Evaluation of Round 1 of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF)

Final Evaluation

31 March 2023

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Evaluation of Round 1 of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF)

Final Evaluation

A report submitted by ICF Consulting Services
in association with Footprint Ecology

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Evaluation of Round 1 of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF): Final Evaluation

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The Green Recovery Challenge Fund

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) was a short-term competitive fund aimed at supporting environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs) and their partners to deliver against one or more of the following three environmental themes in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP):

- Nature conservation and restoration: habitats, species and ecosystems.
- Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Connecting people with nature.

The GRCF was also part of a wider package of measures introduced by the government to boost the economy and support England's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It was intended to address economic challenges affecting the eNGO sector and conservation activity as a result of COVID-19. Hence it also aimed to:

- Support job creation and retention and skills development within the conservation sector and its supply chain.
- Enhance the capacity and resilience of eNGOs in terms of their financial stability, assets, skills, capabilities and governance.

The GRCF was funded by Defra and delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund (The Heritage Fund) in partnership with Natural England, the Forestry Commission, and the Environment Agency. Round 1 of the GRCF was launched at pace in September 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided funding to support the delivery of 69 environmental projects in England until March 2022 (NB: end dates were extended for 26 projects by 1-3 months and by 12 months for one project that started later than the others).

Total grants of £37.8 million were awarded to 69 projects in GRCF Round 1, ranging in size from £62,600 to £3,860,200. Overall there were 47 'medium-sized' projects that received grants of up to £250,000 and 22 'large' projects that received grants of more than £250,000.

Evaluation of the GRCF

ICF was commissioned to deliver an evaluation of the GRCF Round 1 programme to include:

- Process evaluation to examine the process and context of delivery of the GRCF, what was learned, and how delivery (of the GRCF and future similar funds) could be improved.
- Impact evaluation to examine the effects of the intervention and what difference it made.
- Value for money (VfM) evaluation to examine whether the benefits delivered by the GRCF justify the resources used.

This is the final evaluation report, conducted on completion of the GRCF programme period. It presents a final analysis of monitoring data and findings from the final process, impact and VfM evaluation, drawing on the following sources of evidence:

- Monitoring data submitted by all 69 GRCF projects relating to their budgeted costs and other income/contributions and a common set of output indicators covering conservation and engagement activities, infrastructure improvements and jobs.

- Evaluation reports submitted following the completion of projects with near complete coverage of 68 of the 69 projects at the time of analysis.
- An online survey of GRCF Round 1 projects after they had completed their activities. A total of 56 full responses and 4 partial responses were received from 68 invites (all except the late-starting project): a response rate of 88%.
- Semi-structured interviews with 28 GRCF Round 1 projects (including 6 case study projects and a further 22 projects that had responded to the survey). Case studies were prepared based on the survey and interview responses and data sources listed above.
- Semi-structured interviews with 7 GRCF stakeholders – including Investment Managers, advisors and project leads within Defra, The Heritage Fund and partners.

Was the GRCF delivered as intended?

The GRCF has shown it is possible to set up grant scheme in a short amount of time, when there is a clear purpose, such as providing emergency funding and support to the eNGO sector. Many of the challenges encountered were an inevitable consequence of the unique context in which GRCF was introduced and related to the very tight timescales in which it was designed and implemented.

The appropriateness of the GRCF to the wider context

Round 1 projects and stakeholders generally agreed that the GRCF was appropriate for the needs of the eNGO sector and the environment, seeking to balance the immediate financial needs of the sector resulting from COVID-19 with continuing funding for action against longer term environmental objectives. However, there was a tension between these twin goals due to the conflicting timeframes.

The GRCF was the primary funding source accessible to eNGOs at the time. This, and the significant level of overapplication to the GRCF, indicated that the GRCF could usefully have been a larger fund.

The GRCF was aligned with the wider policy agenda, and its objectives were unchanged for Round 2, providing reassurances that GRCF Round 1 had the right objectives from the outset.

The speed with which the GRCF was designed and launched was generally commended by Round 1 projects and stakeholders. The short delivery period provided positive benefits such as improving the efficiency and focus of projects, but also created barriers and challenges including a reduced scale and ambition of projects, a lack of leeway to deal with any other delays, and limiting the scope for more complex, innovative projects.

GRCF monitoring and evaluation processes

Project monitoring has been useful for tracking progress of project delivery progress and identifying risks, while **monitoring project outputs has been useful for tracking progress and informing the impact evaluation**. However, requesting output targets from projects for more indicators at the beginning of the programme would have enhanced the usefulness of the data and the ability to track and evaluate activities.

Most Round 1 projects reported high levels of satisfaction with monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes overall and felt these had been proportionate to the level of funding received, particularly amongst medium-sized projects due to the lighter-touch requirements for those projects. Satisfaction was lower for processes relating to monitoring data and reflected reported issues with the appropriateness and usability of monitoring tools

for some projects. Also, the extent to which Round 1 projects felt equipped to deliver M&E data and reports fell between the interim and final evaluations, which suggested projects felt less equipped to deliver the completion and evaluation reporting at the end of the project.

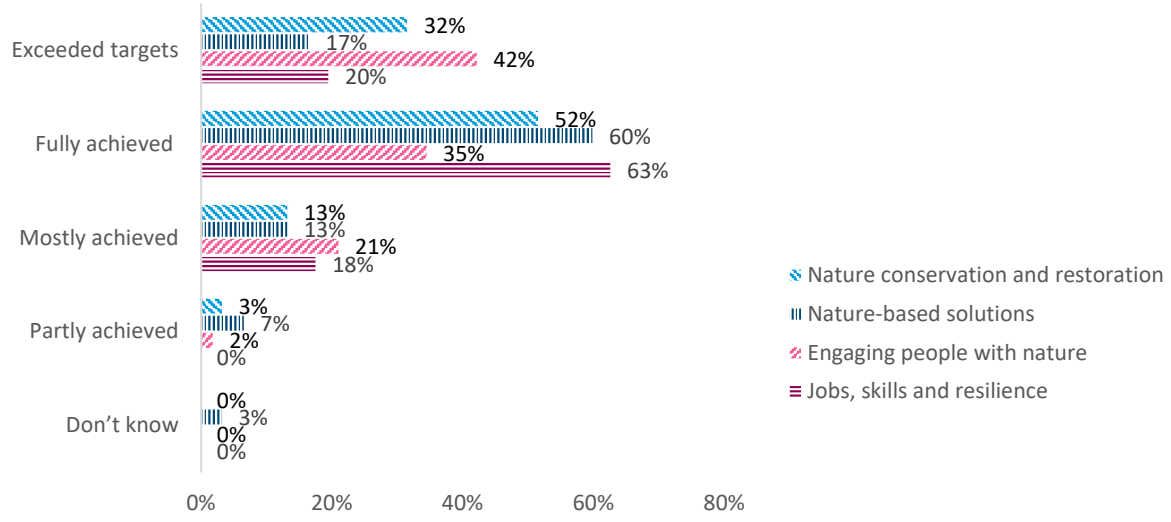
Overall perceptions of the GRCF programme

Round 1 projects and stakeholders provided consistent feedback on aspects of the GRCF programme that were felt to have worked well including: partnerships that were developed and the objectives, timings and flexibility of the programme. Suggested improvements were in line with the issues raised and included: longer timescales for application and delivery phases; more streamlined monitoring tools and clearer guidance, greater flexibility for grant payments and coverage, reviewing requirements for landowner consents; and providing networking opportunities for projects to exchange knowledge and experiences. Some **GRCF stakeholders were also frustrated at not being able to fully meet the demand for the programme**, particularly in light of some underspend amongst the successful projects.

Has the GRCF achieved its intended outputs and outcomes?

The large majority of Round 1 projects reported achieving or exceeding their goals across each of the GRCF objectives: 84% of projects reported achieving or exceeding their nature conservation and restoration goals, compared to 82% for jobs, skills and resilience goals and 77% for goals relating to nature-based solutions and engaging people with nature. Key success factors in achieving these goals included: the commitment and effectiveness of teams and partnerships; high levels of engagement with local communities, landowners and authorities; the development of online resources to mitigate COVID-19 restrictions; the flexibility and support from The Heritage Fund; the ability to extend projects.

Figure ES1.1 Extent to which projects reported achieving their intended goals: (N=63)



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

The majority of projects faced barriers and challenges in delivering their activities. By far the most common challenge was COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns. This was followed by: poor weather; unrealistic timelines; difficulties obtaining materials, procuring contractors and hiring staff; and problems obtaining the necessary licences and consents.

Nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions

GRCF Round 1 projects have reported delivering environmental actions across 930 sites around England, directly benefiting 326,000 hectares of land and 572 km of linear features (e.g. rivers and hedgerows). Adding estimates of indirect benefits suggests that the GRCF Round 1 programme has delivered environmental benefits over a total area of 875,00 hectares of land and 675 km of linear features. These benefits have arisen from activities to both create and restore habitat:

- Habitat creation was reported to have delivered direct benefits for 228,000 hectares and total benefits for 462,000 hectares.
- Restoration of habitats was reported to have delivered direct benefits for 219,000 hectares and total benefits for 615,000 hectares[1].

Approximately half of the sites benefiting from GRCF environmental actions contain land with conservation designations, particularly Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), while the most common UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats targeted by actions are lowland mixed deciduous woodland, rivers and hedgerows.

Tree planting has taken place on 367 sites around England, and 1.1 million trees have been planted, exceeding original targets by 37%. Round 1 projects recorded planting mixed species at most of these sites and more than 60 different species in total. Hazel and hawthorn were the most common species planted by GRCF projects followed by crab-apple, birch, cherry, oak, blackthorn, rowan, willow, maple, alder, holly and dogwood trees.

Approximately **two-thirds of Round 1 projects (45 of the 69 projects) also delivered activities to protect and target individual species across 198 sites**. The large majority of activities targeted animal species with the most common groups being birds, followed by mammals, fish, insects and amphibians. There were also large numbers of conservation activities targeted at flowering plants as well as actions to control invasive alien plant species such as Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed.

Projects also expect to deliver significant and wide-ranging outcomes in the longer term through the continuation of activities that were initiated by GRCF projects and from future environmental benefits that are expected to continue to accumulate over time (e.g. increased biodiversity, carbon sequestration and protection from natural flood management).

Engaging people in nature

More than 170,000 people have been engaged by GRCF projects through more than 9,400 different events comprising a combination of in-person events and online activities:

- 109,000 people were engaged in 8,500 in-person activities delivered at 800 different sites across England. Common examples of in-person events included: activity days; citizen science / volunteering sessions; and workshops, talks and educational activities. Nearly half of the in-person activities were targeted at under-represented or other priority groups.
- 49,000 people were engaged in almost 1,000 online activities delivered by GRCF projects including: webinars and educational activities; online apps, games and streamed content; and online training events. In many cases these activities were delivered as replacements for in-person activities in response to COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns.

[1] The sum of the individual habitat creation and restoration figures is greater than the total figures because some creation and restoration activities were reported over the same area and are included as providing benefits from both habitat creation and restoration.

- A further 17,000 people were engaged through other events, for which it was not possible to establish if they were delivered in-person or online.

Round 1 projects also delivered more than 300 communications and media activities, including TV programmes and films, social media activities, and production of leaflets and hard publications, **with an estimated audience of 26 million people**.

GRCF projects have also delivered 435 improvements to the infrastructure at 193 sites, covering a distance of 255 km of footpaths, boardwalks and fencing, as well as creating new amenities and improving accessibility. This includes new installations and improvements to existing infrastructure and is providing conservation benefits as well as supporting increased engagement with nature amongst visitors to sites.

Legacy impacts are expected to be significant with the large majority of projects (93%) expecting their engagement activities to continue in the future. Some of these activities are expected to be delivered by the project partners, some are dependent upon further funding and others will continue to be delivered by volunteers engaged and trained by the GRCF projects. Infrastructure improvements are also expected to continue delivering benefits including: conservation benefits by protecting and controlling access to habitats; using interpretation to raise awareness and educate people on nature themes and issues; and facilitating access and attracting more people to visit sites and engage with nature.

Employment and eNGO resilience

GRCF Round 1 funding has directly supported 653 positions during the life of the projects, including 69 apprenticeships, equivalent to 473 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs or 710 full-time job years, assuming that people were employed for an average duration of 18 months.

A wide range of jobs were supported across GRCF projects including project managers and project support officers as well as conservationists and youth and community workers. Most of the jobs were newly created for GRCF, while others were positions receiving partial support through full cost recovery or existing roles protected from redundancy. Many post-holders were from underrepresented groups, particularly young people aged 25 and under.

An analysis of the expenditures of GRCF projects suggests that at least 548 positions, equating to 476 FTE job years, were indirectly supported in local supply chains. **Combining direct and indirect employment impacts suggests that GRCF Round 1 funding supported a total of at least 1,200 positions and 1,186 full-time job years**.

GRCF projects also engaged more than 10,000 volunteers in their activities and benefited from 255,000 hours of volunteer support during the project period. Most of these were new volunteers recruited by the GRCF project.

While the majority of Round 1 projects reported meeting or exceeding their goals relating to jobs, skills and resilience, comparisons with initial projections for larger projects suggest more mixed performance, with targets exceeded for numbers of newly created roles, but other targets missed, particularly in relation to the number of apprenticeships. To some extent, this can be explained by an **under-reporting of employment impacts in the project monitoring data, for apprenticeships in particular**, but may also indicate some optimism bias and/or challenges in providing accurate estimates at the application stage or reflect bias in the reported achievement of jobs, skills and resilience goals.

The benefits of GRCF funding are also expected to continue in the longer term from the increased resilience of organisations, new skills developed through the GRCF projects and from jobs retained beyond the end of the project. **Projects reported that two-thirds of FTE jobs (311 FTEs) were expected to be retained beyond the end of the project, while a**

further 20% of individuals had secured new roles, mostly within the same organisations, elsewhere in the conservation sector or in similar roles. GRCF activities were also expected to benefit from further volunteer hours and funding in the longer-term and **GRCF projects reported having already secured more than 1,000 hours of volunteer support per week and £19.1 million of additional funding** to support ongoing activities after the GRCF project had finished.

What impact has the GRCF had?

Evidence from the 2021 survey of Round 1 projects suggested that a large proportion of the outcomes expected to be achieved through GRCF funding would not have been secured without it. The majority of successful applicants felt their project would not have gone ahead and there would have been negative impacts on their organisation and staffing in the absence of GRCF funding. Others that may have gone ahead felt this would only have been possible at a later date or on a smaller scale. This mirrored the reported experiences of unsuccessful applicants: most of which had not progressed and were felt unlikely to progress; while those that had progressed had done so more slowly and outcomes were reduced compared to what had been expected through the GRCF programme.

Research undertaken during the final evaluation phase suggested that environmental outcomes were most likely to have been delivered in the absence of the GRCF, as well as some of those around engaging people with nature. However, **the outcomes involving nature-based solutions and jobs, skills and resilience were less likely to have occurred and were more likely to be attributed to the GRCF**. The timing of the GRCF was particularly important, delivered at a time when the conservation sector was facing significant problems and uncertainty due to the pandemic. The **GRCF was widely considered to have supported eNGOs to survive the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, retain staff and continue delivering activities and outcomes in the future**.

Round 1 projects are actively planning to ensure their long-term legacy is delivered (i.e. the longer term environmental, social and economic benefits of their activities). Most projects have either developed, or are developing, post-project plans, involving different approaches including securing additional funding from public and private sources, subsuming activities as part of the ongoing activities of lead and partner organisations, developing volunteer networks and empowering community groups, and developing new revenue streams, social enterprises, etc. for activities to become self-perpetuating. The **most common risk to the long-term legacy of projects was that of failing to secure additional funding**, while other reported risks were associated with the ongoing engagement of stakeholders, landowners, partners, volunteers and visitors; and natural processes including weather conditions and climate change.

Did the GRCF provide good value for money?

Total grants of £37.8 million were awarded to GRCF Round 1 projects. While projects were not required to secure match funding, they included details of £6.5million in additional income and in-kind contributions in their GRCF applications, increasing their overall budgets to £44.3 million. At the time of reporting in March 2023, **actual grant payments totalled £36.1 million, suggesting an element of underspend, although this is likely to have been offset by additional volunteer inputs and in-kind contributions** that were not recorded in applications but were reported by projects to be significant.

Cost effectiveness analysis (CEA) was not possible across the full GRCF Round 1 portfolio due to the breadth of different activities and outputs delivered. Therefore **the CEA focused**

on comparisons between subsets of projects delivering similar activities and outputs, and where costs could be segmented accordingly. The results suggest:

- Average unit costs of all habitat restoration activities of approximately £340 per hectare for land benefiting directly and £260 per hectare when including indirect benefits. However, these unit costs appear very low for the full restoration of habitats and should be treated with caution as the areas quoted by some projects may extend beyond the specific areas being restored. There was also considerable variation between the unit costs of different projects and the estimated unit costs for restoring seagrass, wetland, peatland and meadow habitats appeared most realistic, ranging between £1,000 and £5,000 per hectare.
- The delivery of in-person activities was found to have average costs of approximately £1,000 per event and £100 per person engaged, while the online events had higher unit costs of £1,500 per event but lower unit costs of £77 per person engaged. When looking across all engagement activities, including communications and media, the average cost per event was £1,200, while the unit cost per person engaged was only £0.35.
- Unit costs of tree-planting were estimated at £5 per tree, across more than 1 million trees planted by the GRCF projects, although there was variation between projects depending on the number and type of trees and their location (e.g. urban versus rural sites).
- Projects targeting invasive species were found to have very low unit costs of up to £3.20 per hectare, but these values reflect the unique nature of these projects, delivering relatively small-scale activities across some very large areas of land.
- Round 1 projects were estimated to have spent £13.4 million on staff costs, supporting 710 job years at an average unit cost of around £20,000 per job year. GRCF projects also reported retaining 311 FTEs beyond the end of the programme, which represents an average staff cost of approximately £46,000 per retained FTE.

Overall, **GRCF stakeholders and projects felt that GRCF-funded activities had delivered good value for money**. GRCF processes were also reported to have contributed positively to value for money and the administrative burden was generally felt to be proportionate to the levels of funding received. Projects' suggestions for improving their own value for money included: allowing time for more thorough project planning; working with quality, trusted contractors; engaging the local community and making good use of volunteers. Projects also felt that longer delivery periods would increase value for money. Stakeholders added that better use of the underspent budget would have further enhanced the value for money of the programme.

Lessons learnt

The unique context and tight timescales in which GRCF was designed and delivered may limit the extent to which general lessons can be learned which would be relevant to future programme delivery.

Lessons to improve grant-making processes and administration

- Allocating sufficient time for preparing and reviewing applications and setting up projects (e.g. for recruitment and project design) to support planning and effective delivery.
- Ensuring that online application portals are fit for purpose and capable of handling heavy demand from applicants, particularly close to the application deadline.
- Ensuring application forms and guidance notes are consistent and fit for purpose to minimise any potential confusion during the application process.

- Reviewing requirements to secure landowner consents prior to the commencement of projects to provide a solution that can reassure funders and minimise barriers for projects.
- Considering the development of common indicator sets earlier in the process to improve tracking of progress against targets.
- Ensuring monitoring tools are streamlined and fit for purpose (e.g. remove duplication, ensure appropriate for all project sizes and allow projects to access via multiple logins).
- Improving project monitoring guidance for specific indicators, including jobs and spatial data, to improve the quality of data provided and reduce the extent of data gaps.
- Lighter-touch approaches to monitoring and reporting requirements for smaller projects were considered effective and proportionate and should be applied elsewhere.
- Providing greater clarity and guidance on using the GRCF name and logo, so that projects do not need to ask for approval every time it is used.
- Providing greater clarity and guidance on reporting requirements and expectations for monitoring beyond the end of the GRCF project.
- Continuing to facilitate changes to budgets and project plans to meet challenges, whilst offering flexible timings for grant payments and early confirmation of project extensions.
- Formalising relationships and shared understanding between Defra and The Heritage Fund, through ongoing dialogue and moving to a Memorandum of Understanding.

Lessons to improve project and programme outputs, outcomes and impacts

- Increasing the scale of funding to better match the scale of demand.
- Offering a parallel emergency funding stream to provide core funding to support those less able to put forward shovel-ready projects or those with less capacity to develop a bid at pace.
- Addressing the needs of seasonally dependent project activities through the timing of the overall programme.
- Ensuring that projects, particularly those with a high number of sites, fully understand the need to secure landowner consents within an appropriate timeframe.
- Ensuring that projects are aware and able to make use of the opportunities for flexibility in how awarded funding is spent across a project's planned activities.
- Improving understanding of in-kind contributions by requiring projects to provide data on volunteer inputs in an appropriate format.
- Providing longer-term clarity on UK Government strategies, targets and funding plans for the eNGO sector to support eNGO resilience and their ability to plan effectively.

Lessons to improve the long-term legacy of GRCF projects

- Providing additional and longer-term funding that is more appropriate for delivering conservation outcomes and can support the longer-term legacy of the GRCF programme: (e.g. ensuring agri-environment schemes are viable for landowners to manage habitats restored by GRCF projects and expand to new areas and supporting further community engagement to build on GRCF successes of engaging people with nature).
- Requiring projects to set aside budgets to fund ongoing monitoring and management plans to help maximise legacy impacts and learning from projects.

- Providing further support to address gaps in capacity in the environmental sector (e.g. in the forestry sector).
- Providing opportunities for projects to network, exchange knowledge and learn from each other's experiences.

Lessons to improve value for money

- Prioritising market research before launching similar funds in future in order to better understand and manage demand and tailor application processes accordingly.
- Restricting the number of applications per organisation (as in GRCF Round 2) to provide a more efficient application process for applicants and reviewers.
- Including an EoI or another light touch shortlisting process for medium-sized projects, to limit the total volume of full-scale applications and resources devoted to them, especially when heavy demand is anticipated.
- Reviewing match funding requirements, and their effects on demand, scheme objectives and overall value for money.
- Examining opportunities to extend the delivery timetable for nature investment projects, even for emergency response funds, to ensure impact and value for money.
- Reviewing how underspent budgets can be avoided at the programme level to further enhance the value for money delivered by the programme.

