage a commitment of time, it is important to design a process that is of benefit to participants (and to communicate those benefits to inspire engagement). Opportunities for skills development and creating social connections to overcome isolation proved to be useful motivators: *“Have an opportunity to learn new skills and engage with like-minded people”*; *“Being able to learn about management strategies”*. There were also comments that people enjoyed hearing from experts, including local people, who were knowledgeable about the sites and wildlife:

- *“I really enjoyed it, having access to this kind of knowledge and experience is very encouraging to novices...in better understanding and enjoying the natural world.”*
- *“Great job of bridging the gap between very beginners like me and those who are clearly much more experienced”*;
- *“Really informative. Has made me realise how much more I'm missing on my walks”*;
- *“I am genuinely enjoying learning more, and am keen to enhance my enjoyment of my time outdoors, by understanding more about the natural world around me”*.

Allowing space for people to tell their stories of place was an important aspect of the whole process. A shift in practice in the wildlife surveying and identification training was to allow specific slots for community members to give a talk about sites that were important to them. Having a practical conservation project on the ground also increased motivation, by creating visible change as part of the project. This was highlighted on the virtual field trip.

The sessions were designed to build on each other over time, but also for people to be able dip in and out, recognising the pressures on people's time. This led to one comment that *“There was quite a lot of repetition throughout the course”*, but did mean that when ongoing outreach efforts (including by the participants and project partners talking to their networks) brought in new participants, they were able to rapidly catch up and contribute.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts the representation of all stakeholders fell short of ideal for such a wide-ranging and important topic. The participants were all self-selected, and therefore of course they had some personal or professional interest in nature recovery or wellbeing—and as a consequence the views of people and groups who are not already concerned with these issues are noticeably absent. Examples of under-represented groups are: the ‘seldom heard’, such as people experiencing homelessness, single mothers; young people not in education or employment, people from the traveller community; those who experience learning or access difficulties, and in general those that lack time and resources to participate (such as access to the internet and IT, or even the confidence to use platforms

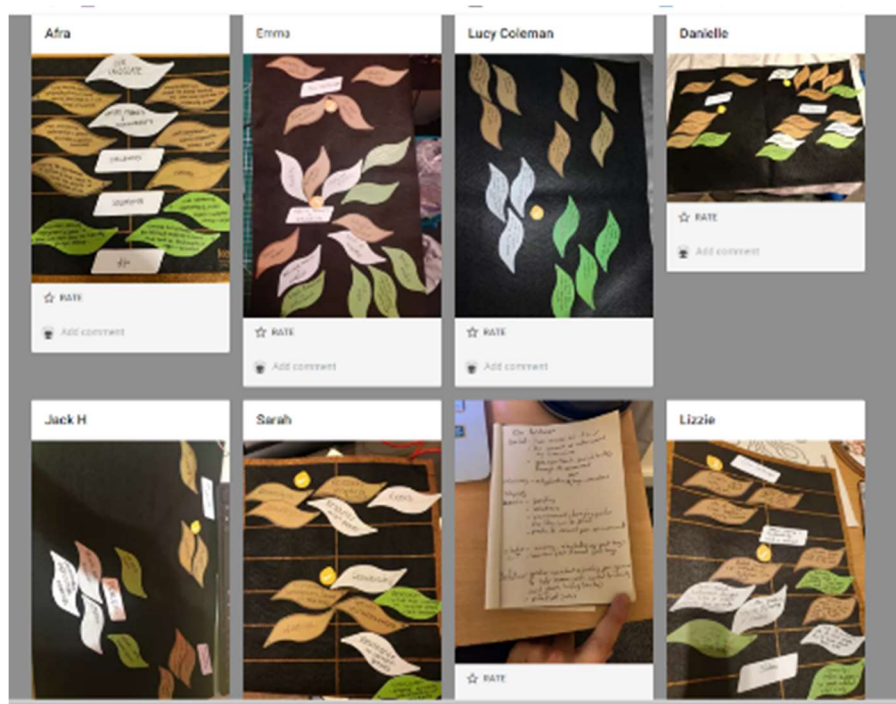
such as Zoom, to take part in remote workshops). In addition, the project did not engage with those who take part in activities that can be viewed as anti-social (for example, quad-biking).

The pilot's rapid timescale and restrictions on meetings in person made such outreach more challenging. To engage with 'seldom heard' it helps to go to where they are meeting, which was not possible during lockdown. Whilst some land-managers and project partners were involved, it would have been preferable to have a wider range of land managers and owners taking part in the workshops to enhance the breadth of perspectives and social learning.

To give all of the people who were involved a real opportunity to be **involved, heard and fully able to contribute** to the dialogue, the workshop process was designed to follow what works learned from decades of face-to-face facilitation using the Ketso toolkit. (Ketso is a social business founded by Dr. Tippett that creates visual, tactile tools and processes for effective dialogue, decision-making and collaboration). This features stages of activity that give everybody a chance to think undisturbed, for themselves, in response to prompts and questions given to all. This helps to mitigate the well-known issue of those with the 'loudest' voices dominating and steering any discussion. Following individual thinking and recording of ideas, the dialogue is structured to enable everyone to share and be heard.

The challenge of delivering these workshops remotely during the pandemic rather than in person required some innovative adaptation. Each participant was sent a physical pack in advance to support their remote engagement. This included a 'Ketso Connect' kit for creative engagement. This was a pandemic-inspired innovation of an individual pack that could be sent to each person to use in their own space. Each person was able to take some time off-screen to develop their ideas before sharing them in digital breakout rooms (shown below).