1 Introduction

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) is a short-term competitive fund aimed at supporting environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs) and their partners. ICF was commissioned to deliver an evaluation of the GRCF Round 1 programme. This is the final evaluation report, conducted after the end of the GRCF programme period.

1.1 The Green Recovery Challenge Fund

Round 1 of the GRCF was launched at pace in September 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided £40 million of funding, to support the delivery of 69 environmental projects in England by March 2022 (although end dates were extended for 26 of the 69 projects by between one and three months, and by 12 months for one project that started much later than the others).

Grants for individual projects varied in size from £62,600 to £3,860,200. Overall there were 47 'medium sized' projects that were awarded grants of up to £250,000 and 22 'large' projects that were awarded grants of more than £250,000.

Funded projects were required to deliver against one or more of the following three environmental themes in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP):

- Nature conservation and restoration: habitats, species and ecosystems.
- Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Connecting people with nature.

The GRCF was also intended to address economic challenges affecting the eNGO sector and conservation activity as a result of COVID-19. Hence it also aimed to:

- Support job creation and retention and skills development within the conservation sector and its supply chain.
- Enhance the capacity and resilience of eNGOs in terms of their financial stability, assets, skills, capabilities and governance.

Projects focusing on the three environmental themes aimed to provide improvements to the physical state of the natural environment to enrich plants and wildlife, support climate change mitigation and adaptation and deliver ecosystem services. Many projects covered more than one theme and therefore delivered on more than one of the GRCF's objectives.

Steps were taken during the selection process to ensure that projects from across all regions of England were awarded grants and, in this regard, the GRCF has contributed to Natural England's endeavour to build strong partnerships across the country, in both urban and rural areas. The GRCF was also part of a wider package of measures introduced by the government to boost the economy and support England's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Round 1 of the GRCF was funded by Defra and delivered by The Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Forestry Commission, and the Environment Agency. Defra provided £40 million of finance for the GRCF and developed the programme in collaboration with its Arm's-Length Bodies including the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. The Heritage Fund was the main administrative body and was responsible for reviewing applications and selecting projects, distributing the grants, day-to-day governance and programme monitoring and evaluation.

1.2 Evaluation purpose and approach

The programme evaluation is an independent evaluation of the GRCF, conducted over a two-year period (December 2020 – March 2023). The scope of this evaluation study was limited to the original £40 million fund – i.e. GRCF Round 1. A second £40 million tranche of funding provided by the GRCF during 2021 – GRCF Round 2 – is subject to a separate evaluation.

The evaluation consisted of three main components, namely:

- Process evaluation to examine the process and context of delivery of the GRCF, what was learned, and how delivery (of the GRCF and future similar funds) could be improved.
- Impact evaluation to examine the effects of the intervention and what difference it has made.
- Value for money (VfM) evaluation to examine whether the benefits delivered by the GRCF justified the resources used.

The evaluation has been delivered in three phases:

- Phase 1: Evaluation design (December 2020 – May 2021). This initial phase elaborated the evaluation questions and how they would be addressed. It developed a theory of change and outcomes framework for the GRCF that identified common themes and indicators (as far as possible) to facilitate the aggregation of outputs and outcomes at a programme level. The evaluation design is available as a separate document[2].
- Phase 2: Interim monitoring and process evaluation (June 2021 - October 2021). Phase 2 involved (i) the collation and analysis of common indicator monitoring data to evaluate the progress and interim outcomes of the GRCF and (ii) interim process evaluation to ascertain which elements of delivery had worked well, which aspects had been challenging, and why. The interim evaluation report is also available as a separate document[3].
- Phase 3: Final evaluation (March 2022 – March 2023). The final phase of the evaluation has focused primarily on answering the evaluation questions on outcomes and impact and value for money. The outputs of Phase 3 are presented in this report.

[2] ICF (2021). Evaluation of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF). Phase 1 Evaluation Design Report

[3] ICF (2021). Evaluation of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF). Interim Evaluation - Final

1.2.1 Key evidence used to support the final evaluation

This section describes the key sources of evidence used to support the final evaluation.

1.2.1.1 Project monitoring and evaluation data

All GRCF Round 1 projects were required to provide monitoring returns and evaluation reports and these are described below.

Monitoring data

Monitoring data were provided by GRCF projects during delivery and on completion of their activities. Data were available for all Round 1 projects and provided information on costs and outputs:

- **Cost data** – Cost data were available for all 69 projects but focused on budgeted costs submitted during the application process rather than actual costs of delivery. The data covered a range of cost categories (e.g. staff costs, training costs, purchases of equipment and services) and also described other sources of income provided by other organisations, funding sources and in-kind contributions.
- **Output data** – All 69 projects submitted monitoring returns during the programme and data were extracted and aggregated for the following themes:
  - **Conservation** data included a brief description of each activity delivered as well as information relating to site designations and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats, creation / restoration of habitats, habitat condition, tree planting, species targeted and areas of land directly and indirectly benefiting from activities, and the project and site where the activity took place.
  - **Engagement** data included a brief description of the activity that was delivered as well as information on the number of events delivered and people engaged, whether activities were social prescribing or targeted at a particular audience, and the project and site where the activity took place.
  - **Infrastructure** data described the activities undertaken and works completed, the type and length of infrastructure improvements (e.g. footpaths, fences, etc.), and the project and site where the activity took place.
  - **Jobs** data included: the number of roles and Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs supported by each project (including numbers and levels of apprenticeships); the employer organisation (project lead, partner, etc.); job titles, Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes and equalities data; whether roles were newly created, protected from redundancy, or partially supported; and the project and site where the individual was employed.

1.2.1.2 Evaluation reports

Evaluation reports were submitted following the completion of projects and provided near complete coverage with 68 of the 69 projects having submitted an evaluation report at the time of analysis. The size and content of these reports varied widely from short evaluation reports, completed in-house by some of the smaller projects, to comprehensive evaluations, often undertaken by external consultants.

The evaluation reports provided useful information and context on the projects, partners and activities, their outputs and expected outcomes and impacts, key challenges, barriers and successes, and lessons learned. The evaluation reports were used to prepare for interviews with GRCF projects, were a valuable source of

information for the six case studies presented in Annex 1 and were used to help fill gaps in the evidence base.

1.2.1.3 Online survey

An online survey was conducted after projects had completed their activities and took place between June and August 2022. The survey was shared with 68 of the 69 Round 1 projects (all except the late-starting project that was extended to March 2023). A very high response rate was achieved, with full responses provided by 56 projects (82% response rate) and partial responses received from a further four projects (representing an overall response rate of 88%).

The survey provided a combination of quantitative and qualitative data across the following themes:

- The achievement of project goals.
- Estimates of the allocation of project resources between different activities.
- Volunteering inputs that supported projects.
- Barriers and challenges faced during delivery.
- Long-term legacy of projects and expectations of short and longer-term outcomes.
- Perceptions of GRCF and its monitoring and evaluation processes.

1.2.1.4 Project interviews and case studies

Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with six case study projects and a further 22 of the GRCF Round 1 projects. Interviews were undertaken during August and September 2022 and were used to fill gaps in the survey data and collect additional qualitative information on the following themes:

- Project achievements and benefits.
- Barriers and challenges and steps taken to mitigate.
- Expectations of longer-term outcomes and associated risks.
- Descriptions of post-project plans and activities.
- Perceptions of GRCF monitoring and evaluation processes.
- In-kind contributions and perceptions of value for money.
- Overall perceptions of the GRCF programme and suggested improvements.

The case studies were prepared based on the information collected from the survey and interviews as well as evidence from the other data sources listed in this section.

1.2.1.5 Stakeholder interviews

Semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with seven GRCF stakeholders including Investment Managers[4], advisors and project leads within Defra, The Heritage Fund and partners. The interviews were undertaken in October 2022 and covered the following themes:

[4] Investment Managers are The Heritage fund staff who are the case officers for individual GRCF projects. They assessed applications and supported projects in delivery.

- Effectiveness of the GRCF in delivering its objectives and its alignment with wider policy.
- GRCF delivery processes and the information provided by projects.
- Overall impact, achievements and value for money delivered by the GRCF.
- The legacy of GRCF projects.
- Lessons learnt and potential improvements for the future.

2 Process evaluation: Delivery of the GRCF

2.1 The rationale for the GRCF

2.1.1 Introduction

This section examines the rationale for the GRCF. Specifically, it examines whether the rationale and timeframes of the GRCF were appropriate to the needs that Defra and The Heritage Fund had sought to address. Evidence is primarily drawn from the online survey and interviews with GRCF Round 1 projects and interviews with GRCF stakeholders.

The rationale for the GRCF was to respond to two key issues: environmental (and climate) priorities and the COVID-19 pandemic (specifically the financial impacts on the eNGO sector and wider labour market). The GRCF was intended to contribute to the 25YEP goals by supporting projects that deliver against three environmental goals: nature conservation and restoration, nature-based solutions, and helping connect people with nature. In addition, the GRCF forms part of the Government's green economic recovery, jobs and skills package[5], and was designed to financially support eNGOs[6] through the COVID-19 pandemic – with two economic goals: to sustain and build eNGO employment and financial stability.

2.1.2 Appropriateness of the GRCF to the needs of the eNGO sector and the environment

2.1.2.1 Overall view

GRCF Round 1 projects and stakeholders generally agreed that the GRCF had the right approach, seeking to balance the immediate financial needs of the sector resulting from COVID-19 with continuing funding for action against longer term environmental objectives. The tension between these twin goals, primarily due to the conflicting timeframes, was recognised.

The GRCF was aligned with the wider policy agenda, and its objectives remain unchanged for Round 2, providing reassurances that GRCF Round 1 had the right objectives from the outset. It was also highlighted as the primary funding source accessible to eNGOs at the time. This, and the significant level of overapplication to the GRCF, indicated that the GRCF could usefully have been a larger fund.

2.1.2.2 The nature of the funding made available through GRCF

The design of the GRCF was informed by eNGO stakeholder consultation[7], which identified a need and preference for project-based funding that would help sustain the day-to-day work at risk from the impact of COVID-19. Consultations during the GRCF design phase indicated that there were a significant number of 'shovel ready'

[5] Defra (2020). Government's £40 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund opens for applications. [Press Release]. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/governments-40-million-green-recovery-challenge-fund-opens-for-applications

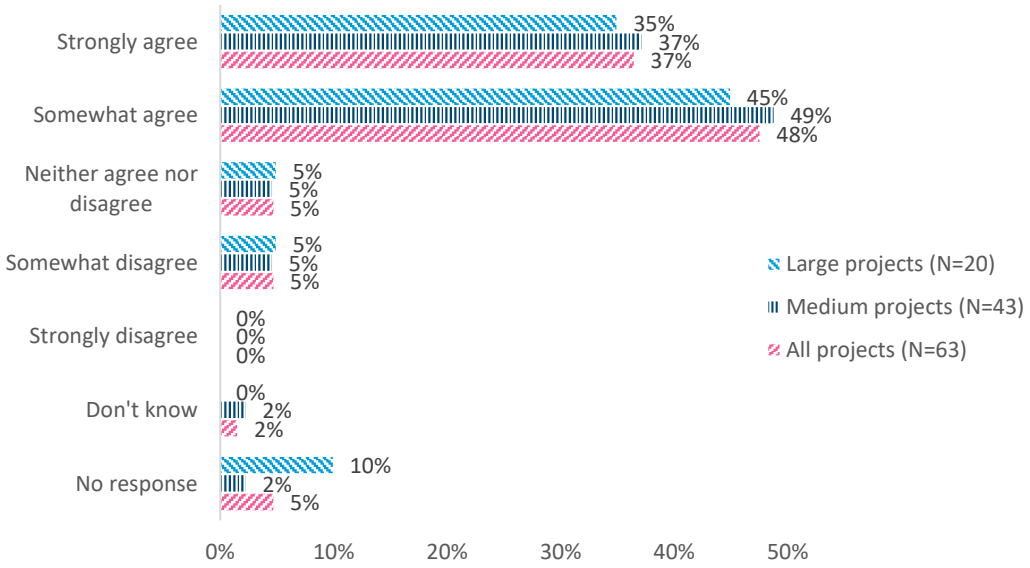
[6] The GRCF was only open to eNGOs, or partnerships that included at least one eNGOs.

[7] Including a Wildlife and Countryside Link survey of the natural environment sector.

eNGO projects that could be rapidly implemented if funding were made available quickly.

The GRCF was generally seen as the right approach. The majority of Round 1 projects (85%) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the GRCF offered the right approach to supporting the environment sector during the pandemic (Figure 2.1). This was consistent across both the interim and final evaluations, but also between projects and stakeholders, and between large and medium projects, and suggests high levels of agreement that the GRCF offered the right approach at the right time.

Figure 2.1 Extent to which projects agreed that the GRCF offered the right approach to supporting the environment sector during the pandemic, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

The GRCF was aligned with wider policy goals, particularly through supporting the 25YEP goals and the Government's green economic recovery and, more recently, the ten-point plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. The GRCF objectives have not really changed over time, although stakeholders reported that there is now a greater emphasis on supporting jobs and skills. Furthermore, stakeholders reported that when the objectives of GRCF were revisited in preparation for Round 2, it was concluded that the original objectives and priorities were still relevant, providing reassurance that GRCF had the right objectives for Round 1 and was well aligned with the Government's wider policy agenda.

The GRCF was the only immediate source of funding available to eNGOs in response to the pandemic in 2020 and was therefore critical for sustaining many eNGOs. Many Round 1 projects reported not being able to access other COVID-19 support funding sources, while usual sources of income were either diminished or unavailable (e.g. reserve entry fees, car parking charges, trading income from shops and cafes, event fees) and other traditional funding streams were not available as they had been diverted to emergency streams or otherwise delayed.

The GRCF did not satisfy the level of eNGO demand. The oversubscription to GRCF was widely recognised by GRCF stakeholders and taken as evidence that the level of funding made available through the GRCF was not sufficient for the

sector. Some stakeholders felt that the £40 million made available by the GRCF was well short of what was offered to other sectors.

2.1.2.3 Relevance of the GRCF goals

There was a tension between the twin goals of the GRCF - to address short-term economic impacts of the pandemic by spending money quickly whilst also addressing long term environmental goals which may be better supported through funding longer-term actions. Some projects suggested that addressing both goals through the same fund was not compatible because of the differing timelines of each. However other applicants, and GRCF stakeholders, recognised that this was a necessary trade-off given both the pandemic and the environmental goals that needed to be addressed by the GRCF.

It was generally welcomed that **the GRCF placed an emphasis on helping to retain jobs that might otherwise have been lost due to the pandemic**, providing job security and preventing the potential loss of skills from the sector, rather than solely focussing on new job creation. However there were also some concerns that the short-term nature of the funding would not result in a lasting impact on employment.

There was **a synergy** between the GRCF connecting people with nature goal and the increased demand and need for environment activities and engagement that occurred during the pandemic, particularly during periods of lockdowns and social distancing restrictions. It was suggested that future funding could be focussed on helping eNGOs (and others, such as local authorities) manage the increased demand from the public for access to their sites.

2.1.3 Implications of the GRCF timeframes

2.1.3.1 Overall view

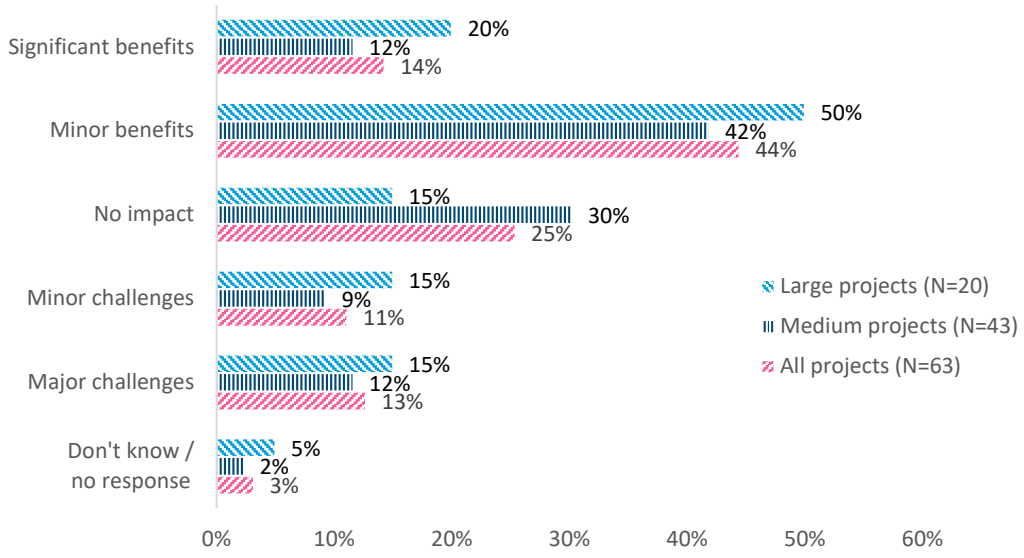
The speed with which the GRCF was designed and launched was generally commended by both GRCF projects and stakeholders. The 15-month period for project delivery – considered necessary to ensure money was spent quickly to support COVID-19 impacts on jobs and resilience – delivered both positive benefits and challenges for the Round 1 projects and the delivery of outputs and outcomes. Positive impacts included improving the delivery efficiency of projects and sharpening the priorities of projects. Negative impacts included reducing the scale and ambition of projects, and difficulties in dealing with any other delays. The short delivery periods also offered limited scope for more complex and innovative projects.

2.1.3.2 Implications of the GRCF timeframes

The timeframes to design and launch the GRCF, prepare applications and then deliver projects, were necessarily very short, given the immediate and short-term need for support in the sector in response to COVID-19. The speed at which the GRCF was administered was generally considered an achievement, as the process of developing a fund of this size can often take several years.

There were both positive and negative effects of delivering projects at pace to fit the GRCF timeframes. Most GRCF Round 1 projects (58%) felt that delivering at pace had delivered benefits for project outputs and outcomes. This was significantly higher than the 24% of projects that felt delivering at pace had provided challenges. Several of the projects had reported that delivering at pace had delivered both positive benefits and challenges. Delivering at pace appeared to have had a greater impact for large projects, who were more likely to report benefits and challenges, compared to the medium-sized projects.

Figure 2.2 Effects of timings and pace of delivery for project outputs and outcomes, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

The survey and interviews explored project perceptions of the benefits and challenges of delivering at pace. The main benefits included the ability to start delivering quickly, **supporting the retention of individuals and skills in the sector** and accelerating a return to normality after the COVID-19 pandemic. The short timescales also created other benefits in terms of forcing project partners to **focus on the priorities of the project and think innovatively** about how to best deliver objectives in the time available. This resulted in some **very efficient projects** that delivered significant outputs and achievements within a short period of time.

However, the short timescales were also reported to have created significant challenges and drawbacks for projects including:

- Needing to make compromises, which meant projects had to focus more exclusively on activities that could be delivered in the time period. This meant there was less time for projects to take a strategic approach, collaborate with partners, or deliver beneficial activities that would have been more difficult to deliver in the time available – *"longer timescales would have supported bigger and better environmental outcomes"*.
- Limited ability to make changes when faced with additional delays (especially those caused by COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions). For example:
  - Having to deliver events online rather than in-person, having to grow plants from seeds rather than from cells as intended, and focusing on 'easy to deliver' works (e.g. tree planting and wetlands works).
  - Having to undertake season-specific works in the wrong season (e.g. outside of breeding seasons or when the ground was waterlogged/frozen).
- Opportunity costs for lead and partner organisations from other work and activities that had to be foregone to enable the GRCF project to be prioritised.
- Recruitment challenges as shorter contracts can be less desirable for the most experienced candidates.
- Conflicting priorities in the second half of the programme, when projects are focusing on project delivery and reporting, but also trying to source additional funding to continue activities and retain staff at the end of the project.

Many projects mentioned that delivering at pace and dealing with the above challenges was made easier by the understanding and flexibility of the project monitors and funders: *"The funders and our monitor were flexible and supportive and understood the challenges we faced given COVID-19 and the pace of delivery. They worked with us to overcome these challenges. If we had rigidly stuck to the bid and obsessed about every milestone we would have struggled to achieve as much."*

2.2 GRCF monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes

2.2.1 Introduction

This section discusses the project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) requirements associated with GRCF Round 1. It explores whether projects felt the M&E requirements were deliverable and effective and considers the usefulness of the monitoring data for the programme delivery team and stakeholders.

Round 1 projects were required to collect and share information with The Heritage Fund to enable the GRCF programme to be monitored and evaluated.

Requirements varied according to projects size with large projects required to submit quarterly monitoring reports, while medium-sized projects were only required to report at the mid-point of the programme, before all projects had to produce completion and evaluation reports at the end of the GRCF programme period. Projects were also required to provide monitoring data on their activities and outputs for each of the core goals:

- Nature conservation and restoration activities and nature-based solutions (NBS) - projects were required to submit data to describe their activities, the areas and types of land they cover and the condition of habitats, the types of species they are targeting, and numbers and species of trees that have been planted.
- Connecting people with nature – projects were required to submit data describing their engagement activities including target audiences and numbers of events and people engaged, and descriptions of activities to improve visitor infrastructure including the type of infrastructure, and length of improvements.
- Jobs, skills and resilience – projects were required to submit data describing job roles, the number of positions and full time equivalent (FTE) jobs, the number and level of any apprenticeships, the employer organisations, the types of role supported and equalities data for employees.

2.2.2 Project monitoring and evaluation requirements

This section describes the Round 1 projects' perceptions of the monitoring and evaluation requirements for the GRCF programme. It covers: the standard contractual requirements for The Heritage Fund grant programmes that require projects to report on progress and financial position to their Investment Manager for compliance purposes; and the requirement for projects to collect and submit data on their activities, outputs and outcomes, to support the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the programme as a whole.

2.2.2.1 Overall view

Project monitoring, the progress reporting to Investment Managers, has provided useful information to support the tracking of project delivery progress and the identification and assessment of delivery risks. The monitoring of project outputs, through projects submitting their activity data, has been useful for tracking progress with GRCF projects and informing the evaluation of GRCF impact. However, stakeholders felt that requesting output targets from projects for more of the indicators at the beginning of the programme would have enhanced the usefulness of the data and the ability to track and evaluate activities.

Most projects felt only somewhat equipped to deliver M&E data and reports. This represented a significant change from the interim evaluation when most projects felt fully equipped and suggests projects may have felt less equipped to deliver the project completion and evaluation reporting at the end of the project.

The GRCF will continue to deliver outcomes over the longer-term – however, as the programme was limited to 15 months, the focus of the monitoring on observable outputs and shorter-term outcomes was appropriate.

2.2.2.2 Perceptions of project monitoring

Project monitoring has supported the tracking of project delivery progress and helped to identify and assess delivery risks. It has also helped guide The

Heritage Fund in its ongoing support for projects operating under the GRCF, complementing other data sources such as intelligence from project Investment Managers and other informal communications.

2.2.2.3 Perceptions of output monitoring data

Output monitoring data has been useful for tracking progress with GRCF projects and informing the evaluation of GRCF impact. GRCF stakeholders have reported that the data collected on projects activities and outputs has been very useful, although it has taken time to develop and refine tools and support projects to provide data in a consistent format. However, the stakeholders also suggested that the usefulness of the data could have been enhanced if projects had been required to provide targets for all of the output indicators from the outset of the programme.

However, most outcomes of GRCF-funded activities will not be observable during the GRCF period (e.g. newly planted trees take time to grow and reach their full ecosystem service potential). This issue was well recognised by GRCF stakeholders and **justified the approach of collecting monitoring data on outputs and shorter-term outcomes**, which were expected to be observable during the GRCF period. Many projects intend to continue monitoring their activities and sites over the longer term and there would be an opportunity for Defra/The Heritage Fund to set up a longer-term monitoring and evaluation plan if it were considered valuable.

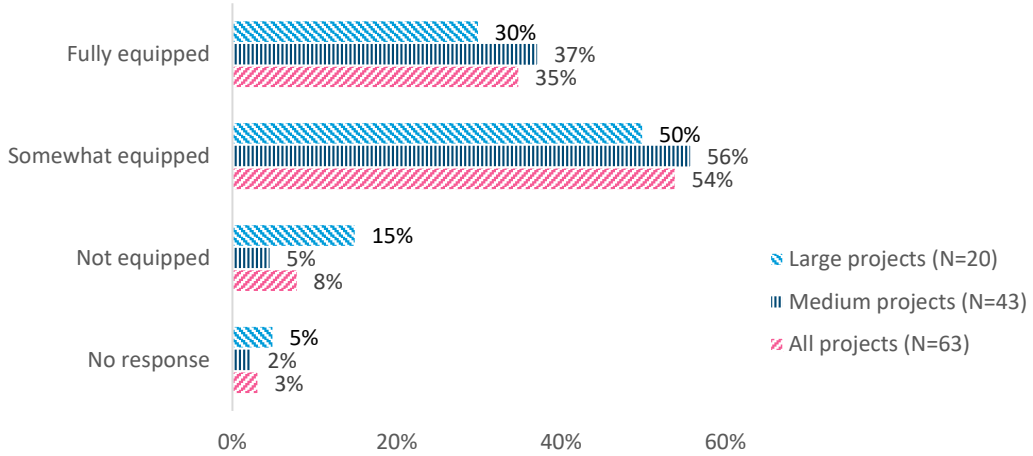
2.2.2.4 Deliverability of monitoring and evaluation requirements

Approximately one in three projects (35%) reported feeling fully equipped to deliver the required M&E data and reports, while 54% felt somewhat equipped and 8% felt unequipped (Figure 2.3). These results were different to the findings of the interim evaluation, when 76% of projects said they felt fully equipped to deliver M&E data and reports. This suggests that projects may have felt less equipped for the project completion and evaluation requirements, than for the ongoing progress reporting. The five projects that said they were not equipped to deliver the M&E data and reports gave the following reasons:

- Insufficient time to collect the required data and/or insufficient data with which to monitor outcomes and impacts.
- Insufficient internal resources or budget to meet the M&E requirements.
- Insufficient information and guidance on the requirements for M&E.

Difficulties hiring an external evaluator.

Figure 2.3 Extent to which projects felt equipped to deliver the required data and reports for M&E purposes, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

2.2.3 Effectiveness and proportionality of M&E processes

2.2.3.1 Overall view

Most Round 1 projects reported high levels of satisfaction with M&E processes and particularly the requirements for reports. Levels of satisfaction with processes for collecting and submitting monitoring data were lower, although most projects remained satisfied overall. This is likely to reflect perceived issues with the appropriateness and usability of monitoring tools and requirements that were raised by some projects. Satisfaction was also slightly higher amongst medium-sized projects, which is likely to reflect the lighter-touch requirements for those projects. Overall, and despite the issues raised, nearly all projects felt that the M&E requirements had been proportionate to the level of funding received.

2.2.3.2 Satisfaction with M&E processes

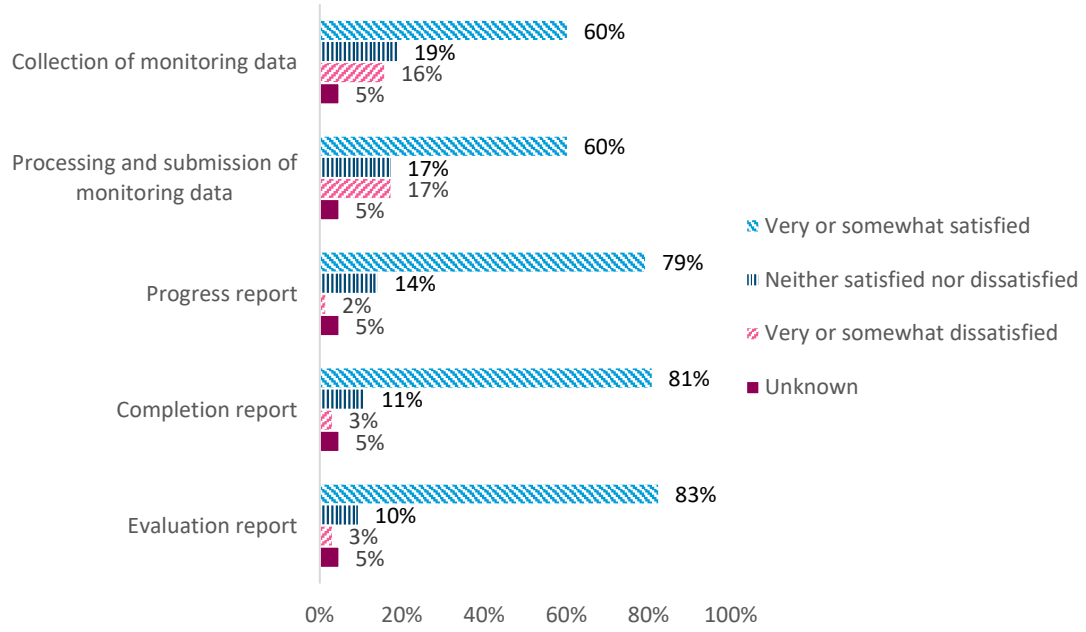
The online survey identified high levels of satisfaction with the M&E reporting processes with 79% of projects stating they were very or somewhat satisfied with the processes for progress reports, 81% were very or somewhat satisfied with the completion reports and 83% were very or somewhat satisfied with the process for evaluation reports (Figure 2.4). Levels of satisfaction with the monitoring data processes were slightly lower with 61% of projects stating that they were very or somewhat satisfied with the processes for collecting, processing and submitting monitoring data. Some projects also raised issues with the monitoring data, which included:

- Some perceived duplication of data requirements, for example between the portal (the grant management portal where projects submit reports to their Investment Manager) and the monitoring app (used to collect project activity and output data): *"Having to report to The Heritage Fund and put data in the [monitoring app] too seemed a bit like double-handling."*
- Concerns with the monitoring app, which some projects reported as *"confusing"* and a "one size fits all" solution that was not completely relevant to all GRCF projects:

- *"We had over 100 sites – [the monitoring app] was not designed to work with that many sites."*
- *"It wasn't easy to report our results in the app. We found it quite clunky to use."*

- One project reported finding the M&E processes disjointed and repetitive: "*Different parts of monitoring and evaluation seemed to be coming from different people. It was quite disjointed and we had to answer the same questions multiple times, which was a bit inefficient… there wasn't a very clear user journey, and we didn't know who was going to ask what and why. It wasn't too much overall but could have been set out more clearly in the beginning.*"

Figure 2.4 Satisfaction with M&E processes amongst GRCF projects (N=63)



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Overall levels of satisfaction with M&E processes were similar between the different sizes of project, although a larger proportion of medium projects reported being very satisfied, which is perhaps due to the lighter-touch M&E processes for medium projects. Medium projects reported being more satisfied with the processing and submission of monitoring data and progress reports, while large projects were more satisfied with the process for the evaluation report.

2.2.3.3 Proportionality of M&E processes

Despite the above issues reported with M&E processes, nearly all GRCF projects still felt that these processes were proportionate to the level of funding they had received. The lighter-touch requirements for medium-sized projects contributed to perceptions of the proportionality of the approach. Only one project reported that the data and reporting burden felt high given the duration and scale of the funding received. However, all other projects were more satisfied with the proportionality of the M&E requirements:

> *"Yes, the monitoring and reporting requirements were justified and were definitely proportionate to the amount of funding received."*

"We didn't have to put a lot of time into this – it was a relatively small cost to put together but has delivered huge benefits."

"We didn't feel like they were asking too much. It was a manageable workload."

2.3 Overall perceptions of the GRCF programme and its processes

2.3.1 Introduction

This section considers overall perceptions of the GRCF programme and its processes, based on the survey and interviews with GRCF projects and stakeholders. It discusses aspects of the programme that have worked particularly well or less well and provides some suggestions for potential improvements for GRCF or similar programmes.

2.3.2 What worked well / less well

2.3.2.1 Overall view

GRCF projects and stakeholders provided consistent feedback on aspects of the GRCF programme that were felt to have worked well. Examples of successes included the strength of partnerships that had been developed, and the objectives, timings and flexibility provided by the programme.

There were also some consistent messages in terms of aspects of the programme that were perceived to have worked less well, which focused on problems caused by the short timescales and delays, and issues with the consistency and clarity of monitoring tools, forms and the accompanying guidance. Stakeholders also described the frustration of not being able to meet the demand for the programme, particularly in light of some underspend amongst the successful projects.

The survey and interviews with GRCF projects and stakeholders identified many aspects of the GRCF programme that had worked well, as well as those that had worked less well. These are summarised below:

2.3.2.2 Aspects of the programme that had worked particularly well – Projects' perceptions

Aspects of the GRCF programme that projects identified as working particularly well included:

- **Delivering the right support to achieve the right objectives at the right time**:
  - *"The project was very useful in providing a way to link environmental objectives with our business and operational objectives after COVID-19. A lot of environmental charities were struggling after COVID-19 and this programme was very much needed to help support the health of the sector."*
  - *"The funding allowed the inertia of COVID-19 to be overcome, provided additional employment at a time of uncertainty, and gave people something positive to engage with."*

- The **flexibility of the programme** to allow projects to adapt in response to unpredictable challenges with a short programme period was considered critical to the achievement of the programme. Examples included:
  - Flexibility regarding changes to project budgets: *"The GRCF provided flexibility to move budget headings and create new budgets… which enabled a lot more work to be done."*
  - Offering extensions to project completion dates: *"Being able to extend the project was critical – the project would have failed to deliver its aims and would have looked like it had under-performed if it had not been extended – that flexibility was critical."*
  - Offering proportionate M&E requirements that were lighter-touch for medium-sized projects: *"Having only mid-term and final reports was really good."*
- Projects generally reported **good communications and strong relationships with The Heritage Fund Investment Managers**: *"[The Heritage Fund] were understanding of the issues we faced and were very friendly in their communications – the personal touch helps to lower the stress levels when delivering projects and overcoming issues."*

2.3.2.3 Aspects of the programme that had worked less well – Projects' perceptions

Aspects of the GRCF programme that projects identified as working less well included:

- While views of the **short timescales** were mixed, it was the most common issue raised by projects, particularly in terms of only allowing a single season of activity for most projects:
  - *"The delivery window was short and really only offered one 'restoration season', which is generally limited to work from August to March each year. With a longer timescale, we could have delivered more for nature restoration, nature-based solutions and jobs."*
  - *"Only having one season of delivery meant there was no opportunity to monitor any of the restoration projects to assess the level of success. As any monitoring will now take place outside of the project, this feels like a missed opportunity for GRCF in terms of measuring the effectiveness of the funding"*
- **Insufficient time for projects to prepare and submit budgets**, which led to some inaccurate projections and caused targets to be missed and/or additional time to be spent making amendments to plans during the project period: *"Setting up the budget was quite rushed and consequently not very precise. We realised that certain costs were quite different to our budget. For example, the cost of recycling of tree tubes and the recycling target were both hard to assess beforehand because there wasn't much information available, which meant we missed our target."*
- Other issues raised by projects included **not being able to fund staff time for partner organisations that were not NGOs** and **experiencing delays in obtaining approvals**: *"We had to gain approval for every press release, plaque or anything that included the GRCF logo. Sometimes there were delays in obtaining approval, which held things up."*

2.3.2.4 Aspects of the programme that had worked particularly well – Stakeholder perceptions

Aspects of the GRCF programme that stakeholders identified as working particularly well included:

- **The strength of partnership working between the GRCF stakeholders**. This was the most common comment from stakeholders working in different organisations. Examples included:
  - The forming of a strong and collaborative partnership between Defra, The Heritage Fund and partners, which was reported to have been particularly good for the GRCF programme: *"It really helped with delivery of the programme that communications were good and there was an open, transparent and participatory process across all partners and throughout the programme."*
    "I have never experienced a project run so smoothly – and this is down to the partners involved, as well as the good will of the pandemic, which helped to ensure clarity and commitment to the aims of the programme."
  - The role of Defra arm's-length bodies (ALBs) to bring specialist advice was reported as being particularly useful.
- **The Heritage Fund has been proactive and successful in dealing with issues** throughout the programme. For example, when the application portal crashed, The Heritage Fund had informed Defra immediately and very quickly formulated a plan for sorting the problem and extending the deadline for applications in case any projects had been negatively affected.
- **Showing that it is possible to set up a grant scheme from scratch, in a short amount of time, when there is a clear purpose** (e.g. providing funding and support to the eNGO sector).
- The **flexibility of the programme**, particularly in terms of offering extensions to project completion dates.

2.3.2.5 Aspects of the programme that had worked less well – Stakeholder perceptions

Aspects of the GRCF programme that stakeholders identified as working less well included:

- **Not being able to meet the demand for the programme**. GRCF Round 1 was very over-subscribed and was unable to support many organisations in the sector.
- **Insufficient time for the application process**. While it was critical to launch the GRCF as quickly as possible, it was felt that the process would have still benefited from a longer period for projects to prepare applications and for the subsequent assessment process.
- **Confusion caused by trying to marry The Heritage Fund's standard application form with GRCF guidance**. There were good reasons for using the standardised form (so that it would be compatible with online processes), but some of the information was phrased differently in the documents, causing confusion for some applicants.
- **Higher than expected underspend of GRCF budgets**. The budget underspend has been greater than anticipated and is likely to suggest that some projects were struggling to achieve their targets.

- While the flexibility to offer project extensions was reported by many projects and stakeholders as a positive benefit, a few individuals suggested that **initial delays in offering extensions** had created problems and unnecessary worry for projects. It was also suggested that **projects may have benefited from being offered six-month extensions** rather than three months in most cases. This was seen as one of the rare cases when the administration of the process did not match the needs of the projects delivering on the ground.

2.3.3 Suggested improvements to the GRCF and similar programmes

2.3.3.1 Overall view

GRCF projects and stakeholders have suggested a number of improvements to the GRCF programme. The suggested improvements were very much in line with the issues raised previously and included: longer timescales for application and delivery phases; more streamlined monitoring tools and clearer guidance, greater flexibility for grant payments and coverage, reviewing requirements for landowner consents; and providing networking opportunities for projects to exchange knowledge and experiences.

2.3.3.2 Potential improvements suggested by projects

GRCF projects suggested the following improvements to the GRCF programme, many of which relate to the issues described previously:

- **A longer period of time for project applications and set up**:
  - *"It would be good to have a more realistic timeline for the application window, which rather than 3 weeks should be 3 months at least."*
  - *"A two-stage approach would be useful. A first phase with funding for 6-12 months to hire people, get a more realistic understanding of costs and plan activities; after that, to then have a delivery phase of 2-3 years"*
- **A longer timetable for delivery**: *"GRCF was well conceived and the short-term nature of the funding fit well with the immediate need to get things moving again and retain staff in the sector. But we are in a different situation now and funding programmes with longer time periods would help support more sustainable projects and activities in the sector."*
- **A more streamlined and appropriate set of monitoring tools**: *"Having one system for submitting data would require less repetition of information and data."*
- **Greater clarity and guidance** were mentioned by projects in relation to several areas including M&E requirements, post-project monitoring and the use of the GRCF name and logo: *"It would have been easier if there was greater clarity and guidance on using the GRCF name and logo, rather than asking for permission each time."*

  "More guidance on evaluation requirements would have been helpful, possibly with a workshop."
- **Greater flexibility in grant payments to help smaller organisations to overcome cashflow issues**: *"Flexibility in the payment of grant instalments would be helpful. Perhaps this could be done if we negotiated a monthly schedule or if larger up-front payment could be made to organisations with a proven track record. This would ensure smoother progress towards project outcomes."*

- Allow projects to **include funding to support legacy activities and ongoing monitoring** as this would help to maximise legacy impacts and ensure opportunities are not missed to learn about the outcomes of different project activities: *"It would be good if there was provision to support planning for legacy, aftercare, follow up and maintenance."*

  "I do worry that we keep learning the same things and always seem to miss the chance to maximise the learning from these projects. It would be good if a small percentage of funding could be used to continue monitoring activities beyond the life of a project. This would allow for more ecological monitoring... We will do the rudimentary monitoring anyway but it would be good to have funding for the more detailed stuff that could provide so much more learning to influence future projects and activities."

- **Include opportunities for projects to network, exchange knowledge and learn from each other's experiences**: *"We did not hear much about the other GRCF projects and don't know if there were any similar or overlapping projects. It would have been useful to have had updates on the other awardees and perhaps a webinar so we could meet other projects."*

  "It would also be useful to have a means of sharing learning and experiences across the GRCF projects... it might be useful to have some events with other projects to share experiences and learn from what others have done. Other Government funds have facilitated getting different projects together so they can take a step back and discuss what they have been doing. This provides useful learning and an opportunity to network with potential partners."

2.3.3.3 Potential improvements suggested by stakeholders

Interviews with GRCF stakeholders identified the following suggested improvements to the GRCF programme. These are again :

- **A longer window for applications**, which was not sufficient for the preparation and assessment of applications. Even though the application stage was extended for Round 2, it has been suggested that this was still not long enough.
- **Restrict the number of applications per organisation**. Some organisations submitted multiple applications in Round 1, resulting in a lot of wasted effort for the organisations preparing bids and for the selection panel. It would be better to restrict the number of applications as was done for GRCF Round 2.
- **More relaxed requirements for landowner consents** prior to the commencement of projects. Stakeholders suggested that these requirements should be reviewed to achieve a solution that still offers security for funders that projects will proceed as planned, but also does not creating barriers and additional burdens for projects during the bidding stage.
- **A longer programme period** to allow projects to deliver activities across multiple seasons. Projects needed more than one season to complete their work and collect evidence of benefits and impacts.
- **Earlier confirmation that projects could be extended**. GRCF projects would have benefited from earlier confirmation that they could be extended to allow more effective planning of their activities and avoid issues such as staff looking for jobs and leaving projects before completion.

3 Impact evaluation: GRCF projects, outputs and outcomes

3.1 Introduction

This section examines the outputs, outcomes and impacts of GRCF Round 1 projects, including analysis of monitoring data, survey responses and qualitative interviews and comparing this to projects' own projections where available.

The GRCF Round 1 programme had five core goals: (i) nature conservation and restoration, (ii) nature-based solutions, (iii) connecting people with nature, (iv) employment and skills and (v) resilience of eNGOs.

Most of the GRCF Round 1 projects have delivered against multiple GRCF goals, and there are strong connections between actions targeting each of the goals. Both the nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions goals involved investments in the creation, restoration and maintenance of natural capital assets, which have delivered benefits both for biodiversity (habitats and species) and people (ecosystem services). Most projects that contributed to these objectives also included an element of engaging people with nature. Even where the focus of the project was primarily on nature conservation and restoration or nature-based solutions, projects still engaged volunteers in land management, worked with land managers and other stakeholders in pursuit of their objectives, raised public awareness and engaged the public to build support for conservation action, or allowed people access to the habitats created or restored. Furthermore, all projects have also contributed to the GRCF objectives to support jobs and skills in the environment sector, and support eNGO resilience and sustainability.

GRCF project applications included estimates of the scale of outputs and outcomes expected to be delivered against each theme. Monitoring data, collected by the projects and submitted to The Heritage Fund, illustrate their achievements, while the survey and interviews also explored project achievements and their expectations of future outcomes.