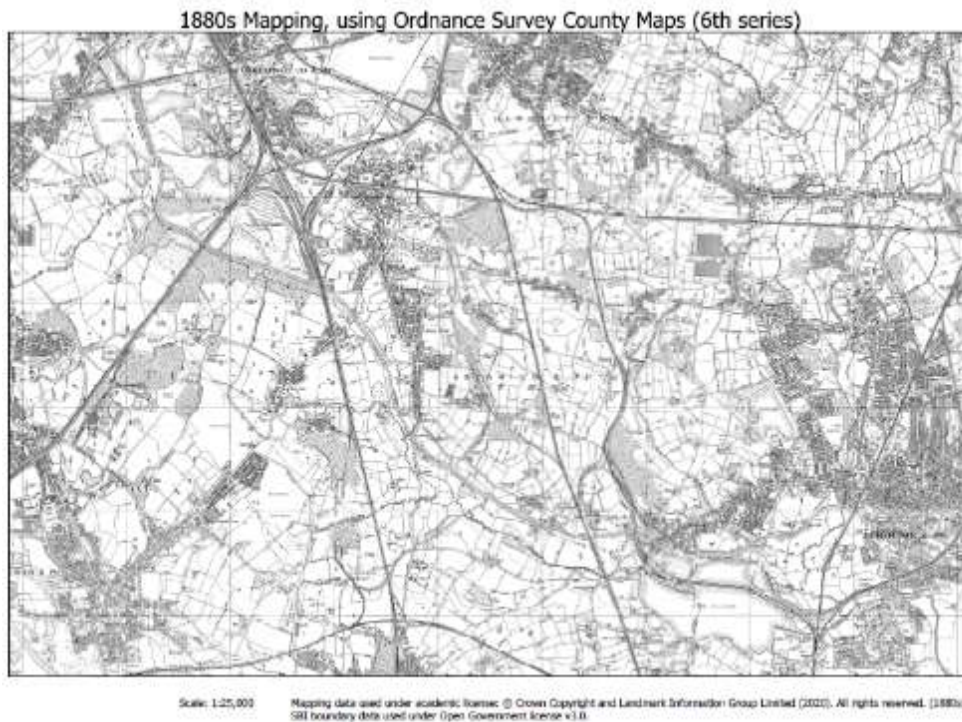
Figure 10 Online 'digital canvas', Padlet, used to share images of participants' ideas on Ketso Connects



The pack included a series of maps created for the project by the University of Manchester team, showing changes in the landscape from the 1830s to 1880s to the present day, landforms and water bodies. The paper copies of these maps were sent along with a sheet of trace paper for making notes, and they were explored and discussed in the workshops.

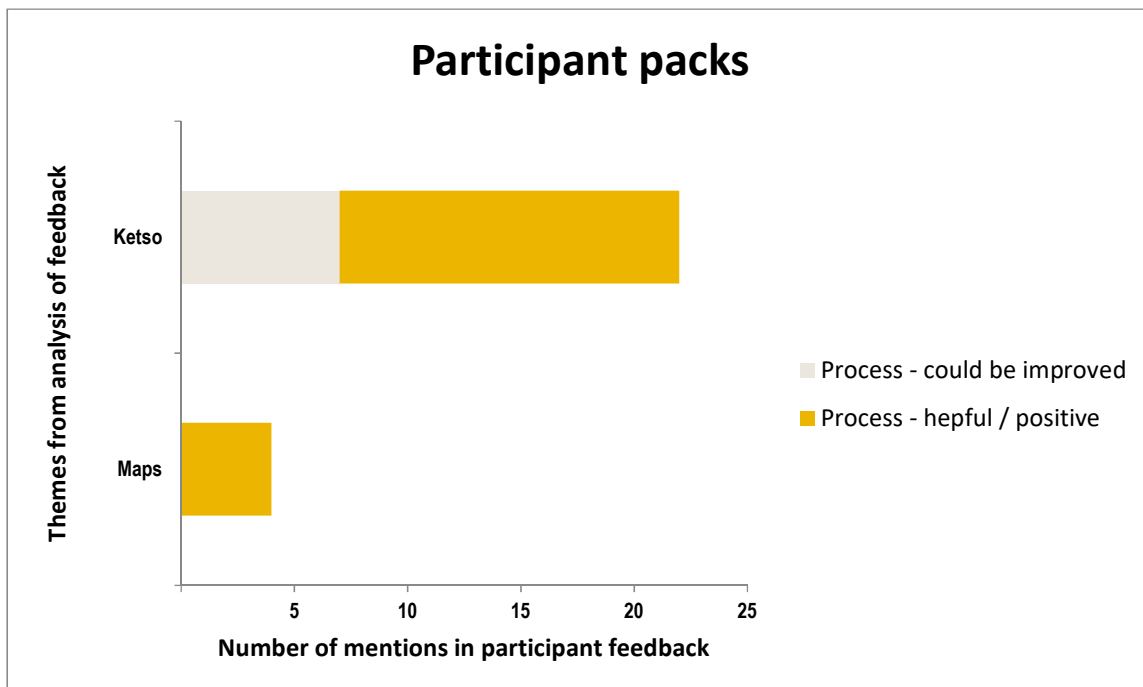


Figure 11 Example of map provided to participants (Map created by Sanderson, 2020)



Participant feedback was largely positive about the physical support packs, enough to state that this innovative format works and would be worth using and developing further in the future. The chart below shows a summary of types of comments about the pack.

Figure 12 Types of feedback form participants about the physical support packs



Some of the challenges discussed with the Ketso kit revolved around the need to navigate another IT system (Padlet) in order to share the ideas during the workshops (though there were also comments about the ease of using the kit itself, and that it was *“handy to have the*

*mind maps after sessions*”). There were a few questions about the additional expense of sending a physical kit, as opposed to using purely digital tools, and a few requests for a trial run in how to use it and share the ideas digitally before the workshops.

Feedback about the value of these packs included:

- *“Maps throughout history, highlighting the water and history of the area, the pack is brilliant and a really lovely touch”;*
- *“The maps are really useful and very interesting!”*
- *“No matter what breakout room you were in, you felt included. The Ketso kits were an excellent way to bridge online activities”;*
- *“Loved the Ketso kit, found that really engaging and a useful tool. A snapshot of our ideas, very neat”;*
- *“This format allows what might be quieter voices to be heard compared with a public meeting!”*

There was a good deal of feedback that suggested that people had felt heard in the workshops. One person commented that more people might be engaged in the future *“if they realise that they are influencing the site, as we thought it would be more inform”*. Feedback on what participants liked included:

- *“Opportunity to make a difference and crystallise ideas”;*
- *“Chance to be a part of change”;*
- *“It actually makes a change to be asked for an opinion!”*

An added benefit was the skills development that using this pack afforded. Through the workshop process, participants learned to use this project planning and ideas development tool – and reported using it many different ways outside of the workshop, from preparing for a job interview, to writing reports, using it in their working lives and studies:

- *“Liked using the Ketso kit, have used it lots since!”*
- *“Since the workshops I have been able to keep the Ketso kit, and I have been using it in my assignments, mapping out my thoughts”;*
- *“It is really useful for organising my ideas, particularly for report writing and work”.*

Project partners were rapidly able to learn to facilitate break out rooms, using the physical kit as a prompt for different stages of the process. In addition, several community members and young people were keen to develop their facilitation skills, and were able to act as facilitators in subsequent rounds of visioning, as one commented, this was a *“great experience and helped to develop my communication skills too”*.

## Structure effective thinking and creativity: Coverage of the issues and questions for effective dialogue

Without a carefully designed structure for the content and sequence of topics and questions, the natural tendency of a group is to drift into often unproductive discussions or details. Again, following from experience and tried-and-tested patterns, we crafted a series of questions designed to cover as wide a range of pertinent topics and angles as possible in the time available.