3.2 Overview of achievements, success factors and challenges

This section provides a summary of responses to the final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects based on their self-reported achievements of targets, and the key success factors and challenges faced in delivering their goals. The following sub-sections provide further analysis for each of the core themes of the GRCF programme.

The large majority of Round 1 projects reported achieving or exceeding their goals across each of the GRCF objectives (Figure 3.1). Overall:

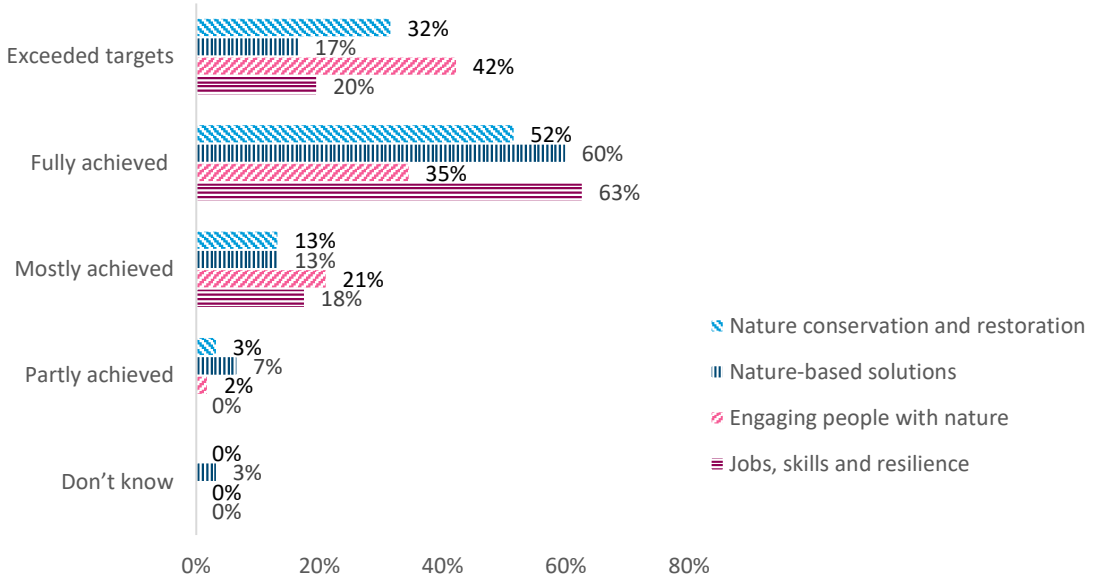
- 84% of projects reported achieving or exceeding their nature conservation and restoration goals.
- 82% of projects reported achieving or exceeding their jobs, skills and resilience goals.
- 77% of projects reported achieving or exceeding goals for their nature-based solutions.

- 77% of projects reported achieving or exceeding their engaging people with nature goals.

Even where targets were not fully achieved, most projects reported having 'mostly achieved' their goals. The survey and interviews also explored the factors that helped projects to achieve or exceed their goals. The key success factors most commonly mentioned by projects were:

- The commitment of teams and the effectiveness of partnerships, project management and team-working.
- High levels of engagement with landowners, local authorities, local communities to support the delivery of, and engagement with, project activities.
- The ability to develop online resources and services to mitigate problems caused by COVID-19.
- The support received from The Heritage Fund, and particularly investment managers, who were widely reported to have been supportive and flexible throughout the programme. The ability to work together to develop and modify plans to meet challenges that arose during the project was seen as being particularly valuable.
- Project extensions, which allowed time to achieve targets that had been affected by issues and delays.

Figure 3.1 Extent to which projects reported achieving their intended goals: (N=63)



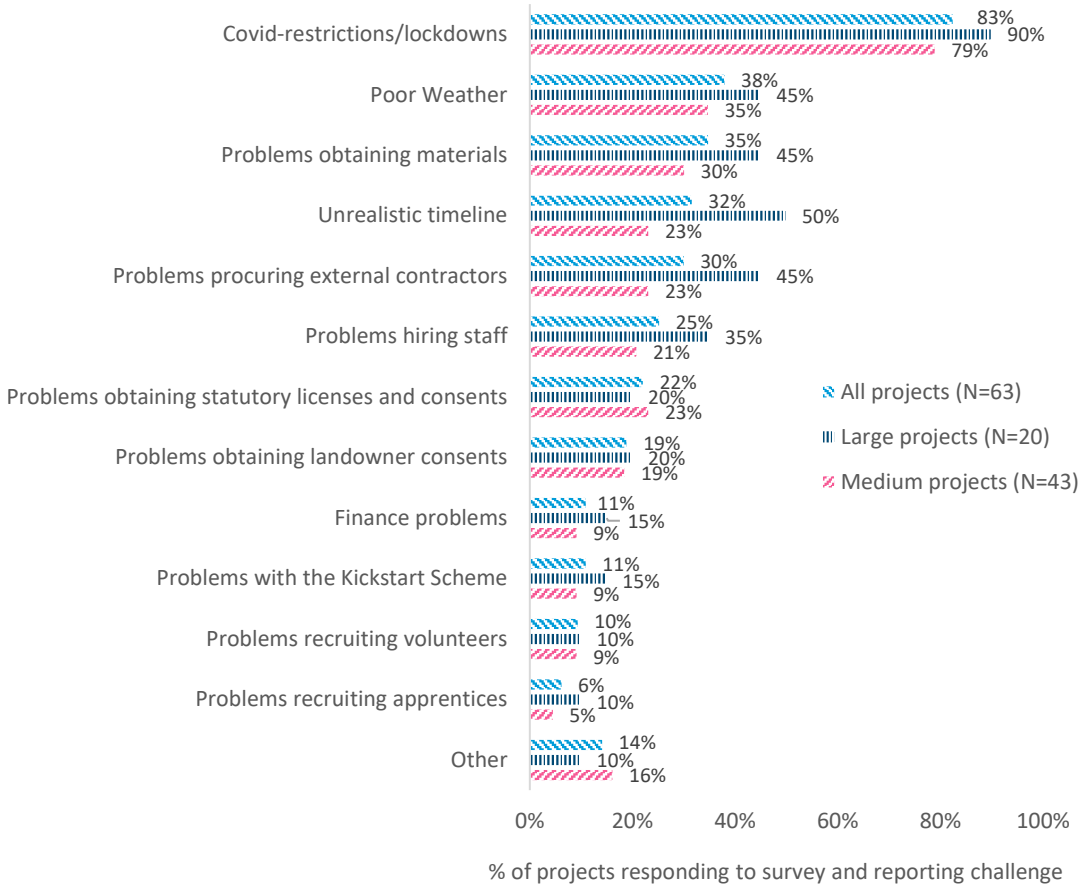
Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Most of the projects that responded to the survey stated that they had experienced barriers or challenges while delivering their project activities (challenges were reported by 89% of all projects: 95% of large projects and 86% of medium projects). By far the most common barrier or challenge was having to deal with COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns during the life of the project (Figure 3.2). These issues were reported by 83% of projects, while one in three projects also reported challenges due to poor weather (38%), unrealistic timelines (32%) and difficulties obtaining materials (35%) and procuring external contractors (30%). Interviews with projects suggested that many of the issues with procuring products and services

were due to shortages and capacity issues that were knock-on effects that had also been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. While these challenges were commonly cited across all projects, they were reported by a greater proportion of the large projects, compared to the medium-sized projects.

Other common challenges included problems hiring staff, obtaining statutory licences and consents and obtaining landowner consents. Finance problems were only reported by 11% of projects and were quite varied, including: higher than expected costs (sometimes also reported to be due to the COVID-19 pandemic); challenges in financial reporting for their grant, and cashflow problems caused by payments in arrears, while others would have liked to have seen costs covered for non-NGOs that were also key delivery partners. Other issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic included challenges with the delivery of seasonal activities that had been delayed during lockdowns, and changes to other external factors (e.g. post-COVID plans of partners and stakeholders). Some other issues were also reported by a minority of projects including unexpected ecological issues (e.g. presence of protected species) and key staff leaving before the end of the project.

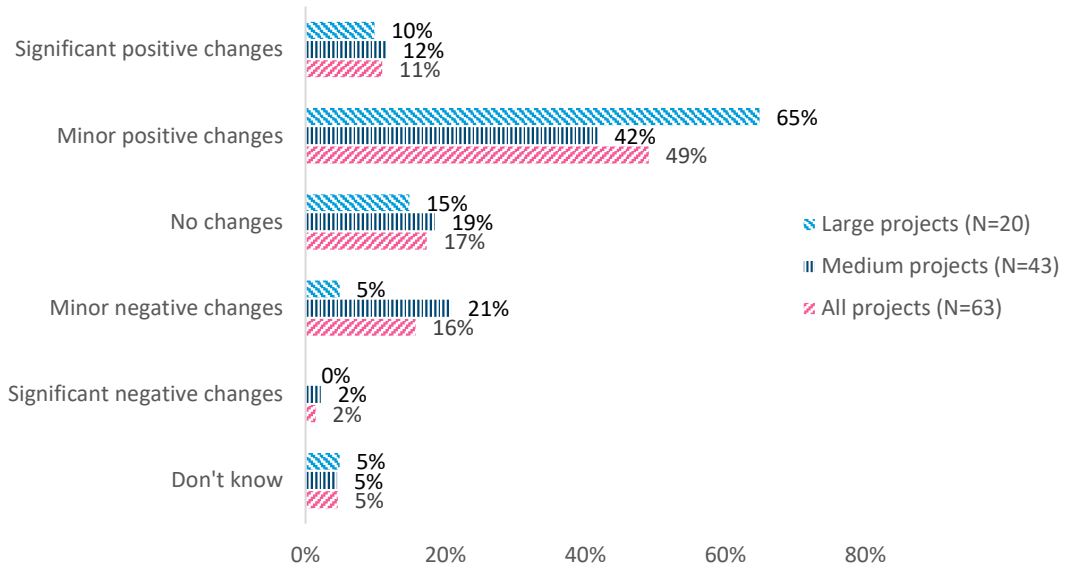
Figure 3.2 Barriers or challenges faced in delivering project activities, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Most projects also reported making changes during the delivery period, either in response to the above challenges or to take advantage of new opportunities. Figure 3.3 and Table 3.3 show that only a minority of projects stated that they had not made any changes during the delivery period (17%). Of those making changes during the delivery period, most projects considered these changes or additions to have been positive (60%), compared to those who felt they had needed to make negative changes or compromises (18%).

Figure 3.3 Projects making changes during the delivery period, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

3.3 Nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions

3.3.1.1 Overall view

GRCF Round 1 projects have delivered environmental actions across 930 different sites around England, providing habitat restoration and creation, species protection and nature-based solutions. This is estimated to have provided direct benefits for 326,000 hectares of land and 572 kilometres (km) of linear features (e.g. rivers and hedgerows). Additional indirect benefits were also reported for a further 549,000 hectares of land and 103 km of linear features, resulting in environmental benefits over a total area of 875,000 hectares of land and 675 km of linear features.

These benefits have arisen from activities to both create and restore habitat. Habitat creation was reported to have delivered direct benefits for 228,000 hectares and total benefits for 462,000 hectares, while restoration of habitats was reported to have delivered direct benefits for 219,000 hectares and total benefits for 615,000 hectares. The sum of the individual habitat creation and restoration figures is greater than the total figures because some creation and restoration activities were reported over the same area and are included as providing benefits from both habitat creation and restoration.

Approximately half of the sites contain land with conservation designations, particularly Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), while the most common BAP

habitats targeted by actions are lowland mixed deciduous woodland, rivers, ponds and hedgerows.

Tree planting has taken place on 367 sites around England, and 1.1 million trees have been planted, exceeding original targets by 37%. Approximately two-thirds of projects (45 of the 69 projects) also delivered activities to protect and target individual species across 198 sites.

The large majority of projects reported having met or exceeded their goals for nature conservation and restoration (84% of projects) and for nature-based solutions (77% of projects). Projects also expect to deliver significant and wide-ranging outcomes in the longer term through the continuation of activities that were initiated by GRCF projects and from future environmental benefits that are expected to continue to accumulate over time (e.g. increased biodiversity, carbon sequestration and protection from natural flood management).

3.3.2 Performance against goals

3.3.2.1 Type, area and condition of land benefiting from environmental actions

The large majority of GRCF Round 1 projects have delivered environmental activities relating to nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions. In total, 66 of the 69 Round 1 projects (96%) have delivered this type of activity across 930 of their 1,447 sites (64%). The areas of land that have directly and indirectly benefited from these activities have been estimated by each project[8]. A total of approximately 326,000 hectares of land is estimated to have directly benefited (Table 3.1), while a further 549,000 hectares of land is estimated to have benefited indirectly. This suggests that the **GRCF Round 1 projects have provided environmental benefits for 875,000 hectares of land** in total (including direct and indirect benefits).

These figures exclude the areas of benefit reported by one unique GRCF project - Restoring biodiversity: building a mink-free East Anglia. This project is estimated to provide benefits across the whole of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire due to the vast roaming areas of the European Mink. The project and its four sites have therefore been treated as outliers and excluded from the headline figures to avoid biasing the results. If the reported benefits of this project and its four sites are also included, the total area benefiting directly from GRCF activities would increase to 2.85 million hectares, with a further 1.05 million hectares reported to have benefited indirectly, providing environmental benefits for 3.9 million hectares of land in total.

The following tables focus on the more conservative, preferred estimates that exclude the 'mink' project and its four sites, but also provide total figures for all sites for comparison[9]. The data suggest significant variance in the size of sites and the areas of land benefiting from GRCF activities, which range from less than a hectare for many sites, up to a maximum of 214,000 hectares (or 1.75 million hectares for the largest site of the 'mink' project).

[8] i.e. the area of land over which activities were delivered.

[9] The areas of benefit for the 'Restoring biodiversity: building a mink-free East Anglia' project are included separately in the cost effectiveness analysis (CEA) in Section 5.3.5 for projects focused on removing invasive alien species but are excluded from all other aspects of the CEA and value for money assessment.

Table 3.1 Area of land directly and indirectly benefiting from environmental actions of GRCF Round 1 projects (hectares)

Type of area	Land directly benefiting	Land indirectly benefiting	Total land benefiting
Total area (headline figures excluding largest 4 sites)	326,000	549,000	**875,000**
Total area (all sites)	*2,850,000*	*1,050,000*	***3,900,000***
Mean area per site (headline figures excluding largest 4 sites)	440	4,800	**940**
Mean area per site (all sites)	*3,800*	*9,100*	***4,200***
Median area per site	3	19	**4**
Min site area	<1	<1	**<1**
Max site area (headline figures excluding largest 4 sites)	63,500	210,000	**214,000**
Max site area (all sites)	*1,250,000*	*500,000*	***1,750,000***

Note: Reported totals may be an under or overestimate of the true area of land benefiting from environmental activity. There is missing data (from some projects overall and for some project sites), which results in likely underestimation. However many activities reported for a single site may be undertaken on the same area of land, but it was not possible to identify for which records this might occur – therefore, if a project provided area data for multiple activities on a site, these areas were counted only once if they were reported to cover the same hectares of land, and summed if they were reported as covering different hectare areas - which results in a likely overestimation. Furthermore, two projects reported the same significant indirect benefits across all of their sites, which appears to duplicate the scale of these indirect benefits. In both cases, the indirect benefits have been included for one site but excluded for the others where they were reported to cover the same area of land.

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.2 presents the land benefits in terms of habitat creation and restoration activities. It shows that the scale of benefits is broadly similar for habitat creation and restoration activities, when the largest four sites are excluded, with 462,000 hectares of newly created habitats and 615,000 hectares of restored habitats. The results are completely different when the largest four sites are included, as these are exclusively focused on restoration activities and add more than 3 million hectares of restored habitat.

Table 3.2 Area of land directly and indirectly benefiting from habitat creation and restoration activities (hectares)

Type of distance	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Total distance*
Total area (headline figures excluding largest 4 sites)	462,000	615,000	**875,000**
Direct benefits	228,000	219,000	**326,000**
Indirect benefits	234,000	396,000	**549,000**
Total area (all sites)	*462,000*	*3,638,000*	***3,900,000***
Direct benefits	*228,000*	*2,742,000*	***2,850,000***
Indirect benefits	*234,000*	*896,000*	***1,050,000***

** Habitat creation + habitat restoration sums to >total land benefits. Some project activities were reported as providing both creation and restoration activities over the same area – in such cases the area is included as both 'direct creation' data and 'direct restoration', but only once in the 'total land benefits'.*

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Medium-sized projects have delivered the large majority of created and restored habitats, accounting for 96% of all of the land that has benefited from environmental action (Table 3.3). Habitat creation and restoration activities have been delivered across all English regions, with most benefits delivered in the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands and East of England (Table 3.3, Figure 3.4, Figure 3.5 and Figure 3.6). The concentration of benefits on the activities of medium projects in these regions is due to some large areas reported by four medium-sized projects: 'P&DRSG REDS'; 'Sherwood Forest's Truth - Woods, Heathlands and People'; 'Long-term Biological control of Invasive Non-Native Species'; and 'Curlew Recovery Northern England'. These four projects accounted for 88% of all land directly benefiting, and 94% of land indirectly benefiting, from GRCF activities (after excluding the four largest sites).

Table 3.3 Area of land directly benefiting from environmental action (excluding largest 4 sites), by project size and region (%)

Project size	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Total area*
Large projects	1%	7%	8%
Medium projects	99%	93%	92%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Region	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Total area*
East Midlands	28%	1%	21%
East of England	0.1%	2%	3%
London	0.03%	0.5%	0.4%
North East	1%	10%	8%
North West	69%	73%	56%
South East	0.1%	2%	2%
South West	0.1%	3%	4%
West Midlands	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%
Yorkshire & The Humber	1%	8%	6%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

** Some project activities were reported as providing both creation and restoration activities cover the same area – in such cases the area is included as both 'direct creation' data and 'direct restoration', but only once in the 'total area'.*

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.4 Total area of land benefiting (directly and indirectly) from environmental action (excluding largest 4 sites), by project size and region (%)

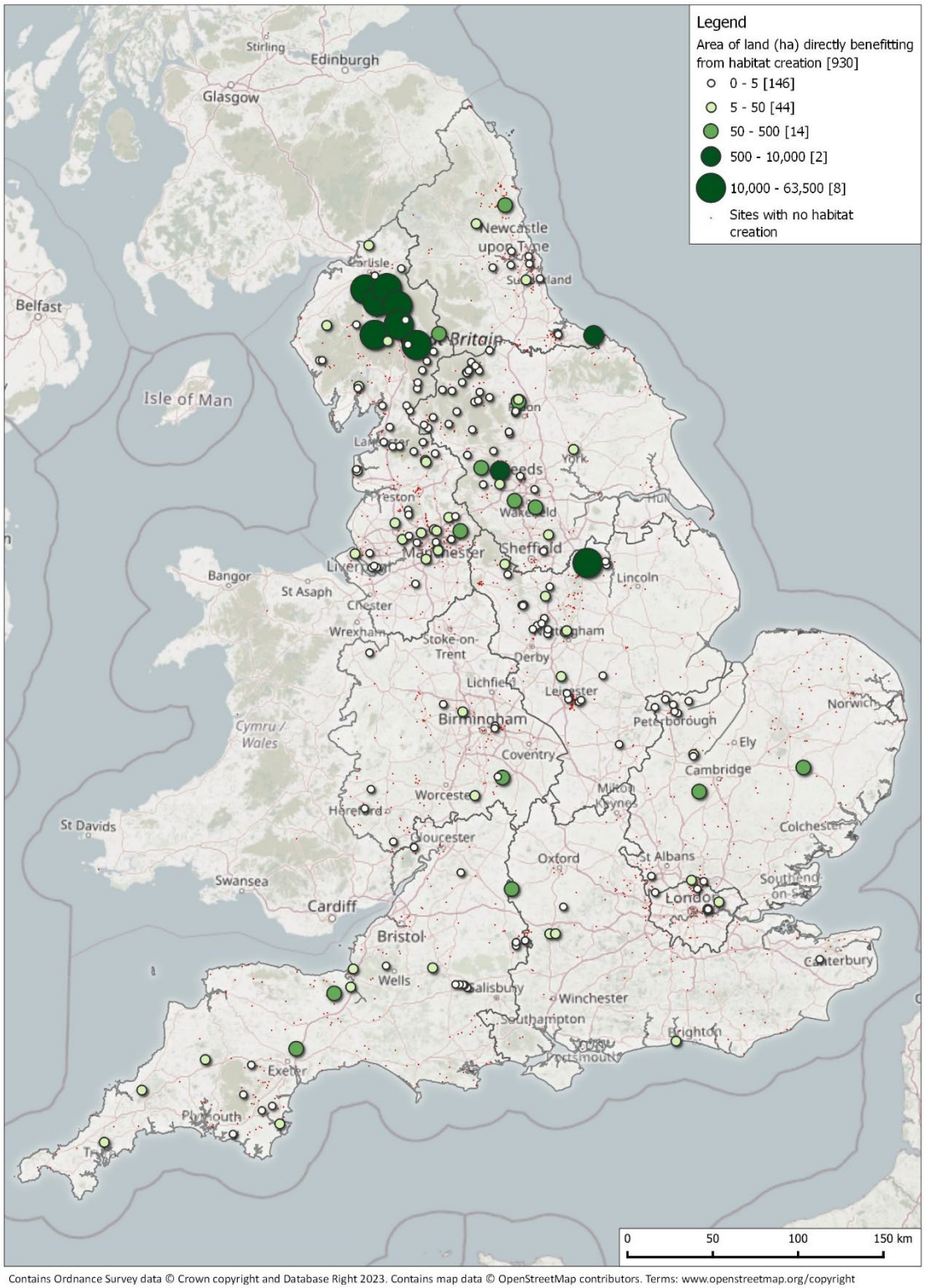
Project size	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Total area*
Large projects	0.4%	4%	4%
Medium projects	99.6%	96%	96%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Region	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Total area*
East Midlands	27%	1%	15%
East of England	0.2%	1%	11%
London	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%
North East	1%	3%	3%
North West	71%	54%	41%
South East	0.03%	1%	1%
South West	0.1%	2%	2%
West Midlands	0.03%	0.1%	0.2%
Yorkshire & The Humber	1%	37%	26%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