The visioning processes started with exploring what people valued in the landscape and what was already working in terms of improving biodiversity and wellbeing. An understanding of how a landscape and its associated ecology has evolved is important for creating a sense of place and attachment for local communities. Why is this area special?

During the visioning sessions there was a great deal of discussion about the landscape's heritage, and the need to find ways to make the history of the area (including the radical changes it has undergone) more visible – both as a reminder of its industrial heritage and a powerful story of hope, showing nature's ability to reclaim degraded landscapes.

The workshops went on to stretch participants' thinking by eliciting ideas for the future of the landscape within a bigger picture, systems-view of sustainability (the RoundView, Tippett et al 2009; Tippett and How 2018).

The RoundView provides a clear set of positive guidelines for how to meet human needs without causing environmental problems in the first place, in contrast to a focusing on what we need to *stop* doing. It sets nature recovery in the context of climate change and other key issues. The RoundView has provided a core underpinning for community engagement and work in schools in the Carbon Landscape (Steering Group 2016).

The hands-on exercises of the RoundView, using artistic representations of geological time and human's relationship to the environment, were modified into an interactive process for use online.



Figure 13 RoundView matching exercise adapted for online use (Source authors' own)

This approach helped people to think bigger, beyond their patch, about how these activities can contribute to broader sustainability aims, such as climate change mitigation. This led to discussions about the possibilities for sustainability in the area, and the potential to use increased awareness of the ecological richness of the Wigan Flashes as a catalyst for change.

Feedback included:

- *“Educational elements particularly interesting from a personal perspective - e.g. guided walk on site, bird ID session. But also understanding the bigger picture of the site(s), their history and importance”;*
- *“I have learned new ways of thinking through the Zoom workshops. The environment and nature and especially our effects on them”;*
- *“I found the RoundView process genuinely inspiring; it's very easy to feel overwhelmed and powerless against the planet's problems but I left feeling optimistic that change is possible for a positive future and I really loved hearing people's passion and ideas.”*

Figure 14 RoundView Guidelines for Sustainability (Source [www.roundview.org](http://www.roundview.org))



## Link information across time and space: using pertinent, existing data, and making data available for use in the future

Much of the information in the analysis of species data came from existing records and earlier citizen science records. A key partner in this pilot was the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, which runs the biological data base for the ten Greater Manchester districts and currently holds 2.4 million records. The accumulation of data over time builds to a richer picture of the area, as well as a greater sense of connection to its wildlife, as reflected in these comments from participants:

- *“I do a lot of surveying, bird surveys... I will make a record of what I see and I will report that to the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit. So that data is captured as a snapshot of what was there on that particular occasion. And there are quite a lot of Leigh Ornithological Society members who are doing that on a regular basis. ... [This] is real data and real science and not just opinion.”*
- *“The helping with species data collection seems really rewarding for the application and personal development.”*
- *“If doing so I can also contribute to the valuable records kept by the GM Ecology Unit, and play a small part in monitoring the health of our natural world, then so much the better.”*

Figure 15 Engaging with Ketso, developing Carbon Landscape (Source Tippett & Connelly 2013)

The pilot was set in the context of decades of restoration work and practical support from 'Friends of' groups. The engagement that led to the Carbon Landscape partnership's successful bid to the National Heritage Fund, has built a resource of maps and information, which were used to inform this process (Great Manchester Wetlands Partnership 2014).

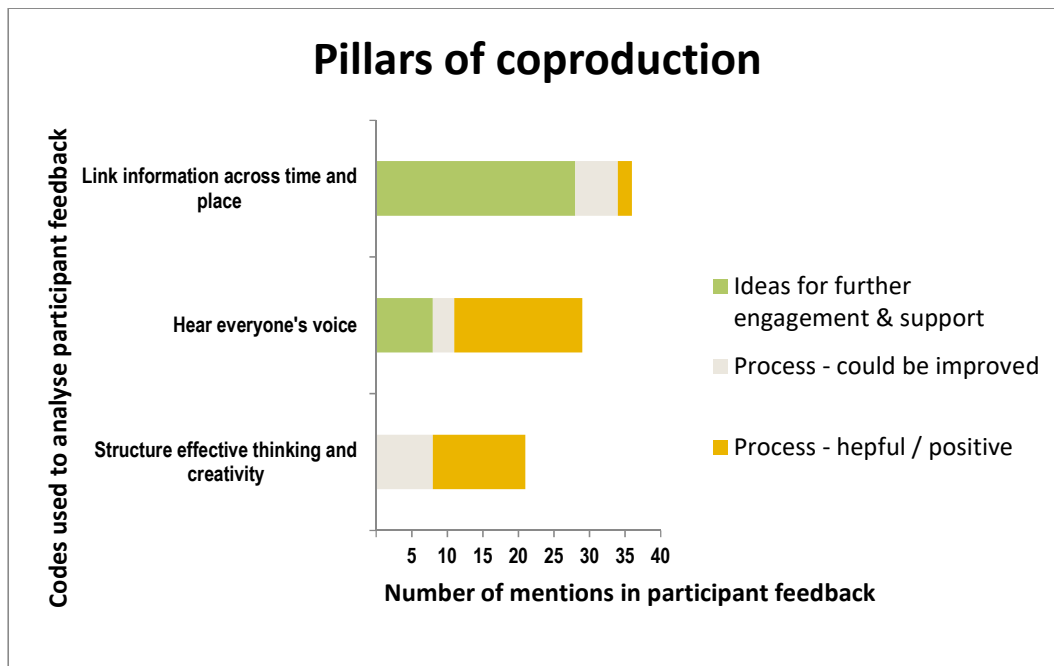


In addition to data and recorded information, there is a great deal of tacit knowledge built from the experience of prior engagement that can be drawn on in ongoing processes. It is important to have the active involvement of a range of partners and project officers in the knowledge creation process, including in the workshops with community members, to draw out, and make the most of such tacit knowledge.

This third pillar, asking how well the engagement was 'joined-up' with previous engagement, or related engagement elsewhere, was the weakest aspect of these visioning workshops. In this specific project, time and resource constraints (especially with the need to adapt all workshops to be delivered remotely) meant that it was not possible to give proper consideration to finding and fully integrating the full range of other relevant information from the past and other sectors, such as public health. This is by no means uncommon or surprising. There is a systemic lack of infrastructure to support strategic joining-up of data from engagement and this represents a significant opportunity, as we discuss below.

The following chart shows an overview of the feedback from participants when coded by each of the three pillars of coproduction.

Figure 16 Types of feedback from participants coded by pillars of coproduction



The striking number of ‘suggestions for further engagement and support’ around the pillar of ‘linking ideas over time and place’ reinforces the insight that this is an area ripe with opportunity. It was also a key concern of participants, that they would like to be further involved but this would need support in the future.

The ‘suggestions for improvement’ under the pillar of ‘structure effective thinking’ were almost equally split between making the information less complex and ‘lecturey’ and comments that the sessions could have given more detail and that they could have prompted for deeper answers and given more detailed examples.

The high number of ideas around ‘what worked’ for ‘hear everyone’s voice’ backs up the qualitative analysis of feedback that in the workshops, generally people felt heard – with the suggestions largely around how to widen and broaden the network of people involved.

Below is a summary of this evaluation of the quality of the data gathered, using the three pillars of coproduction:

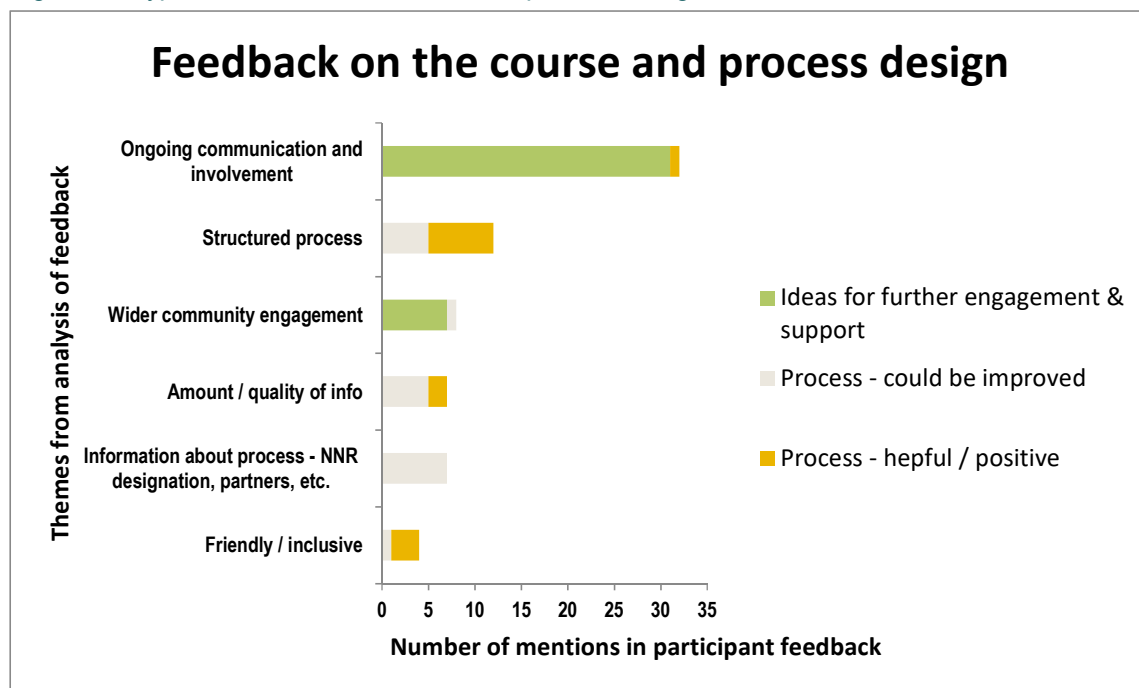
- 1) **Hear everyone’s voice:** The project achieved a relatively good reach within communities but some key stakeholder groups were un-represented, as is often the case (e.g. some land managers and owners, community members with no interest in nature recovery, or who lacked the capacity and access to ICT to attend). A strong point was that the people who were involved felt heard in the process, and that their ideas were making a difference.
- 2) **Structure effective thinking and creativity:** The process was effective under the circumstances (remote delivery during lockdown) and is worth replicating and developing further. In particular the combination of a structured workshop process, supported by a participant pack of hands-on engagement tools, was well received.
- 3) **Link information across time and space:** Existing citizen science data and records were synthesised, and the project was able to draw on the engagement and analysis that led to the Carbon Landscape. As is common due to lack of explicit inclusion as a project aim and targeted resource, however, more could be done to link to and join-up data and knowledge from previous activity and other sectors, such as public health, into the process.



## Participant feedback on the process of consultation, dialogue & data gathering around nature recovery & wellbeing

Participant feedback on the visioning process was enthusiastic, and although it was—of course—not 100% positive, the areas for improvement were approached constructively and positively. The following chart gives an overview of participant feedback about the workshop process.

Figure 17 Types of feedback coded around process design

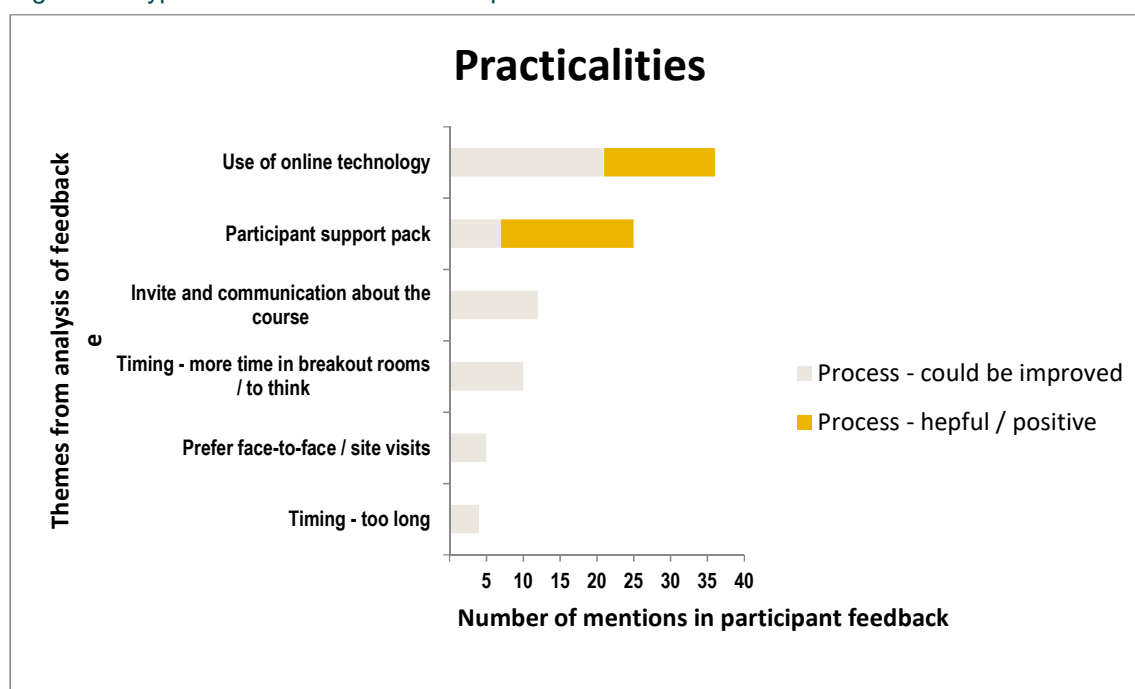


The most striking feature is the amount of suggestions offered around how to continue being engaged and involved after this pilot. As noted already, there is a strong appetite for more.