** Some project activities were reported as providing both creation and restoration activities cover the same area – in such cases the area is included as both 'direct creation' data and 'direct restoration', but only once in the 'total area'.*

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.4 Area of land directly benefiting from habitat creation (hectares – ha), by GRCF project site (all sites)



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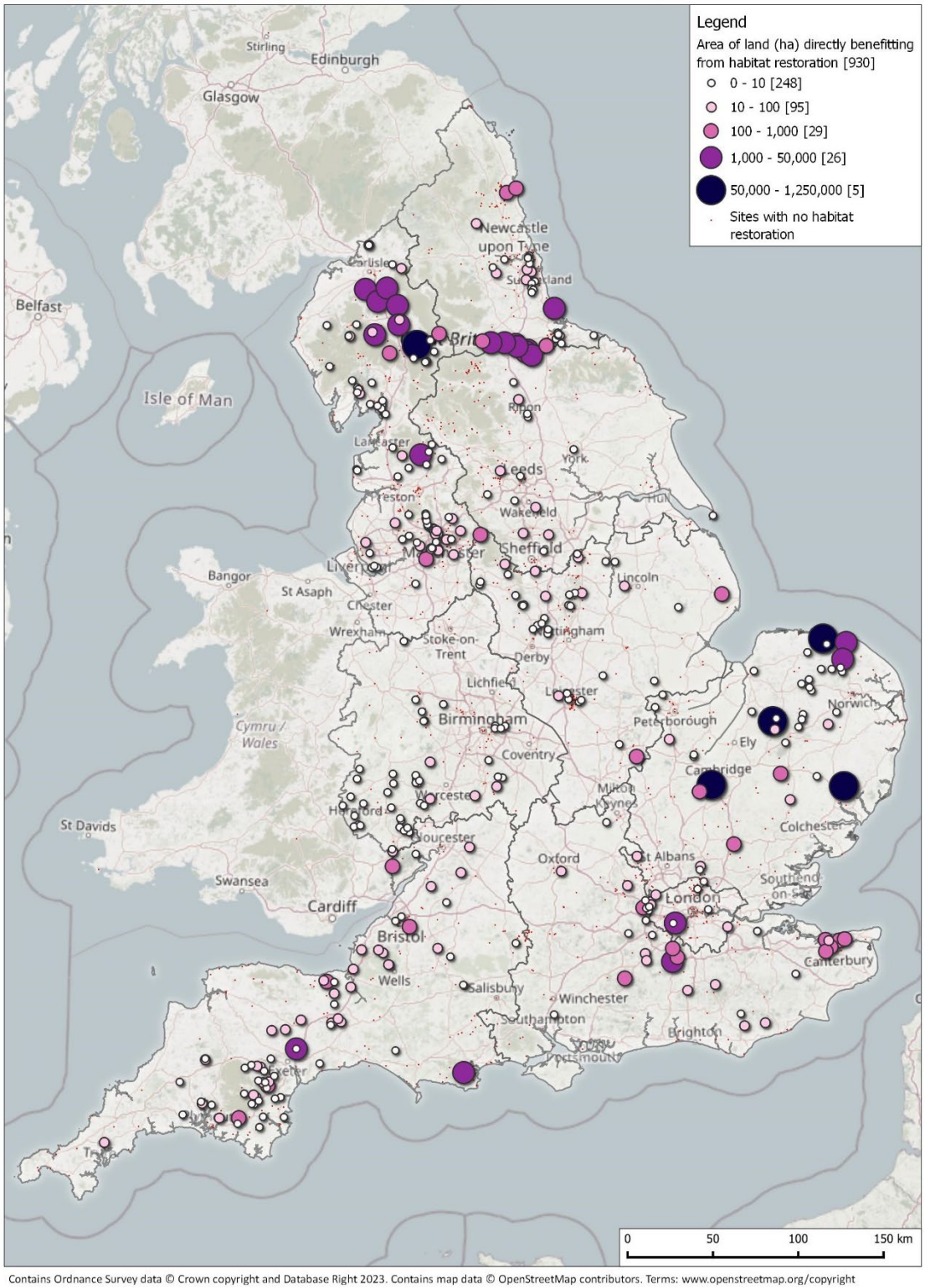
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.5 Area of land directly benefiting from habitat restoration (hectares – ha), by GRCF project site (all sites)



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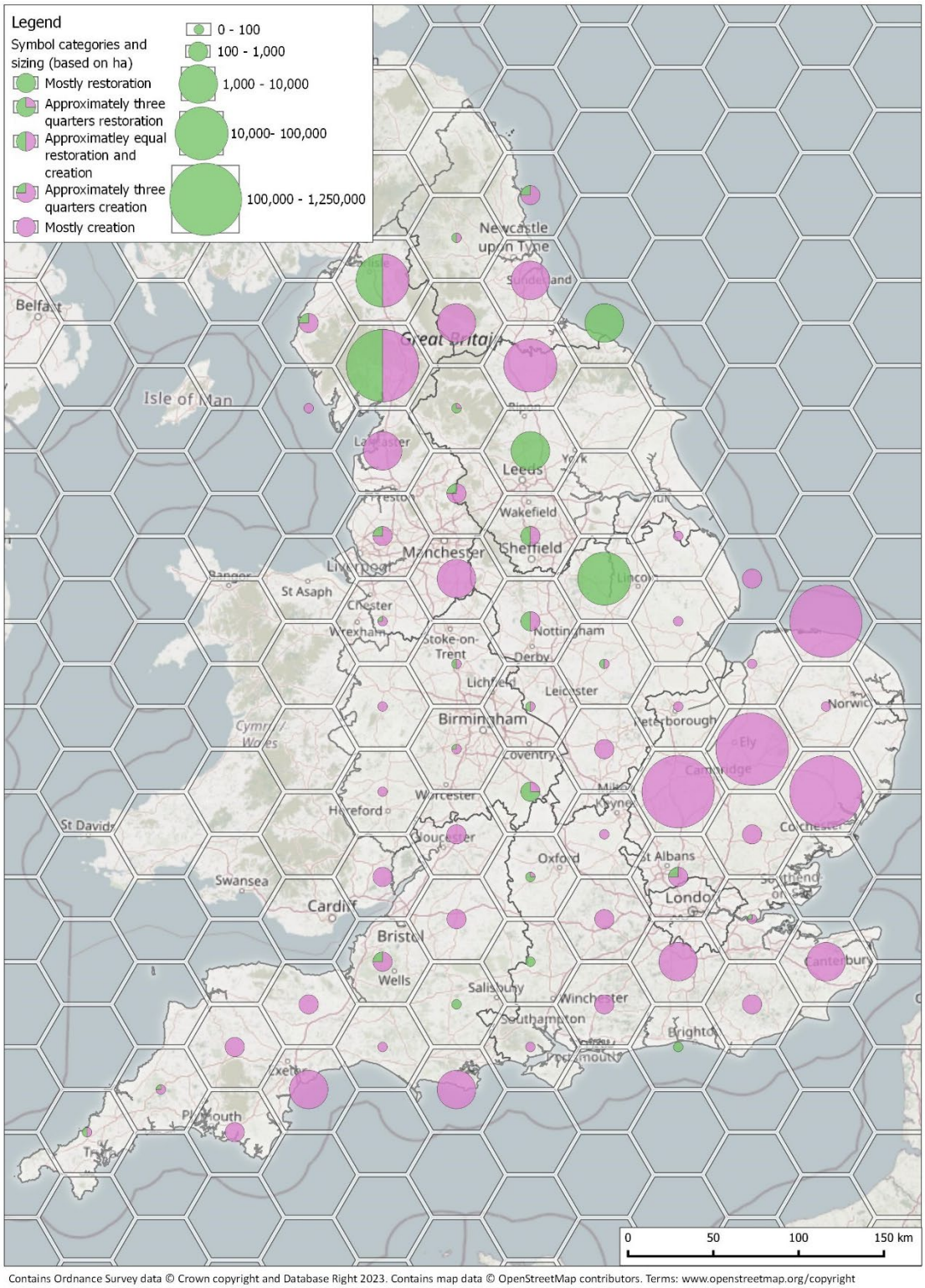
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.6 Area of land directly benefiting from environmental action (hectares – ha), by 50km hexgrid (all sites)



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** Hexagonal 50km cells with a central pie chart to show the area of land benefitting from direct habitat creation and restoration activities, summed for all GRCF project sites located within the cell*

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

In total, 66 of the 69 Round 1 projects have reported delivering environmental actions across 930 different sites. The descriptions of these environmental actions have been analysed to identify key themes in the types of activity. Table 3.5 shows that maintenance activities and habitat change for carbon sequestration have been common actions for GRCF projects and both have been delivered by around 40 projects at between 250 and 300 sites. Activities to control invasive species have been delivered by 22 projects at more than 80 sites. These activities provide benefits over a relatively large area, even when the four largest sites are excluded. Activities to provide natural flood management were also common, with 13 projects delivering activities across 30 different sites.

Table 3.5 Area of land benefiting from different types of environmental action and number of sites and projects involved in delivery

Type of activity	Total area of land	Area of land excl. largest 4 sites	No. of sites	No. of projects
Habitat change for carbon sequestration	135,000	135,000	280	38
Maintenance activities	28,000	28,000	256	40
Invasive species control	3,274,000	251,000	84	22
Natural flood management	5,000	5,000	30	13
Other activities	602,000	602,000	576	55
Total*	**3,900,000**	**875,000**	**930**	**66**

** Similarly, some project activities covered multiple types of activity and the associated areas of land are included under each type of activity – resulting in double-counting of some areas – although they are only included once in the 'total area'.*

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Linear features benefiting from environmental actions

The Round 1 projects also submitted data measuring the distance of features that have been created or restored by GRCF-funded projects (e.g. rivers or hedgerows). The data in Table 3.8 suggest that **675 km of features have benefited from environmental actions of GRCF projects**, comprising 572 km of direct benefits and 103 km of indirect benefits.

As with the areas of land described above, these figures for the distances of linear features also exclude the main site of another unique GRCF project – the 'Thames Catchment – Community Eels' project. This project is expected to deliver significant indirect benefits by collecting and sharing data that will inform the future prioritisation of eel passage work in the future and deliver wide-ranging benefits for the European Eel (a critically endangered species listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species). If the main site of this project was also included, the distance of features benefiting from GRCF projects would increase significantly to more than 3,800 km, comprising 730 km of direct benefits and 3,100 km of indirect benefits.

Table 3.6 Linear distance of features (e.g. rivers, hedgerows) directly and indirectly benefiting from environmental actions of GRCF Round 1 projects (km)

Type of distance	Directly benefiting	Indirectly benefiting	Total
Total distance (headline figures excluding largest site)	572 km	103 km	**675 km**
Total distance (all sites)	729 km	3,103 km	**3,832 km**
Mean area per site (headline figures excluding largest site)	2 km	0.4 km	**3 km**
Mean area per site (all sites)	3 km	13 km	**16 km**
Median area per site	0.4 km	0.1 km	**0.5 km**
Min site distance	0.01 km	0 km	**0.01 km**
Max site distance (headline figures excluding largest site)	135 km	23 km	**135 km**
Max site distance (all sites)	157 km	3,000 km	**3,157 km**

Note: Reported totals may be an under or overestimate of the true distance of features benefiting from environmental activity. There is missing data (from some projects overall and for some project sites), which results in likely underestimation. However many activities reported for a single site may be undertaken on the same section of features, but it was not possible to identify for which records this might occur – therefore, if a project provided distance data for multiple activities on a site, these were counted only once if they were reported to cover the same km, and summed if they were reported as covering different km - which results in a likely overestimation.

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

As with land area, it is possible to disaggregate the linear distance of features between newly created and restored features. The data suggest that environmental actions on linear features is split relatively evenly between creation and restoration activities. However, there are more gaps in the dataset for these linear features, which results in a relatively high proportion of unknown activities (for approximately half of the distance of features when excluding the 'Community Eels' project, and around 90% of the overall distance if the 'Community Eels' project is also included).

Table 3.7 Linear distance of features (e.g. rivers, hedgerows) directly and indirectly benefiting from habitat creation and restoration activities (km)

Type of distance	Habitat creation	Habitat restoration	Unknown activity	Total distance*
Total distance (headline figures excluding largest site)	229 km	248 km	317 km	**675 km**
Direct benefits	173 km	199 km	314 km	**572 km**
Indirect benefits	56 km	49 km	3 km	**103 km**
Total distance (all sites)	*229 km*	*248 km*	*3,474 km*	***3,832 km***
Direct benefits	*173 km*	*199 km*	*471 km*	***729 km***
Indirect benefits	*56 km*	*49 km*	*3,003 km*	***3,103 km***

** Habitat creation + habitat restoration sums to >total distance. Some project activities were reported as providing both creation and restoration activities over the same distance – in such cases the features are included as both 'direct creation' data and 'direct restoration', but only once in the 'total distance'.*

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.8 shows how the benefits of GRCF-funded environmental action for linear features are disaggregated by project size and region. It shows that medium-sized projects have delivered three-quarters of the overall benefits for linear features, due to a very high delivery of direct benefits. The regional distribution of benefits for linear features is varied across all regions with highest concentration of benefits delivered in the North West (38%), South East (31%) and London (12%). The concentration of benefits arising from the activities of medium projects is due to the benefits reported by two medium-sized projects: the 'Coquet 20-20 Vision' project and the 'Thames Catchment Community Eels Project', which reported some large benefits in terms of linear features despite the exclusion of its largest site. These two projects accounted for 68% of all linear features benefiting from GRCF activities (after excluding the largest site).

Table 3.8 Linear distance of features (e.g. rivers, hedgerows) benefiting from environmental action (excluding largest site), by project size and region

Project size	Directly benefiting	Indirectly benefiting	Total
Large projects	13%	93%	25%
Medium projects	87%	7%	75%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Region	Directly benefiting	Indirectly benefiting	Total
East Midlands	0.2%	5%	0.9%
East of England	3%	23%	6%
London	14%	1%	12%
North East	42%	11%	38%
North West	3%	10%	4%
South East	31%	34%	31%
South West	5%	10%	5%
West Midlands	2%	1%	2%
Yorkshire and The Humber	1%	5%	1%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Designations and condition

GRCF-funded environmental action is taking place on areas of land inside and outside conservation designations. Table 3.9 presents conservation designations for the 930 sites benefiting from environmental action delivered by 66 of the 69 Round 1 projects. Conservation designations were available for most of these sites and projects (i.e. for 64 projects and 599 of their sites) and show that most GRCF project sites were outside of conservation designations (333 sites), but many others were within designated areas. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) were the designation type most frequently overlapping with GRCF project sites (for 25% of the sites) and almost half of GRCF projects (48%) delivered environmental actions on at least one SSSI designated site. Some GRCF project sites also overlapped with local wildlife sites, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), local nature reserves, National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Ramsar sites, while four project sites overlapped with Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).

The GRCF projects also provided information on the condition of sites receiving environmental action. Table 3.10 shows that most environmental action is taking

place on sites currently deemed to be in unfavourable condition, and particularly in an 'unfavourable – recovering' condition. Comparing the condition status of sites (between the July 2021 and final monitoring data) suggests that the site condition is unchanged in most cases. However, there were four sites for which the environmental action was reported to have already delivered an improvement in condition status from 'unfavourable – recovering' condition to 'favourable' condition.

Table 3.9 Conservation designation of GRCF project sites that benefited from environmental actions

Conservation designation	Number of sites	% of all sites*	Number of projects	% of all projects*
No Designation	333	56%	42	66%
Sites of Special Scientific Interest	147	25%	31	48%
Local Wildlife Sites	57	10%	14	22%
Protected by an Act of Parliament	56	9%	4	6%
Special Areas of Conservation	45	8%	17	27%
Local Nature Reserves	45	8%	17	27%
National Nature Reserves	20	3%	11	17%
Special Protection Areas	14	2%	9	14%
Ramsar	9	2%	6	9%
Marine Conservation Zone	4	1%	3	5%
Total sites / projects for which conservation designation is known	**599**	**100%**	**64**	**100%**
Unknown designations	*331*	*No value*	*2*	*No value*
All sites / projects benefiting from environmental actions	**930**	*No value*	**66**	*No value*

** Sum to >100% as some project sites reported >1 designation*

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.10 Condition of sites receiving beneficial environmental action

Site condition	Number of sites
Favourable	100
Unfavourable – recovering	152
Unfavourable – no change	37
Unfavourable – declining	29
Destroyed (partially/completely)	13

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

GRCF projects reported undertaking beneficial actions across 38 different UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats. Table 3.11 shows that three habitats - Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Rivers, and Ponds – have received the greatest focus, accounting for more than a third of all actions targeted at BAP habitats. In addition to BAP habitats, the other habitat types most frequently reported by projects as benefiting from environmental actions were other woodland and amenity grassland[10].

[10] ICF analysis of open text responses on other non-BAP priority habitats

Table 3.11 BAP habitats targeted by GRCF projects, by number of sites where the habitat is present and number of projects targeting those habitats

BAP Habitat	Number of sites	Number of projects
Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	139	24
Rivers	95	19
Ponds	62	20
Hedgerows	56	20
Lowland Meadows	49	18
Wood-Pasture & Parkland	41	13
Lowland Heathland	23	9
Wet Woodland	31	13
Lowland Calcareous Grassland	21	9
Reedbeds	20	13
Upland Mixed Ashwoods	19	4
Lowland Fens	12	6
Upland Oakwood	17	6
Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pastures	7	4
Traditional Orchards	9	5
Lowland Beech and Yew Woodland	10	3
Blanket Bog	7	5
Lowland Raised Bog	7	5
Native Pine Woodlands	11	3
Upland Birchwoods	9	2
Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh	7	5
Fens and Swamps	4	2
Upland Flushes	4	2
Upland Hay Meadows	3	2
Upland Heathland	3	2
Lowland Dry Acid Grassland	13	9
Upland Calcareous Grassland	3	2
Aquifer Fed Naturally Fluctuating Water	13	4
Calaminarian Grasslands	1	1
Open Mosaic Habitats on Prev.	10	4
Arable Field Margins	6	4
Coastal saltmarsh	4	3
Eutrophic Standing Waters	5	3
Seagrass beds	3	2
Intertidal mudflats	2	1
Mesotrophic Lakes	1	1
Mountain Heaths and Willow Scrub	1	1
Mud habitats in deep water	1	1

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

3.3.2.2 Trees planted by GRCF projects

Tree planting was a major activity undertaken by GRCF Round 1 projects. In total, **1.1 million trees were planted across 367 sites** (25% of all GRCF project sites) by 36 different projects (52% of all GRCF Round 1 projects). Table 3.14 shows that the number of tree-planting projects was split evenly between medium and large projects, although large projects accounted for almost 90% of the trees planted (980,000 trees) and almost 70% of the sites where trees were planted (254 sites).

Table 3.12 Number of trees planted and number of sites and projects planting trees, by project size

Project size	Total trees planted	Number of sites planting trees	Number of projects planting trees
Large projects	978,582	254	18
Medium projects	113,127	113	18
Total	**1,091,709**	**367**	**36**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database and Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

The number of trees planted has also been compared to the projections provided in GRCF applications (Table 3.13). It shows that the GRCF Round 1 projects have exceeded their original target of 800,000 trees by 37%. Targets were exceeded for both medium projects (5% higher than the target) and for large projects (42% higher than the target).

Table 3.13 Number of trees planted by GRCF projects by project size (compared to forecast)

Project size	Forecast	Actual	% of forecast
Large projects	690,600	978,582	142%
Medium projects	107,924	113,127	105%
Total	**798,524**	**1,091,709**	**137%**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database and Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.14 Number of trees planted by region (compared to forecast)

Region	Forecast	Actual	% of forecast
East Midlands	16,000	82,994	519%
East of England	112,000	251,186	224%
London	6,000	109,396	1823%
North East	111,000	98,453	89%
North West	167,000	166,772	100%
South East	110,000	58,217	53%
South West	108,000	150,873	140%
West Midlands	117,000	120,199	103%
Yorkshire and The Humber	55,000	53,619	97%

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database and Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.14 and Figure 3.7 show the distribution of trees planted across the English regions. They show that the greatest number of trees have been planted in the East of England (251,000 trees), at more than double the original target. There were also significant numbers of trees planted in: the North West (167,000 trees, almost matching the original target); the South West (151,000 trees, exceeding the original target by 40%); the West Midlands (120,000 trees, achieving the original target); and in London, where 109,000 trees were planted, which was 18 times higher than the original target of 6,000 trees).

Table 3.15 shows the most common species of trees planted by GRCF projects, ranked by the number of GRCF sites planting each species[11]. Although data on tree species were only available for less than half of the sites, they suggested that **hazel and hawthorn trees were the most common species, with each being planted at more than 100 different sites, and by more than 20 different projects**. Other tree species planted at large numbers of sites included crab-apple, birch, cherry, oak, blackthorn, rowan, willow, maple, alder, holly and dogwood. In total, the GRCF projects recorded planting more than 60 different species of trees. The planted species were reported for more than 200 GRCF sites. The large majority of these sites (88%) had planted mixed species, with 71% of sites planting five or more species and 32% of sites planting ten or more different species.