The largest amount of constructive criticism was around the information provided about the 'course' content and people's expectations. It should be noted that this engagement covered a lot of ground and there were some areas prone to confusion, e.g. distinctions between the boundaries of the potential NNR and other important local features such as Bickershaw Country Park; the scope of the questions being asked regarding the specific NNR and the more general nature recovery process; and expectations around a wide ranging visioning process that introduced novel 'big picture' concepts.

A number of participants had constructive suggestions about the online nature of the sessions (shown in the chart below, an overview of feedback on practicalities), though many felt it had worked really well considering the format and limitations of Zoom.

Figure 18 Types of feedback around the practicalities of the course



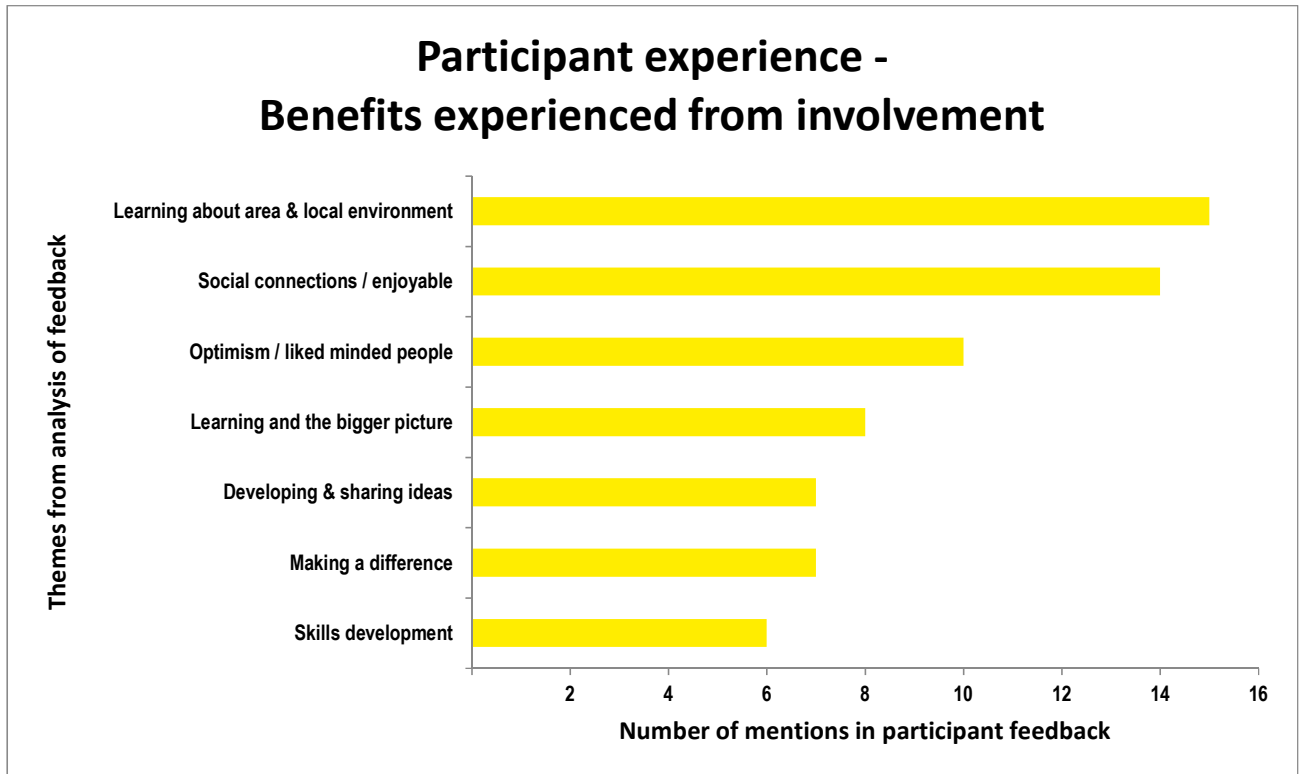
As usual in workshops, there was a mix of feedback that the sessions were both too long and too short (in time)—there is always a balance to be struck and different people are more inclined towards wanting less or more. As a rule of thumb for workshops the authors have found that an approximately equal amount of suggestions for change saying ‘longer session’ and ‘shorter session’, as was the case here, is an indicator that it is probably about right.

In addition to discussion and consultation around the potential NNR and nature recovery more generally, the engagement programme included an extensive range of other activities such as further training in species identification, conservation skills and art projects. These have been described in the End of Project Report (Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside Wildlife Trust 2021). Feedback shows that participants appreciated this variety.

The data and insights to emerge from the visioning process are by no means the only value to have come from this process: participants have experienced a range of benefits from their involvement, as indicated in the analysis of comments about perceived benefits in feedback about their participation in the six-session course shown in Figure 19 below.



Figure 19 Themes from analysis of participant feedback: benefits from involvement



It is striking that the process was seen as informative and enjoyable despite the challenges of conducting the entire process via virtual meetings. The fact that people felt they were making a difference was also significant, which is likely to increase motivation for further involvement in the future. Although beyond the scope of this evaluation, it should be pointed out that these kind of benefits are also highly correlated with wellbeing, and thus contribute significantly towards a key societal objective that cuts across all of this work.

The overall format seems to have worked well. Taken together, the programme, with its combination of skill development opportunities with the innovative online visioning workshops described above, constitutes a good demonstration of an effective community engagement programme.

The skill development aspect—whilst certainly challenging to organise and deliver well—is relatively straightforward to understand: empowering and educating people in communities is a vital part of forward-looking engagement activity, building social capital and supporting people in their development personally and professionally. There are no clear-cut lines, but this kind of engagement could be viewed as more akin to training or capacity building. This lies in contrast to consultation, visioning and shared decision-making, which can be seen as different levels of ‘coproduction’ (shared design and delivery of services, projects or initiatives). This second ‘flavour’ of engagement is equally important and somewhat more complex to evaluate and develop a good strategy for. This is the focus of the next section.

## Towards coproduction: Engagement beyond consultation

The importance and potential value of coproduction is becoming more widely recognised as a necessary extension and deepening of partnership working between organisations. A recent insight into how professionals from a variety of organisations are thinking about this topic can be seen in the online record of ideas generated during a Carbon Landscape workshop that explored the future of nature recovery in the landscape in which the potential NNR sits (How and Tippett 2021). Participants from environmental, health, arts, regeneration, and educational sectors discussed ways to increase collaboration between diverse organisations and communities for nature recovery and wellbeing. The emergent ‘headlines’ from this dialogue were:

- Collaborate more actively and widely
- Adopt a strategic approach
- Support, educate & empower communities
- Work *with* communities - coproduction

This indicates both the rising awareness of the need for this work, and a general approach that could be adopted towards doing it. Beyond consultation, dialogue and skills development, the topic shifts into coproduction more generally: how can we—all stakeholders including communities—work together to address our big challenges and achieve real positive change? The line between effective engagement and effective change work becomes less defined, to the extent that communities (and stakeholders) are genuinely involved in thinking and decision-making about ‘where to go’ as well as ‘how to get there’.

Drawing again upon our prior work in this domain, we can broaden the frame of the ‘Pillars of Effective Coproduction’ introduced previously to give us a handle on how to evaluate these deeper dimensions of coproduction. In this model, any particular engagement process (whether that be a one-off event or a series such as was implemented within this project), of course exists within a context. This context may be more or less visible, considered, structured or directed; it is just a way of thinking about the oft declared need to ‘join-up’ working. Perhaps it might be usefully considered as an analogue of the Lawton-esque insight of the ‘need to connect up, isolated patches are not sufficient’ (Lawton, et al. 2010), applied to the domain of stakeholders, community engagement and projects rather than to ecology.

This is nothing really new in the world of organisations—both internally and across them, networks, strategies, protocols and processes abound, seeking to create effective functional connections, with wildly varying degrees of success. Serious and systematic endeavours to do this *including* communities and all stakeholders exist, but are somewhat thin on the ground. Learning and data is fragmented and often lost, in a manner akin to the lack of ongoing value extracted from the plethora of data from community engagement that has been collected over the decades, that is now sitting all but forgotten in dusty spreadsheets.

Why is this an issue—or put more positively—an area so ripe for growth and development? As well as a lack of awareness, clarity or value attributed to this need, we have argued that there is also a lack of well understood knowledge about *how* to do this.



Returning to the coproduction model (Tippett and How 2020), we identify the following features of a process to move us systematically towards more and more effective coproduction:

- A core focus on creating a **shared ‘map’** that features good (and ever evolving) coverage of salient features of ‘the landscape’. This should cover the ground which will be familiar to any organisations and projects engaged in change work within complex systems (e.g. aims, direction, strategy, context/boundaries, assets & resources, challenges, critical path, etc.)—and it should do so in a way that endeavours to represent the perspectives and needs of *all* stakeholders across the whole map.
- Deliberately implemented **cycles of action and reflection** that are guided by—and shape—this shared map. Ideally all projects or initiatives within the space would at least be designed with reference and consideration given to this resource at the beginning, and updates fed into it at the end.
- Deliberately implemented **cycles of outreach, engagement and inclusion** to continually reflect the changing population and situation of the stakeholder group as a whole, pursuing an agenda to increase capacity and agency throughout the network and in particular in communities.

This implies a set of questions which can be used to evaluate this (or any other) project with regard to effective and ongoing coproduction. Because this is complex, distributed and ‘fuzzy’ work, it seems prudent to build in a generative infrastructure / knowledge / capacity building aspect to any evaluation criteria. This is reflected in the questions that follow:

1. **Shared ‘map’:** To what extent did we build a comprehensive (in terms of informing change and decision-making) map representing views and activities of all stakeholders around the potential NNR, and the move towards nature recovery and wellbeing more generally in the region? Has the project explored long-term vision and direction and how future actions could help achieve this? How will this map be shared and updated over time? How has this project contributed towards the broader goal of integrated, shared information or processes to create and maintain it?
2. **Cycles of action and reflection:** To what extent was this project designed with reference to existing records of issues, data about salient features, and ideas gathered from earlier engagement (from the perspectives of *all* stakeholders)? How will the outcomes from this be used to inform future initiatives and other projects / work in different sectors with overlaps in the area? Will these future initiatives feed their results and learning back into the shared map? Has this project done anything to make it more likely or feasible that such activity will take place in the future?
3. **Cycles of outreach, engagement and inclusion:** To what extent did this project endeavour to bring in more stakeholder voices (in particular those who are vulnerable and / or ‘seldom heard’) and empower them to contribute meaningfully in ways appropriate to them? How is information (results, updates on changes and successes, signposts to further activity) fed back to participants and wider stakeholders? How has this project contributed towards the effectiveness of such work in future projects?

With regards to the first group of questions around creating a **shared map** in relation to this project: The visioning process gathered information about existing resources and challenges, but also went beyond asking about site level improvements to look at the wider vision and desired direction for restoration, wellbeing and sustainability in the area. The breadth and depth of the data collected was discussed previously (quite good reach within the community, with definite limitations with regard to broader stakeholders).

Although the range of topics considered was expansive from a visioning perspective, from the point of view of this question, the reach of this 'map' falls short of the ideal by lacking a full coverage of project and organisational strategies across all relevant sectors, community groups and some of the land manager and owner perspectives.

Thus the emerging 'shared-map' is a solid start from a community perspective, but would need to incorporate wider organisational and stakeholder perspectives to be something around which a broader integrated process could coalesce. It is hoped that this data will be used and further developed, moving in the direction of a broad and effective coproduction process. This is made more likely by the interest shown during the pilot.

With regards to **cycles of action and reflection**, the contributions of many volunteer wildlife recorders and local wildlife groups was synthesised with existing data, and the analysis and engagement that led to the Carbon Landscape provided valuable background data. It was possible to build in cycles of feedback and reflection *during* the series of workshops themselves, with emergent themes from rapid analysis of data gathered used to seed discussions and in subsequent workshops within the series. This was well received by participants: *"loved seeing our ideas fed back to us"*, and deepened the learning.

The pilot did not, however, have the capacity to fully uncover and integrate all prior related information and relevant data from across different sectors. Until such integration is more supported and enabled by strategic application of resource, it will likely always be a challenge for any one project to substantially achieve this aim.

This pilot has produced a data-set or 'proto-shared-map' output that could be a seed for learning and input into future initiatives and cycles of reflection on progress over time. We will be recommending that future initiatives do seek to feed back their results and learning to continually build this emergent resource.