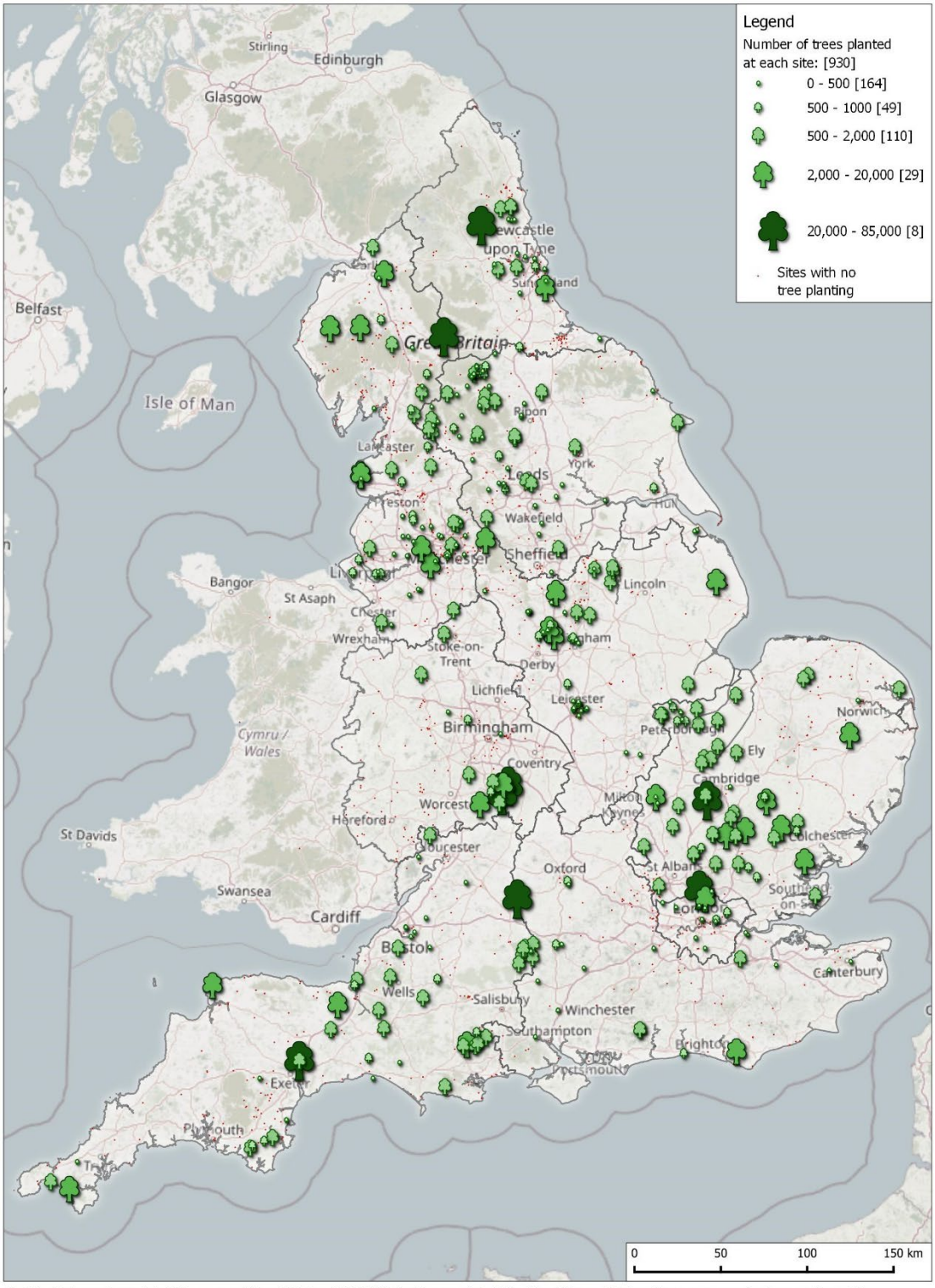
Table 3.15 Numbers of GRCF projects and sites planting trees, by species

Tree species	Number of sites planting trees	Number of projects planting trees
Hazel	113	25
Hawthorn	106	21
Crab apple	82	19
Birch	81	19
Cherry	80	21
Oak	77	24
Blackthorn	71	16
Rowan	70	19
Willow	59	16
Maple	57	12
Alder	57	16
Holly	44	13
Dogwood	43	12
Other	131	28
Unknown	194	14
Total	**367**	**36**

Sources: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

[11] It was not possible to estimate numbers for each species as the monitoring data only provided a total number of trees and a list of the different species planted at each site. Most sites had planted multiple species of tree so it was not possible to disaggregate numbers of trees between species.

Figure 3.7 Number of trees planted at each site



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Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

3.3.2.3 Type of species benefiting from GRCF activity

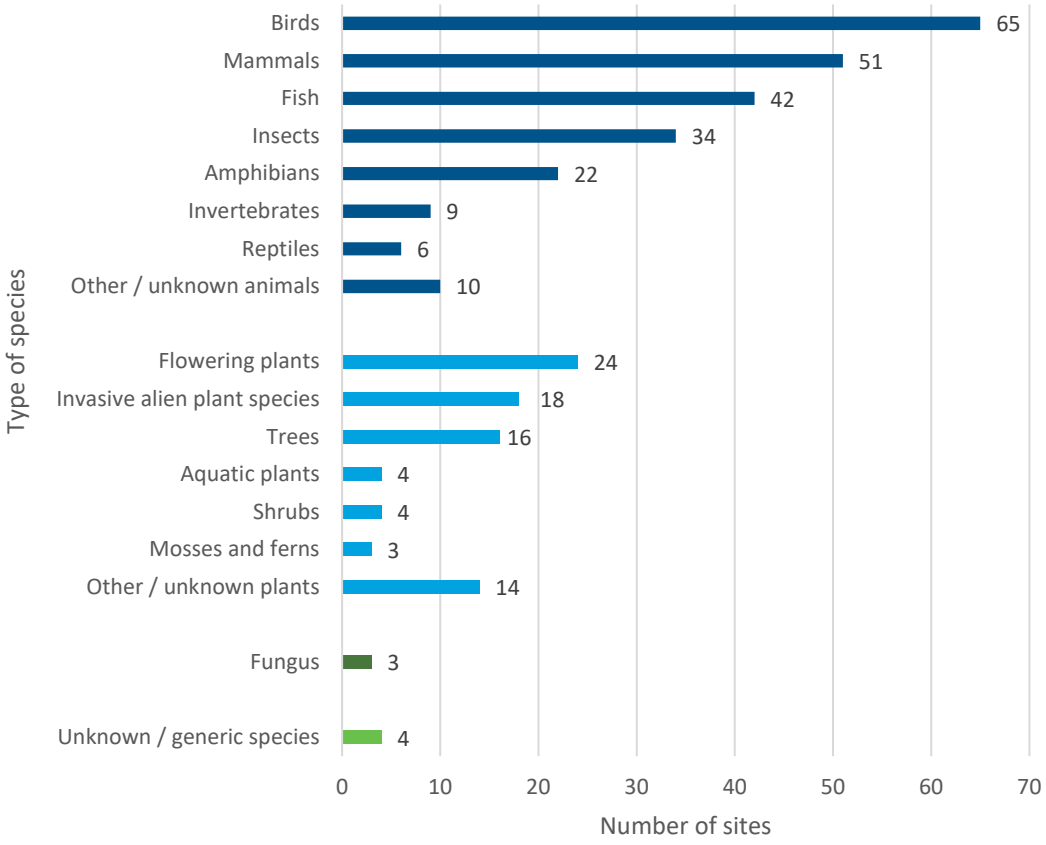
Many of the GRCF Round 1 projects also delivered conservation actions that were targeted to support individual species. In total, **45 GRCF projects reported delivering activities targeted at specific species across 198 different sites**.

Figure 3.8 and Table 3.16 show that the large majority of activities were targeted at animal species and were delivered by 42 projects at 163 different sites. Further activities targeted at plant species were delivered by 15 projects at 57 different sites. The most common groups of species targeted by the GRCF Round 1 projects were:

- birds (conservation activities delivered by 29 projects at 65 sites).
- mammals (conservation activities delivered by 21 projects at 51 sites).
- fish (conservation activities delivered by 9 projects at 42 sites).
- insects (conservation activities delivered by 15 projects at 34 sites).
- amphibians (conservation activities delivered by 13 projects at 22 sites).

There were also conservation activities targeted at flowering plants delivered by ten projects at 24 sites and actions to control invasive alien plant species such as Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed delivered at 18 sites by two projects.

Figure 3.8 Types of species targeted by GRCF projects, by number of sites



Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.16 Species groups targeted by GRCF projects, by number of sites and projects

Category	Type of species	Number of sites targeting	Number of projects targeting
Animal	Bird	65	29
Animal	Mammal	51	21
Animal	Insect	34	15
Animal	Fish	42	9
Animal	Amphibian	22	13
Animal	Invertebrate	9	6
Animal	Reptile	6	6
Animal	Other / unknown	10	5
Plant	Invasive alien plant	18	2
Plant	Flowering plant	24	10
Plant	Tree	16	6
Plant	Aquatic plant	4	4
Plant	Shrub	4	4
Plant	Mosses and ferns	3	2
Plant	Other / unknown	14	6
Other	Fungus	3	3
Other	Unknown / generic	4	4
Total Animals	**All**	**163**	**42**
Total Plants	**All**	**57**	**15**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

The GRCF Round 1 projects targeted almost 300 individual species of animals, plants and fungi. Table 3.17 lists the 30 most common species based on the number of conservation actions targeting each species. It shows that the largest number of actions (45) were targeted at removing Himalayan Balsam from sites, while there were also large numbers of actions benefiting a range of animal species. The most common animal species benefiting from GRCF conservation actions included salmon (35 actions), common toads (32 actions), common frogs (31 actions), curlews (31 actions) and water voles (30 actions). However, it is important to note that these numbers only include actions that specifically mentioned the individual species. This is therefore likely to provide conservative estimates of the number of actions targeting each individual species where they were also included in the monitoring data under more generic species groups such as amphibians, butterflies, bats, etc.

Table 3.17 Most common species targeted by GRCF projects, by number of conservation actions, sites and projects

Top 30 most common species targeted by GRCF Round 1 projects	Type of species	Number of beneficial conservation actions	Number of sites targeting	Number of projects targeting
Himalayan Balsam	Plant	45	12	2
Salmon	Fish	35	25	3
Common toad	Amphibian	32	8	3
Common frog	Amphibian	31	7	2
Curlew	Bird	31	8	6
Water Vole	Mammal	30	15	8
Smooth newt	Amphibian	28	6	2
Nightingale	Bird	27	5	1
Palmate newt	Amphibian	27	5	1
Lesser spotted woodpecker	Bird	26	4	1
Lapwing	Bird	23	11	9
Dingy skipper	Insect	20	9	4
Red Squirrels	Mammal	19	10	3
Grayling (butterfly)	Insect	16	5	1
Redshank	Bird	15	7	5
Brown trout	Fish	11	8	2
Juniper	Plant	11	8	1
Snipe	Bird	11	7	5
Barn Owl	Bird	10	10	3
Japanese knotweed	Weed	10	5	1
Woodlark	Bird	9	8	2
European eel	Fish	8	7	2
Grey Squirrels	Mammal	8	8	1
Sea trout	Fish	8	8	1
Bunting	Bird	7	4	3
Great crested newt	Amphibian	7	5	4
Lesser horseshoe bat	Mammal	7	6	1
Reed warbler	Bird	7	4	3
Greater horseshoe bat	Mammal	6	6	1

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

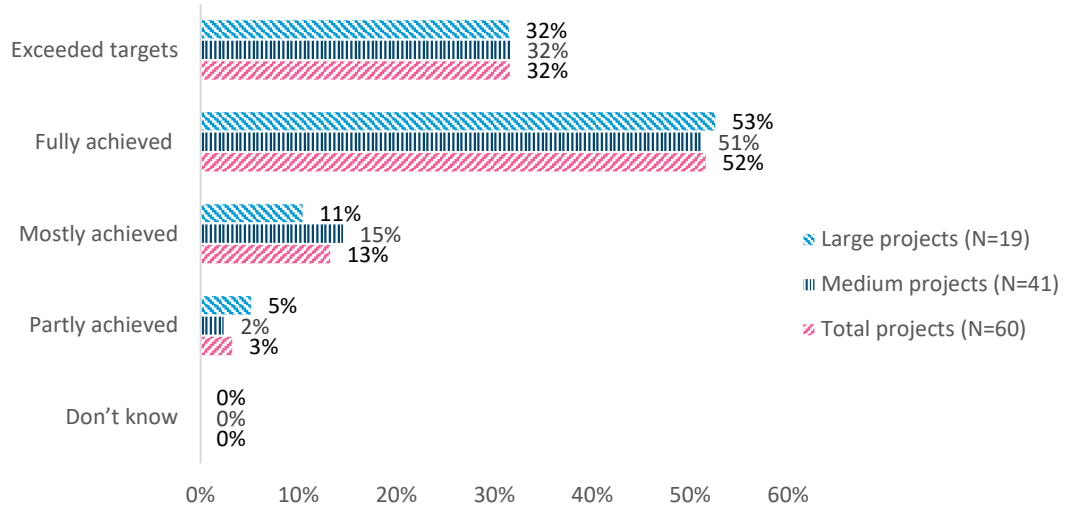
Achievement of project goals

The large majority of GRCF Round 1 projects indicated that they had either exceeded or fully achieved their targets for both conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions (Figure 3.9 and Figure 3.10) and this was the case for both large and medium-sized projects:

- 84% of projects reported achieving or exceeding their nature conservation and restoration goals (including 85% of large projects and 83% of medium projects).
- 77% of projects reported achieving or exceeding goals for their nature-based solutions (including 82% of large projects compared to 71% of medium projects).

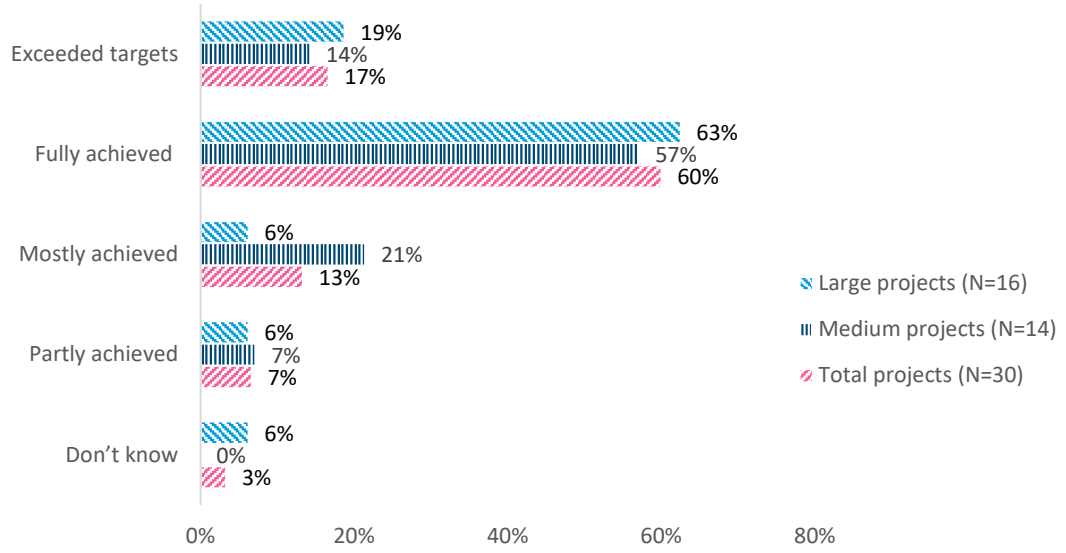
Most of the other projects reported having 'mostly achieved' their targets and only a small minority of projects reported having only 'partly achieved' their goals.

Figure 3.9 Extent to which projects reported achieving their intended goals: Nature conservation and restoration



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Figure 3.10 Extent to which projects reported achieving their intended goals: Nature-based solutions



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

3.3.3 Longer-term outcomes and expected timescales

The previous section summarised the extent to which projects reported achieving their output targets, while this section describes projects' expectations of longer-term outcomes for nature conservation and the expected time periods. The survey asked projects about the extent to which shorter-term outcomes had already been achieved and expectations for longer-term outcomes. The findings suggested that, of the projects delivering nature conservation goals:

- 70% reported achieving all of the short-term outcomes for conservation that they had intended to achieve during the life of the project;
- 28% reported delivering most of their intended short-term outcomes; and
- 2% reported delivering some of their intended short-term outcomes.

The survey responses also provided examples of projects' expectations regarding longer-term outcomes and their associated time periods, which are summarised below:

- Short-term outcomes (up to 2 years):
  - Further creation of garden, meadows, ponds at different sites including schools and hospitals.
  - Further work to improve water channels and re-profile bends.
  - Creating pollinator-rich, ground-layer plants (e.g. one programme covering 18 hectares) and increased feeding areas for pollinators.
  - Increasing biodiversity in meadows, grasslands and woodland sites.
  - Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) will mature and improve removal of agricultural pollutants.
  - Increased water infiltration levels within each forest site.
  - Increasing carbon capture (estimated at 250kg of CO_2 per year per 200m^2 site after the first 2 years).
  - Further GPS monitoring of barn owls to inform guidance for farmers.
  - Growing facility for seagrasses, including 2.5 hectares of restoration.
  - Creation of a tree nursery growing 2.5 million native species.
- Short to medium-term outcomes (3-5 years):
  - Eradicate invasive species (e.g. mink) / improved control of grey squirrels.
  - Reduction in the dominance of Himalayan Balsam in control sites.
  - Improved thermal comfort levels within each forest site.
  - Ongoing improvements in fish migration, assemblage, river and riparian habitats.
  - Increased biodiversity across range of habitats including sustainable populations of species (e.g. butterflies, pine martins).
  - Reduced risk of local flooding.
  - Establishment of a new nature reserve.
  - A new programme of wood pasture creation and management.
  - New tree planting (e.g. one scheme to plant a further 21,000 trees and another to plant up to 15 hectares per year).
- Medium-term outcomes (6-10 years):
  - New woodland continue to grow, providing new habitats and natural spaces.
  - Enhancement of wetlands, lowland bog and mire habitats.
  - Improved water quality.
  - Restoration of lowland heath and pasture woodland (120 hectares for one project and another programme covering up to 20 hectares per year).
  - Stronger woodland resilience to climate change and ash dieback.
  - Improved productivity of key species of ground-nesting birds.
  - Further species re-introductions / expanding bird, reptile and amphibian populations.
  - Expand treatment of Himalayan Balsam to other colonies.
  - Enhanced connectivity between wildlife habitats to support a healthier, functioning ecosystem.

- Longer-term outcomes (11-50 years):
  - Healthy stock of established native species ready for planting.
  - Creation of 100 hectares of grassland / scrub / woodland mosaic.
  - Reduced biodiversity loss / measurable increases in biodiversity.
  - Establishment of new broadleaved woodland & hedgerows (115,000 trees & shrubs planted)
  - Provision of natural flood management.
  - Soil stabilisation and prevention of erosion.
  - Increasing carbon sequestration.
- Very long-term outcomes (more than 50 years):
  - Woodland will mature, delivering increased environmental benefits.
  - Maximum carbon sequestration and storage (builds over time as peat rebuilds and scrub/woodland develops.)

The above list shows that projects are expecting a broad range of environmental outcomes to occur in the future. Examples included relatively short-term outcomes of further creation of new habitats and increasing levels of biodiversity, to the much longer-term outcomes of mature woodlands delivering carbon sequestration and storage.

3.4 Engaging people in nature

3.4.1.1 Overall view

GRCF Round 1 projects have delivered more than 9,400 events and activities aimed at engaging people with nature. This included 8,500 in-person events delivered at 800 different sites across England, which engaged 109,000 people. Nearly half of these activities were targeted at under-represented or other priority groups. GRCF projects also delivered almost 1,000 online activities, which engaged a further 49,000 people. In many cases these activities were delivered as replacements for in-person activities in response to COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns.

GRCF projects have also delivered 435 improvements to the infrastructure at 193 sites, covering a distance of 255 km of footpaths, boardwalks and fencing, as well as creating new amenities and improving accessibility. These improvements include new installations and improvements to existing infrastructure and are reported to be providing conservation benefits as well as delivering increased engagement with nature both during the project and in the longer-term.

The majority of projects indicated that they have met or exceeded their goals for engaging people with nature (77% of GRCF projects), while most other projects had mostly achieved their goals.

The legacy impacts of these activities are expected to be significant with the large majority of projects (93%) expecting their engagement activities to continue in the future, with some being delivered by the project partners, some dependent upon further funding and others continuing to be delivered by volunteers who were engaged and trained by the GRCF projects. The improvements to visitor infrastructure are also expected to continue delivering benefits including: conservation benefits by enabling protection and access to habitats to be better controlled; using interpretation and other facilities to raise awareness and educate people on nature themes and issues; and by facilitating access and attracting more people to visit sites and engage with nature.

3.4.2 Performance against goals

3.4.2.1 Scale of engagement (events delivered, people engaged)

A total of more than 170,000 people have been engaged by GRCF projects through more than 9,400 different events comprising a combination of in-person events and online activities. Table 3.18 shows that these activities were delivered by 65 of the 69 GRCF Round 1 projects and took place at around 800 different sites. The number of events, people engaged and the number of sites delivering events was split relatively evenly between large and medium-sized projects. Medium-sized projects delivered the largest number of events (56% of the total), but large projects had the largest number of sites delivering events (60% of the total) and engaged the largest number of people (63% of the total).

Table 3.18 Number of in-person and online events delivered and people engaged by GRCF Round 1 projects and sites

Response categories	Large projects	Medium projects	Total
No. of events	4,112	5,314	**9,426**
No. of people engaged	107,000	64,000	**171,000**
No. of sites delivering events	479	329	**805**
No. of projects delivering events	22	43	**65**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

The number of events and the number of people engaged in the different types of event is presented in Table 3.19. It shows that **in-person events accounted for the majority of events delivered by GRCF projects (90%) and delivered activities to 109,000 people**. GRCF projects also delivered almost 1,000 online activities, which engaged a further 49,000 people. Many projects reported amending their planned engagement activities in response to COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns, which had resulted in a greater than expected focus on online activities.