A challenge is that it is not easy to present large amounts of varied, fuzzy data in an easily digestible way, nor clearly link such data to temporal and spatial characteristics. It is time-consuming and requires analytical skill to draw out key themes and ways to navigate granular and complex data. There is huge scope for technical improvements, as well as capacity building, in ways to process, analyse and present such data, and in particular to think about how to make it useful and adaptable over time and in different contexts.

For the third set of questions, around **cycles of outreach, engagement and inclusion**, with the excellent skills development programme, and innovative visioning workshops with their inclusive and creative process, this project seems to have done well in bringing in and supporting a range of people in the community. The project team signposted participants to further activities and ways to be involved with partners' activities during and beyond the pilot.

This has built a wider network of people with improved capacity and interest in supporting nature recovery through practical conservation action as well as volunteer monitoring. Attention now needs to be paid to feeding back information about next steps with the bid and ongoing support and involvement in response to the clear interest shown by participants.

All of this activity sits within a context in which there is a huge amount of creative and positive work going on across the landscape, by project partners and many, many others. Yet still – despite growing awareness of this issue for a long time – recognising, engineering and taking advantage of synergistic opportunities remains largely dependent on the insights, personal connections and creative work of individuals in the space, rather than being something that is systematically and robustly built in to the way work is done in organisations and partnerships. This creates a massive opportunity for positive change.

## Conclusion

The first part of this report asked how we might evaluate the quality of data emerging from community engagement, and assessed the pilot in terms of enriching and supporting the case for National Nature Reserve status and the aim of nature recovery in the wider landscape of Wigan and Leigh. In addition to informing the development of the NNR proposal, a key outcome has been the capacity building and increase in interest and enthusiasm for future conservation and restoration activity and action across the landscape. It then went on to evaluate the pilot as a demonstration of community engagement practice in the general context of nature recovery and wellbeing, using our (recently published) framework for effective coproduction as a set of criteria against which to evaluate this work, as it represents a potential model for an 'ideal' process.

The second part of this work explored going beyond engagement towards coproduction, and developed an evaluation framework based on this analysis. Thus the report has developed an improved understanding of design considerations for effective community engagement and the outline of key questions for evaluating future efforts. These evaluation questions could be evolved and further improved to inform future community engagement 'standards'.

This evaluation report has drawn on a range of data sources, including feedback collected from participants during the engagement process and discussions with the emerging group of assistant facilitators after each session. It is possible that more data, from more of the participants, might have been collected in face-to-face workshops, due to the challenging context of maintaining communication by zoom. It was, however, still valuable to include time for reflection in the process.

In terms of the value of community engagement, this analysis indicates that efforts to build capacity and the skill base in a wider network of community members and cross-sectoral stakeholders is helpful for long-term outcomes, both for nature and participants themselves. Increasing levels of involvement or agency are associated with a range of wellbeing outcomes. Due to the complex nature of system change, effective and meaningful engagement is likely to be a critical success factor in wide-scale nature recovery, rather than a 'nice to have' add-on. In order to effect such change, all stakeholders' perspectives, not just around *how* to do things but also *what* to do, need to be included. The direction of travel and the overall vision also needs to be co-produced.

## Recommendations for Wigan and Leigh Flashes

- A key next step in the Wigan and Leigh pilot is to feed back to the community and engaged partners the results of the analysis and the status of the application.
- Opportunities for further engagement and support should be discussed in this feedback session. This could include exploring options within the partners' existing activities and possible fund raising for future support, such as regular workshops to develop ideas further and continue to build skills.
- It should be made clear that the areas highlighted as important by the community, but not included in the National Nature Reserve application, can still form an important part of the Nature Recovery Network, and opportunities for restoration, access improvements and activities on these sites should be explored.
- A more far-reaching recommendation is to explore options for creating a dynamic, living repository of ideas to emerge from the visioning process. In the short run, the

existing analysis and project reports should be posted in an accessible place online so that it can be found, used and referenced in the future.

Moves towards creating a more accessible, engaging and dynamic 'story map' to support action and future visioning in the landscape could prove of value to other partnerships and organisations wishing to carry out a similar process. Lessons learned and tools developed in this process could in turn support similar activities in other areas and partnerships.

## Recommendations for community engagement in nature recovery more broadly

- Think in terms of stakeholder *and* community engagement, rather than just community engagement, and consider how to support two-way social learning
- Include capacity-building in the skills of engagement into the process, including opportunities for reflection and community involvement in evaluation
- Create a map of 'pathways / opportunities for engagement' at different levels
- Deliberately consider and work towards broader accessibility of 'shared maps' in terms of language, structure and format, to enhance usability and inclusivity
- Build an 'information and process' infrastructure to operationalise data from engagement between projects, across sectors and over time, to maximise learning
- Find ways to support community-based initiatives over time in the face of ever-changing funding landscapes and personnel, including consideration of new layers of community-led organisation that cross-cut more local or focused groups
- Consider coproduction as a top-level objective in itself, comparable to Nature recovery and Wellbeing, rather than just as a path towards them – with an associated need for appropriate and sufficient resource to foster such meaningful engagement

## Recommendations for the NNR process

- Have roles that bridge between community and technical aspects
- Clearly set the process of developing an NNR within the broader process of creating a nature recovery network – this extends the restoration activity and helps community members feel their activities and local sites are linked to the reserve
- For urban areas: signposts outside the reserve can combine information about nature recovery, and nature-based solutions such as Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, with signposts to the reserve. This can improve community awareness of local nature and the actions they can take, as well as local access to the reserve
- Consider effective involvement / coproduction as a key criteria of refined criteria for developing NNRs, given its central importance for system change
- Consider using the evaluation questions articulated in this work to seed future community engagement standards, which can guide ongoing learning



To make the most of such coproduction processes, there needs to be support for strategic roles, including:

- overview of the coproduction design (consideration of big picture and strategic links);
- design and delivery of visioning processes, including data analysis and synthesis;
- curation and synthesis of ecological monitoring and species data (e.g. species records in the context of NNRs; ideally this would include a capacity building element to bring more volunteers into the process); and
- administrative and communication support, including signposting to opportunities for further activities and engagement.



As well as resourcing such roles to make the coproduction effective, it requires a social learning process amongst a wider range of participants to 'draw out' and 'make most of' the knowledge that emerges in the process. This requires time and support for project officers and community members to be involved in a meaningful way. Whilst there is clearly a resource and effort implication, in the long run this may be the most cost effective path towards genuine nature recovery and widespread improvements in wellbeing.