Table 3.19 also provides details of the communications and media activities of Round 1 projects. GRCF projects reported delivering 336 activities relating to communications and media, including TV and social media activities, which were reported to have reached a very large, estimated audience of more than 26 million people.

The different types of engagement activity vary widely in terms of the numbers of people engaged and the intensity of the engagement. This is highlighted by looking at the average number of people engaging with each type of engagement activity. The average number of people attending an in-person event was 13 compared to more than 50 for online activities. If communications and media activities are also included, the average number of people engaged increases significantly to more than 2,700.

Table 3.20 provides a breakdown of the different types of engagement activities. It shows that the most common types of in-person engagement activities delivered by GRCF projects were citizen science / volunteering activities (accounting for 38% of in-person activities and 21% of people engaged in in-person events), followed by workshops, talks and educational sessions (accounting for 17% of in-person activities and 21% of people engaged in in-person events), and activity days/sessions (which accounted for 12% of in-person activities and 28% of all attendees of in-person events).

The most common online activities were: webinars, talks and educational activities (accounting for 62% of people engaging with online content); followed by apps, games and streamed content (27%); and online training activities (18%). Finally, TV and film accounted for the majority of people engaged by communications and media activities (86%), while blogs, social media and newsletters accounted for a further 13%.

Table 3.19 Number of events and people engaged, by broad type of event

Response categories	Number of events	Percentage of events	Number of people engaged	Percentage of people engaged
In-person events	8,495	90%	109,000	64%
Online activities	974	10%	49,000	29%
Unknown events	30	0.3%	17,000	10%
Total in-person and online events	**9,426**	**100%**	**171,000**	**100%**
Comms and media	*336*	*No value*	*26,315,000*	*No value*
Wider total (including comms and media)	***9,722***	***No value***	***26,480,000***	***No value***

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.20 Detailed event types and people engaged, by type of event (% of total)

Type of in-person event / activity	Events (%)	People engaged (%)
Activity days / Day trips	12%	28%
Residential / camping	9%	8%
Guided walks	6%	11%
Citizen science / volunteering	38%	21%
Workshops, talks and educational activities	17%	21%
Training	11%	7%
Meetings, external events and consultation activities	7%	13%
Other / unknown in-person activities	8%	9%
All in-person events	**100%**	**100%**

Type of online activity	Events (%)	People engaged (%)
Apps, games & streamed content	4%	27%
Webinars, talks and educational activities	48%	62%
Online training	23%	18%
Other / unknown online activities	30%	3%
All online activities	**100%**	**100%**

Type of communications and media activity	Events (%)	People engaged (%)
Blogs / social media / newsletters	81%	13%
TV / film	4%	86%
Leaflets / hard publications	5%	0.1%
Other / unknown comms & media activities	20%	1%
All comms & media activities	**100%**	**100%**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

In-person engagement activities were delivered in large numbers by both large and medium-sized projects. Medium projects delivered the most in-person events (56% of the total), while the events delivered by large projects were attended by slightly more people (54%). In-person engagement events were delivered throughout England (Table 3.21 and Figure 3.11) with the highest numbers of people engaged in the North West (24,550), East Midlands (20,200), West Midlands (17,200 people) and South West (14,400).

Figure 3.12 presents geographical data for all types of events. It shows comprehensive coverage with a large number of events delivered, and a large number of people engaged, across all English regions.

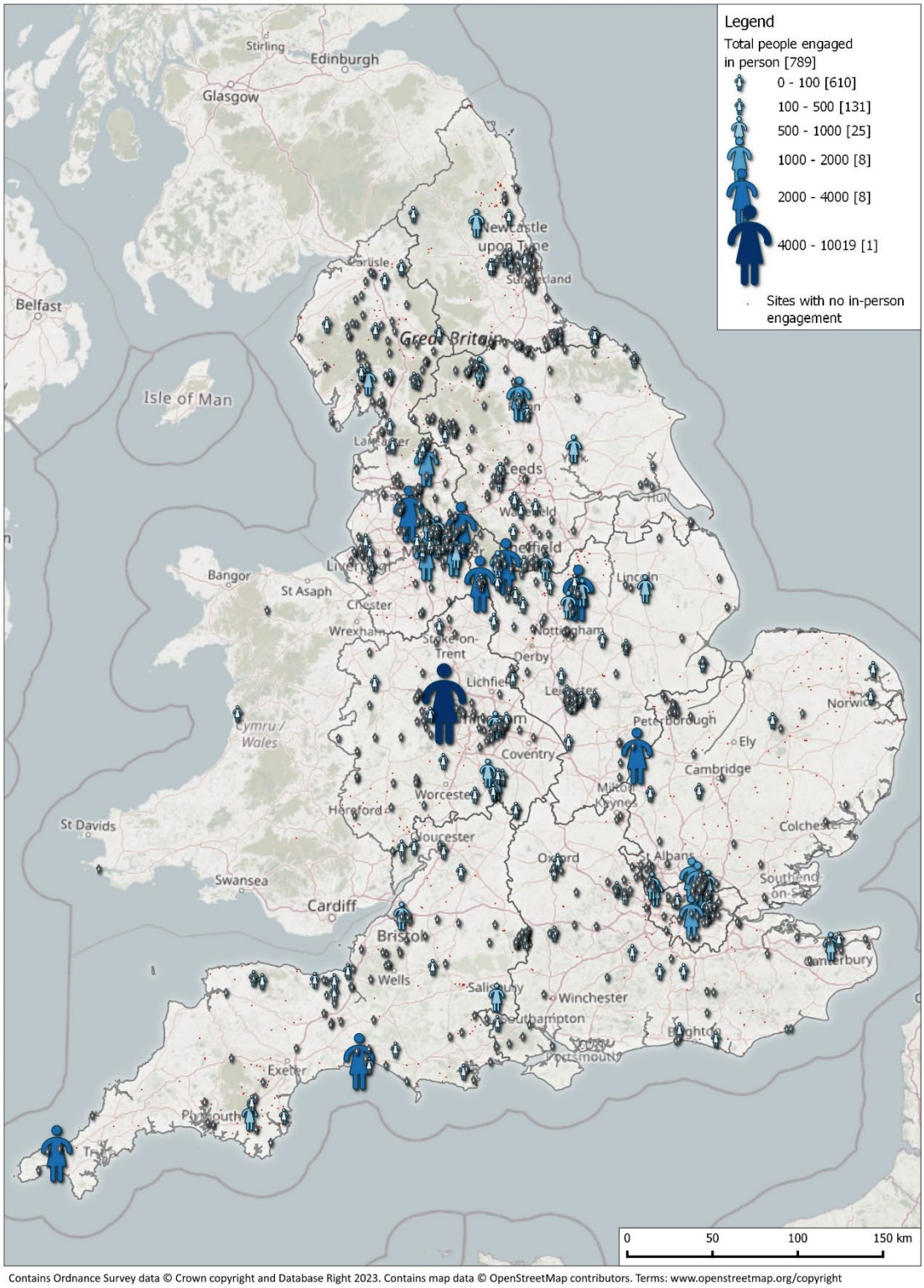
Table 3.21 Number of in-person events and people engaged, by project size and region

Project size	Number of events	Percentage of events	Number of people engaged	Percentage of people engaged
Medium projects	4,749	56%	49,800	46%
Large projects	3,746	44%	59,600	54%
Total	**8,495**	**100%**	**109,400**	**100%**

Region	Number of events	Percentage of events	Number of people engaged	Percentage of people engaged
East Midlands	1,222	14%	20,192	18%
East of England	610	7%	4,672	4%
London	624	7%	9,420	9%
North East	460	5%	4,354	4%
North West	1,872	22%	24,552	22%
South East	588	7%	5,420	5%
South West	1,289	15%	14,422	13%
West Midlands	1,159	14%	17,168	16%
Yorkshire & The Humber	649	8%	8,995	8%
Unknown	22	0.3%	216	0.2%
Total	**8,495**	**100%**	**109,400**	**100%**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.11 Number of people engaged in in-person events, by project site location



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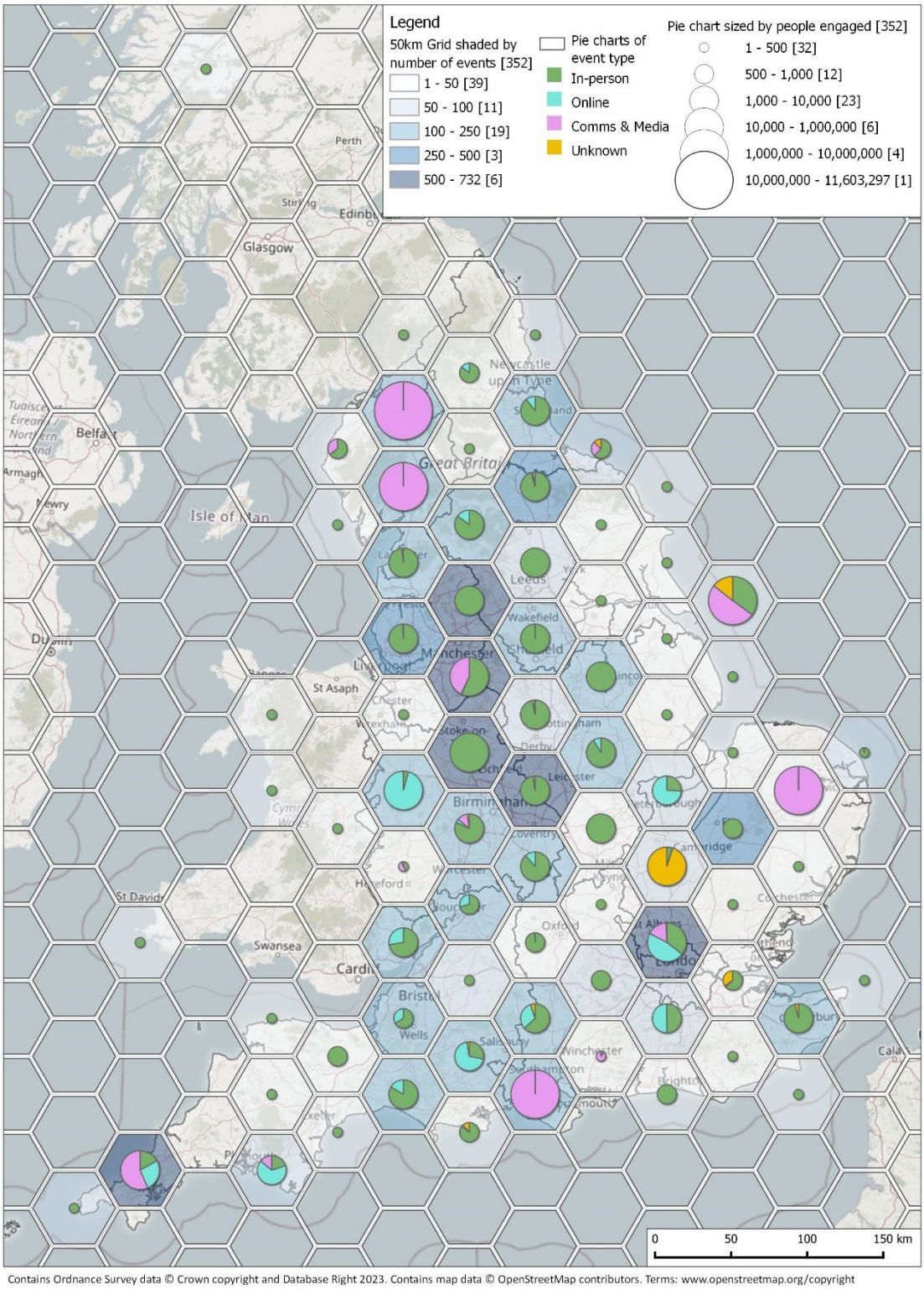
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.12 Number of events and total people engaged by type of event, using a 50km Hexgrid



** Hexagonal 50km cells with a central pie chart to show the type of event delivered, summed for all GRCF project sites located within the cell*

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

3.4.2.2 Targeted engagement

The descriptions of events in the monitoring data were analysed to identify target audiences for each of the 9,722 events (including the 9,426 in-person and online activities and the 336 communications and media activities). Table 3.22 shows that approximately half of the events (48%) were targeted at under-represented and other priority groups, with 52 GRCF projects delivering events for these groups at almost 500 different sites. Other common groups targeted by events delivered by GRCF projects included: project staff and volunteers (e.g. training events and volunteering activities); health staff, carers and patients; farmers, land owners and land managers; and events that were available for everyone.

Table 3.22 Intended audiences of engagement events (number of events, sites and projects targeting each group)

Intended audience	Number of events	% of events*	Number of sites	% of sites*	Number of projects	% of projects*
Under-represented & other priority groups	4,681	48%	493	60%	52	80%
Open to all (local communities, etc.)	2,219	23%	276	34%	52	80%
Volunteers & project staff	1,771	18%	165	20%	42	65%
Health staff, carers & patients	1,470	15%	57	7%	21	32%
Farmers, land owners & managers	421	4%	47	6%	19	29%
Unknown / other	1,976	20%	187	23%	49	75%
Total	**9,722**	**100%**	**815**	**100%**	**65**	**100%**

** Total sums to >100% as some events, sites and projects targeted more than one group or a group with more than one of the listed characteristics.*

Source: ICF analysis of open text responses in Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Projects reported delivering 4,700 events targeted at under-represented or other priority groups, representing nearly half of all engagement events. Nearly three quarters of these activities (74%) were targeted at young people including those targeted at schools and children of school age (55%). There were also large numbers of events targeted at other priority groups including: those from deprived communities (1,566 events), disabled people (630 events), diverse ethnic communities (616 events), people with mental health challenges (562 events), people with learning difficulties (547 events), and older people (132 events).

Many of these activities and events were targeted at multiple underrepresented groups. This could be events targeted more than one group or a group with more than one of the listed characteristics. Analysis of the monitoring data suggests that 1,720 events were targeted at more than one of the underrepresented groups listed in the table below (representing 37% of all events targeted at underrepresented groups). These events were delivered by 25 projects across more than 200 sites (accounting for 48% and 42% of those targeting activities at underrepresented groups respectively).

Table 3.23 Engagement activities targeted at people from underrepresented or other priority groups

Intended audience	Number of events	% of events*	Number of sites	% of sites*	Number of projects	% of projects*
Disabled people	630	13%	101	20%	11	21%
People with mental health challenges	562	12%	97	20%	11	21%
People with learning difficulties	547	12%	44	9%	13	25%
Older people	132	3%	9	2%	5	10%
Young people (incl. schoolchildren)	3,448	74%	363	74%	50	96%
Schools/school-age children	2,585	55%	253	51%	46	88%
Diverse ethnic communities	616	13%	146	30%	12	23%
Deprived communities	1,566	33%	192	39%	10	19%
Total under-represented & other priority groups	**4,681**	**No value**	**493**	**No value**	**52**	**No value**

** Total sums to >100% as some events, sites and projects targeted more than one group or a group with more than one of the listed characteristics.*

Source: ICF analysis of open text responses in Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Projects also reported delivering 1,180 social prescribing activities – where participants in the activity were referred to particate by a healthcare professional. All of these were in-person activities and were reported to have engaged 8,300 people at an average of seven people per activity. The social prescribing activities were delivered by 13 of the 69 GRCF projects and took place at 31 different sites. The social prescribing events covered a range of activities including activity days, guided walks, citizen science/volunteering activities, talks and educational sessions.

These projects generally felt that the social prescribing activities had worked well, providing valuable experiences and support to individuals, and in some cases were reported to have been over-subscribed. However, projects also reported some initial barriers that had taken time to navigate in terms of raising awareness of their activities, developing partnerships and securing referrals from healthcare professionals. This was felt to have taken a lot of effort, including finding out about potential sources of referrals, the wider services available and then integrating their social prescribing activities with those wider services. For example, one project reported that initial referrals had not been appropriate for the activities they were offering and it had taken time to work with those making the referrals to ensure they were receiving the right type of referrals. The level of effort required to set up and maintain referral pathways meant that projects had reported different expectations for future activities. Some felt that partnerships with referral agencies were likely to cease without access to further funding, while others reported that the referral pathways that had been developed were now well established and were likely to continue beyond the end of the GRCF project.

3.4.2.3 Visitor infrastructure delivered

The most common infrastructure improvements funded by GRCF were related to footpaths. Table 3.24 shows that 122 improvements were made to footpaths, representing 28% of all improvement activity. In total, 19 GRCF projects made improvements to footpaths across 69 different sites. This was similar to the number of projects and sites making improvements to signage and interpretation (23 projects across 68 different sites) and making improvements to fencing[12] (22 projects across 64 different sites). There were also large numbers of improvements to improve the accessibility of sites (e.g. for vehicle access or for those with mobility problems) and improve the amenities provided at sites.

Table 3.25 shows that the infrastructure improvements included similar numbers of new installations (223) and improvements to existing infrastructure (211)[13]. The nature of improvements varied according to the type of infrastructure. For example, improvements to footpaths, boardwalks and accessibility were more likely to involve improvements to existing infrastructure, while signage and interpretation was more likely to involve new installations.

Table 3.24 Number of infrastructure improvement activities by type (including numbers of sites and projects delivering each type of improvement)

Type of infrastructure improvement	Number of improvements - Number	Number of improvements - % of total*	Number of sites	Number of projects
Footpaths	122	28%	69	19
Signage or interpretation	87	20%	68	23
Fences	75	17%	64	22
Accessibility changes (e.g. vehicle accessibility, ramps or rails)	59	14%	50	20
Amenities (e.g. transport infrastructure, toilets, catering)	52	12%	39	22
Shelter or hide	16	4%	10	8
Board walks	15	3%	11	6
Bridge(s)	9	2%	9	7
Other / unknown	156	36%	89	28
All infrastructure improvement activities	**435**	**100%**	**193**	**40**

** Sum to >100% as some activities reported >1 type of improvement*

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

[12] Figures for fencing include conservation fencing as well as fencing for visitor purposes as it was not possible to disaggregate the different types of fencing from the information provided in the monitoring data.

[13] Please note that these figures are indicative and sum to more than the total because some activities included elements of new and existing infrastructure, which could not be separated and have been included in both figures.

Table 3.25 Number of infrastructure improvement activities by type (including new installations and improvements to existing infrastructure)

Number of improvement activities

Type of infrastructure improvement	New	Existing	Unknown	Total*
Footpaths	61	90	6	**122**
Signage / interpretation	53	9	29	**87**
Fences	35	33	17	**75**
Accessibility changes	23	38	7	**59**
Amenities	35	15	9	**52**
Shelter or hide	8	2	6	**16**
Board walks	9	10	2	**15**
Bridge(s)	9	5	0	**9**
Other / unknown	70	100	15	**156**
All infrastructure improvement activities	**223**	**211**	**63**	**435**

Percentage of total

Type of infrastructure improvement	New	Existing	Unknown	Total*
Footpaths	50%	74%	5%	**100%**
Signage / interpretation	61%	10%	33%	**100%**
Fences	47%	44%	23%	**100%**
Accessibility changes	39%	64%	12%	**100%**
Amenities	67%	29%	17%	**100%**
Shelter or hide	50%	13%	38%	**100%**
Board walks	60%	67%	13%	**100%**
Bridge(s)	100%	56%	0%	**100%**
Other / unknown	45%	64%	10%	**100%**
All infrastructure improvement activities	**51%**	**49%**	**14%**	**100%**

** Sum to >100% as some activities were reported to include both new installations and improvements to existing infrastructure. These infrastructure activities are included within 'new' and 'existing' figures but are only included once in the total figures.*

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Projects also provided information on the length of infrastructure improvements where applicable (e.g. for footpaths, fences, access roads, etc.), and is presented in Table 3.26. This suggests that GRCF projects delivered 255 km of infrastructure improvements, of which 134 km were new installations and 184 km were improvements to existing infrastructure[14]. The majority of infrastructure improvements were associated with footpaths (97 km) and fencing (62 km).

[14] As before, these figures are indicative and sum to more than the total because some activities included elements of new and existing infrastructure, which could not be separated and have been included in both figures.

Table 3.26 Length (km) of infrastructure improvement activities by type (including new installations and improvements to existing infrastructure)

Type of infrastructure improvement	Length (km) – New*	Length (km) - Existing*	Length (km) - Unknown*	Length (km) - Total*
Footpaths	62	72	4	**97**
Fences	45	40	4	**62**
Accessibility changes	14	26	3	**36**
Bridge(s)	n/a	n/a	n/a	**n/a**
Board walks	5	7	0	**7**
Other / unknown	33	88	10	**103**
All infrastructure improvement activities	**134**	**184**	**17**	**255**

** Sum to more than total as some activities were reported to include both new installations and improvements to existing infrastructure. These infrastructure activities are included within 'new' and 'existing' figures but are only included once in the total figures. Similarly, in a small number of cases, the lengths of improvements covered more than one type of infrastructure (e.g. 2km of fencing and footpaths) and could not be disaggregated, so have been included for each type of infrastructure but are only included once in the total figures.*

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Large projects undertook most of the infrastructure improvements funded by the GRCF, accounting for more than 60% of the number of activities and the length of improvements. Infrastructure improvements took place in all of the English regions with most activity taking place in the North West (29% of improvements), North East (14%), East Midlands (11%), South West (11%) and West Midlands (11%), as shown in Table 3.27, Figure 3.13, Figure 3.14, Figure 3.15 and Figure 3.16.