By moving community engagement efforts towards meaningful involvement in future visioning and delivery, we increase the likelihood of nature recovery efforts being successful. They are more likely to be supported by communities and volunteers. Partners are more able to realise synergies amongst their areas of work, making the most of scarce resources. As we move towards coproduction, involving more stakeholders across the landscape, we are also more likely to deliver multiple benefits for health and wellbeing for communities.

It is hoped that this evaluation contributes towards greater awareness and consideration of strategic moves towards coproduction in future projects in this and other landscapes.

## Acknowledgements

A tremendous team of people has supported this pilot and the community engagement process within it, too many to list each in turn. We would like to thank the community members and project partners who volunteered their time to the visioning, assisting with facilitation and giving feedback on the process, especially the volunteer facilitators: Daniel Jeal, Rose Sumner, Alan Cargill, Minnie Mirshahi, Vivian Vaillant, Susan Whittle, Stuart Morris, Kieran Sayer, Adrian Byrtus and members of Wigan and Leigh Youth Cabinet.

Matt Sanderson, PhD Researcher at The University of Manchester, offered excellent technical and functional support with the online workshops, as well as producing the historical and landform maps. Helen Fulcher rose to the challenge of capturing and synthesising disparate sources of data. Joe Roper crafted a wonderful record and story in making the documentary, and provided many of the pictures (some working with community members in the Carbon Creative programme) used to help capture a sense of place.

Partners from Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside Wildlife Trust; Greater Manchester Ecology Unit; Wigan Council and Natural England showed remarkable innovation delivering this programme. They offered excellent project support and assistance with facilitation in the visioning exercises, and valuable insights to inform this analysis.

## References / further information

See the Carbon Landscape Resources Centre for access to data emerging from this process.  
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# Appendix: Natural Flood Management

Given the prominence of recent Natural Flood Management interventions on the Bickershaw site, this was a focus of discussion during one of the visioning workshops. This raised useful insights into the need for social learning and engagement around sustainability interventions.

Figure 20 Leaky dams: volunteer help & storm water retention (Source Bickershaw Project Facebook)



Participants were shown images of natural and engineered flood management and asked for their responses, a summary is shown below, natural (right side) engineered (left side).

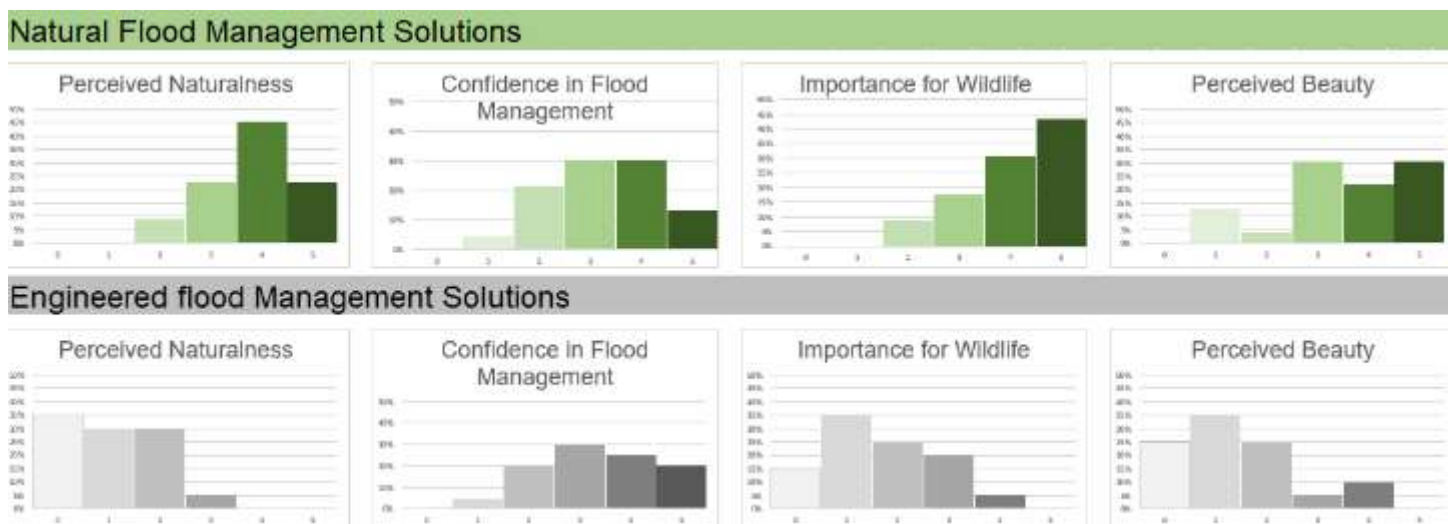
Figure 21 Word clouds: participants' responses to images of flood management options



A key issue that was raised was concern that natural flood management measures can increase the amount of mud, already a major problem for accessibility on the site. This prompted discussion around the need to provide information about potential benefits to increase understanding of the measures (and in turn, hopefully reduce damage through visitors' activities, such as riding horses through the leaky dams). Signage that clearly sets out the reasons for the measures, and their value for flood management and wildlife, can reduce the sense that the areas are just being abandoned and are 'unmanaged' (another issue apparent in these word clouds). Signage can be usefully complemented by active approaches and ongoing engagement in response to events, such as the pictures of the leaky dams storing water during a major storm event (Storm Christoph), as communicated via social media, shown above in Figure 20.

The charts below show participants' ratings of perceptions of the values of these different approaches to flood management on a scale of 0 (*least*, on left) to 6 (*most*, on right), n=23.

Figure 22 Summary of responses to natural and engineered flood management options



The participants saw clear perception of value for wildlife from natural flood management: *“Opportunities for wildlife seem much greater in the natural options”*. Perceptions of beauty were more mixed, which could reflect a sense of the spaces looking less managed and muddier, though there were comments that engineered solutions were *“not as pretty”* and *“the natural solutions make the whole landscape more appealing to look at and spend time in”*.

A striking feature is the relatively high level of confidence shown in the natural flood management systems' ability to manage flood risk when compared to engineered flooding solutions. This could come in part from the fact that these workshops were held shortly after Storm Christoph, which had acted well to demonstrate the value of the interventions (which had been discussed on the project's Facebook page, a key source of recruitment for these participants). Comments on this aspect showed a nuanced understanding:

- *“Natural flood management is needed to protect homes and help conserve wildlife and promote rivers with better water quality”*;
- *“The first option [natural flood management] is preferable as it doesn't cause more problems downstream as the water ends up somewhere else very quickly”*.

Interpretation boards could be developed to help give this wider context of water in the landscape, showing an overview of the changes that are not always visible from the ground, along with information on the reasoning behind them. Even these well-informed participants said they found it useful and inspiring to see the aerial photos setting the scheme in context.

Figure 23 Before & after: natural flood management in Bickershaw