Table 3.27 Number and length (km) of infrastructure improvements (including numbers of sites and projects delivering infrastructure improvements)

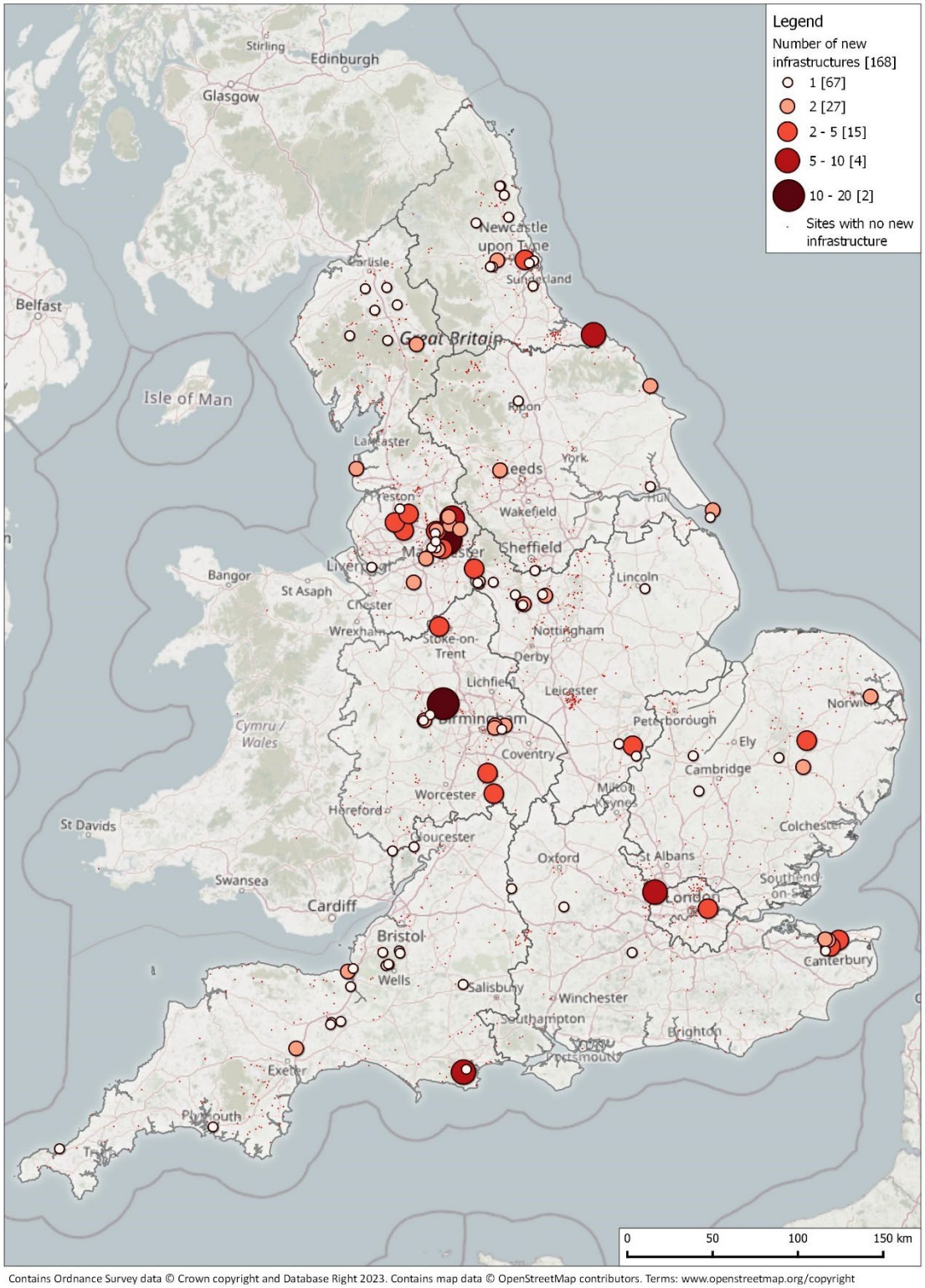
Project size	Improvements - Total number (% of total)	Improvements - Total length (km and %)	Number of sites (% of total)	Number of projects (% of total*)
Medium projects	157 (36%)	99km (39%)	91 (47%)	27 (67%)
Large projects	278 (64%)	156km (61%)	102 (53%)	13 (33%)
Total	**435 (100%)**	**255km (100%)**	**193 (100%)**	**40 (100%)**

Region	Improvements - Total number (% of total)	Improvements - Total length (km and %)	Number of sites (% of total)	Number of projects (% of total*)
East Midlands	49 (11%)	23km (9%)	26 (13%)	9 (23%)
East of England	25 (6%)	19km (7%)	15 (8%)	5 (13%)
London	20 (5%)	0.4km (0.2%)	3 (2%)	3 (8%)
North East	60 (14%)	83km (32%)	35 (18%)	7 (18%)
North West	128 (29%)	37km (14%)	41 (21%)	9 (23%)
South East	27 (6%)	18km (7%)	15 (8%)	7 (18%)
South West	50 (11%)	46km (18%)	29 (15%)	11 (28%)
West Midlands	50 (11%)	21km (8%)	17 (9%)	7 (18%)
Yorkshire & The Humber	24 (6%)	8km (3%)	10 (5%)	7 (18%)
Unknown	2 (0.5%)	No value	2 (1%)	1 (3%)
Total	**435 (100%)**	**255km (100%)**	**193 (100%)**	**40 (100%)**

** Projects Sum to >100% as some activities reported >1 type of improvement*

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.13 Number of new installations of visitor infrastructure, by project site location



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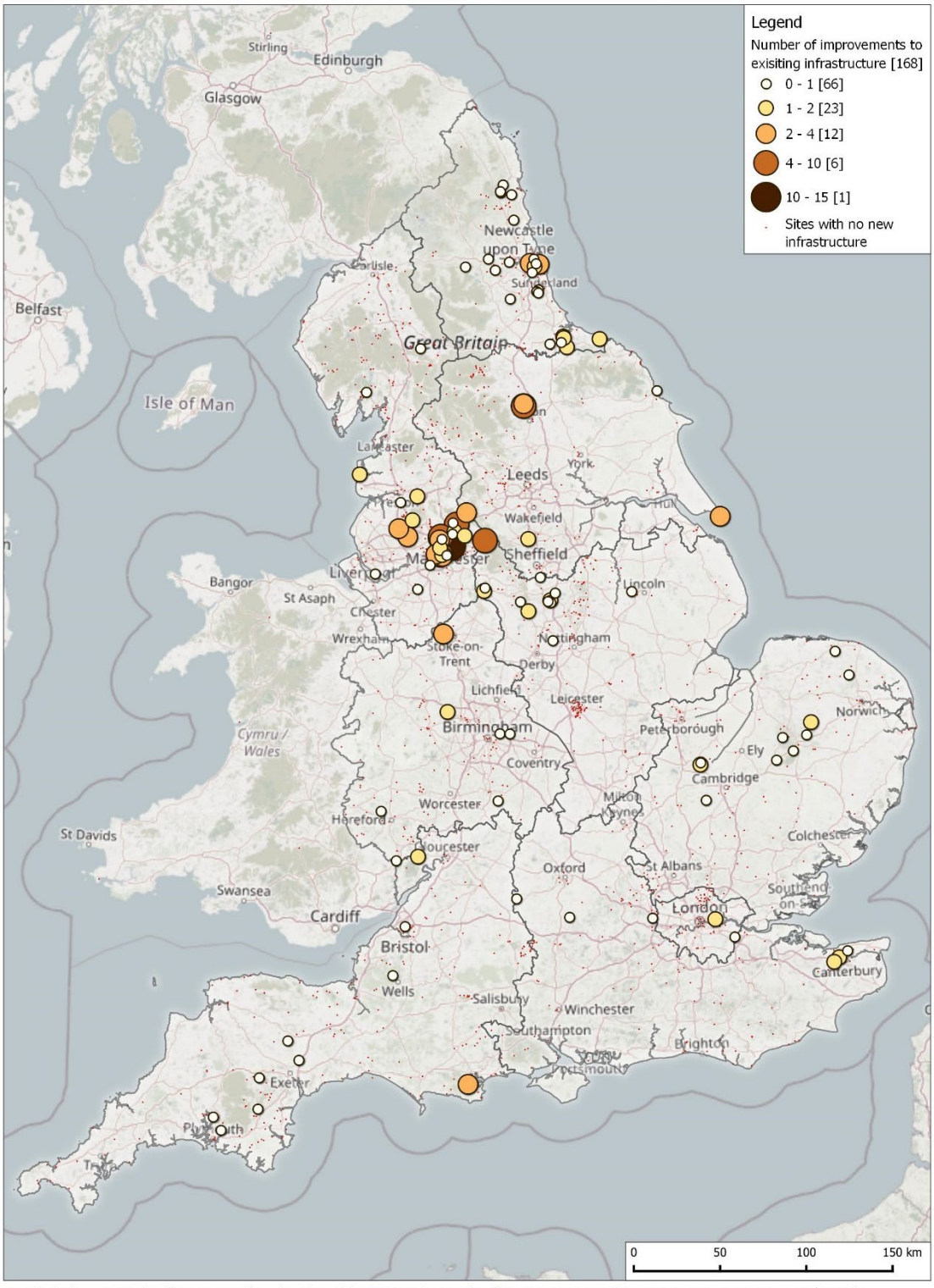
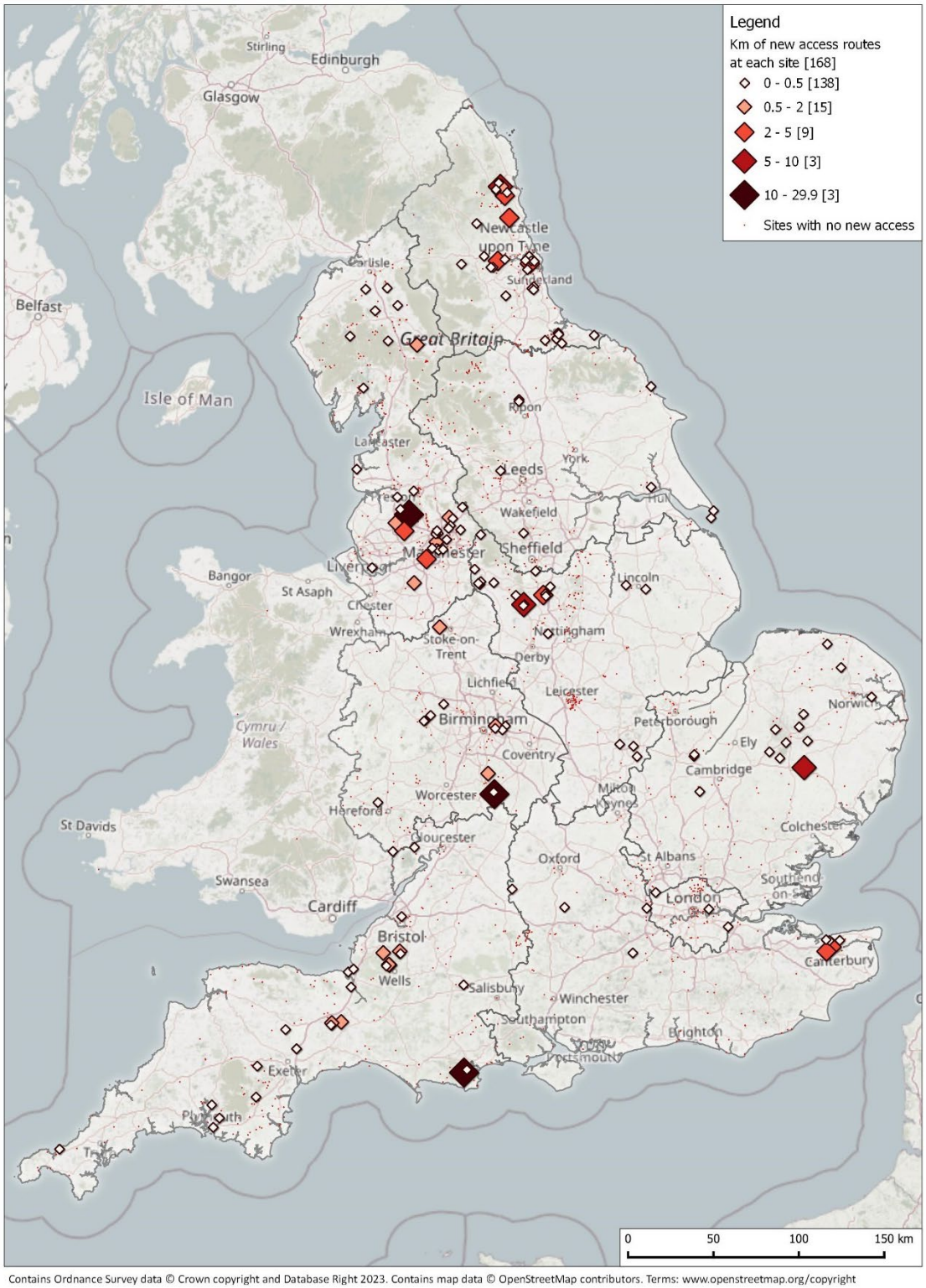
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.14 Number of improvements to existing visitor infrastructure, by project site location



Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.15 Length (km) of new installations of visitor infrastructure (e.g. access routes, footpaths, fencing, etc.), by project site location



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Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

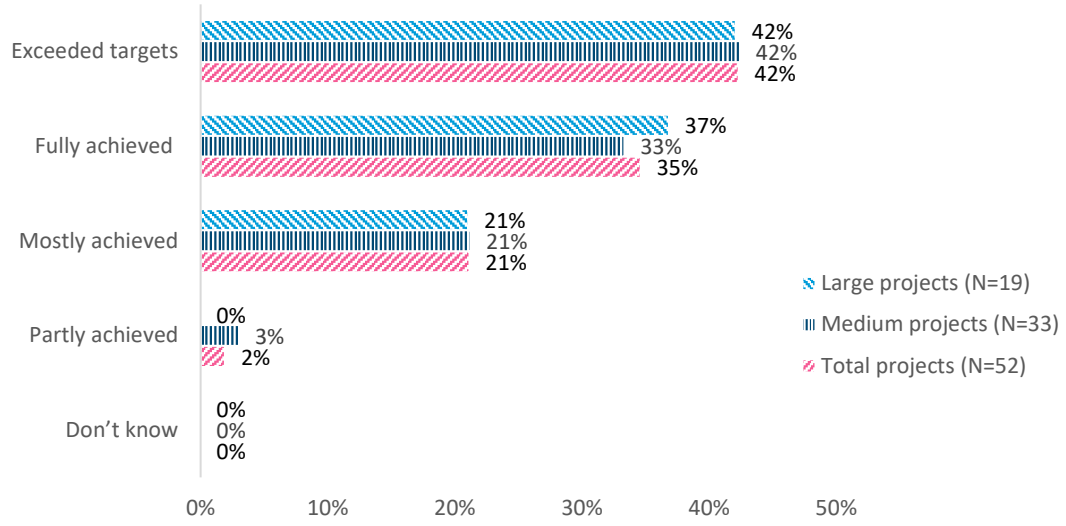
Figure 3.16 Length (km) of improvements to existing visitor infrastructure (e.g. access routes, footpaths, fencing, etc.), by project site location

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Achievement of project goals

Most projects indicated that they had exceeded or fully achieved their goals for engaging people with nature (Figure 3.17). While rates of achievement with these goals were high, they are slightly lower than for the other goals relating to nature conservation and restoration, nature-based solutions and jobs, skills and resilience. In total, 77% of GRCF Round 1 projects had either exceeded or fully achieved their goals for engaging people with nature, including 79% of large projects and 75% of medium projects. Nearly all other projects (>20%) reported having had mostly achieved their goals in this area.

Figure 3.17 Extent to which projects reported achieving their intended goals: Engaging people with nature



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

3.4.3 Longer-term outcomes and expected timescales

This section describes projects' expectations of longer-term outcomes for engaging people with nature and the likelihood that these will continue into the future.

3.4.3.1 Continuation of GRCF events

The Round 1 projects that had delivered activities to engage people with nature were asked whether they expected any of the engagement activities to continue beyond the end of the project. The large majority of projects (93% or 53 projects) reported that their engagement activities would continue to be delivered in some form. Another three projects did not know whether their activities would continue and only one project said their activities would not continue, due to a lack of funding.

For those who expected engagement activities to continue, the survey and interviews collected descriptions of activities that were expected to continue. This included a full range of events, of comparable breadth to the events delivered under the GRCF programme, including in-person, online and communications and media activities. In some cases, the plans for future events were also linked to ensuring the legacy of nature conservation outcomes. For example, by continuing to engage with landowners, undertake surveys and monitor progress to ensure the legacy impacts of GRCF projects are maintained and evidenced.

Post-GRCF events were expected to be delivered in several different ways. In some cases, the continuation of events had been made possible by securing additional funding. In other cases, the lead and partner organisations had simply decided to continue delivering events and building on the achievements of the GRCF project or were able to continue delivering activities using volunteers who had been trained to lead activities (and train further volunteers) as part of the GRCF project, which helped to ensure event delivery could be sustained after the end of the project.

3.4.3.2 Projections of GRCF impacts on future site engagement / visitor numbers

The 40 GRCF projects that had made improvements to their visitor infrastructure have also provided information about how those improvements have delivered or are expected to deliver benefits in the future. This was explored in the survey and interviews with projects and found that:

- 26 of the projects (63%) expected the improved infrastructure to support improved public engagement. Examples included:
  - Improved access to sites to encourage the public to engage with nature and attract new people who would not otherwise have visited.
  - Improved access around sites, which makes it easier to control visitor movements to allow access to certain areas and restrict access to others.
  - New facilities to also encourage increased use of sites and attract more visitors, enable increased delivery of engagement activities and provide a resource for the local community to use (e.g. for community events).
  - Improved interpretation via websites or interpretation panels to educate and engage the public about activities at the site and use the public as a resource (e.g. to report sightings of grey squirrels).
  - New seating, which provides amenity in this healthcare setting for staff and patients, while the new shelter provides shade, which is particularly important for the chemotherapy patients who use the site.
  - New visitor services infrastructure provides an opportunity to engage directly with the public, improve the experience for visitors and generate an income so that the services can be self-sustaining.
- 24 projects (60%) expected the improved infrastructure to continue to support improved conservation outcomes. Examples included:
  - Improved access to sites to facilitate ongoing conservation activities.
  - New fencing to enable conservation grazing to take place to support the achievement of target outcomes (e.g. for grassland and heathland habitats), as well as protecting other new habitats by keeping livestock, deer and public vehicles out of sensitive areas.
  - Interpretation improvements having a positive impact on public awareness and behaviour, ensuring a reduction in visitor disturbance of wildlife, and reduced trampling of habitats, at some of the sites.
  - Fish passes to facilitate more salmon and sea-trout accessing spawning grounds, while habitat boxes have provided new homes for bees, bats and hedgehogs.
  - Introduction of solar powered water pumps to provide an alternative water source for wildlife and the addition of new crossing points, which have offered

greater protection to the river, thereby improving water quality and protecting newly created habitats.

  - The creation of a tree and wildflower nursery to not only deliver conservation benefits but also create a source of income that will be used to fund further nature conservation activities.

- 5 projects (15%) felt there were other benefits of the improved infrastructure including: wider health and wellbeing benefits associated with public engagement; increased income from being able to charge fees to use the infrastructure; and benefits of the presence of infrastructure to show that the site has a purpose and function and is not derelict land.

The survey also asked projects about changes in visitor numbers that had occurred at their sites, as well as their expectations of future changes, as a result of the GRCF-funded activities. The responses suggested that very few projects were able to provide visitor numbers, report whether there had been any changes during the project period or provide any projections for future changes. Only ten projects responded to the question asking whether their project had delivered an increase in visitor numbers, with seven reporting that it had and three suggesting that it had not. Of those who reported a change in visitor numbers, only four projects provided estimates of visitor numbers:

- One medium-sized project had seen visitor numbers increase from around 1,500 per annum before the project to more than 60,000, based on pedestrian counters that recorded visits increasing by a factor of 40. The increase had been driven by project activities to create new woodland habitats, new visitor infrastructure and deliver events. Future visits were expected to continue at this new level.
- Another medium-sized project reported that its site had not received any visitors prior to the GRCF project, but had since increased to 50 visitors per week, as a result of project activities to make the site accessible to visitors. The number of visitors was expected to continue to increase over time.
- A large project reported that visitor numbers had more than doubled from 90,000 per annum to 200,000. This site was already a major visitor attraction, but GRCF-funded improvements to habitats and visitor infrastructure and events had delivered a significant increase in visitor numbers, which were expected to continue to increase in the future.
- Another large project reporting an increase in visitor numbers was one of the case study projects: Realising Greater Manchester's Environmental Ambitions. The project had delivered a programme of habitat restoration and community engagement events as well as comprehensive improvements to physical and digital infrastructure for visitors. Attendance at events and amongst general visitors had exceeded expectations and helped to deliver an increase in visitor numbers from 500,000 per annum to 600,000. The project also reported expectations for further increases in the future.

The other six projects did not provide visitor numbers but did report future expectations of visitor numbers, with three projects expecting these to continue at a similar level and three expecting visitor numbers to continue to increase.

3.5 Employment and NGO resilience

3.5.1.1 Overall view

GRCF Round 1 funding directly supported a total of 653 positions during the life of the projects, including 69 apprenticeships, and represented 473 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs. Assuming that the average position was temporarily supported for a period of 18 months suggests that GRCF Round 1 funding directly supported a total of 710 full-time job years.

A wide range of jobs were supported by GRCF including project managers and project support officers as well as conservationists and youth and community workers. Most of the jobs were newly created for GRCF (65%), while others were positions receiving partial support through full cost recovery (22%) or existing roles protected from redundancy (13%). Many post-holders were from underrepresented groups: data on characteristics of supported individuals were available for around 40% of GRCF-funded roles, with approximately half of these taken by young people aged 25 and under.

The GRCF projects also provided indirect support for other jobs in local supply chains through the expenditures of projects and their staff. An analysis of the expenditures of GRCF projects suggests that at least 548 positions, equating to 476 FTE job years, were supported during the project period. Summing the direct and indirect employment impacts suggests that GRCF Round 1 funding supported at least 1,200 positions and a total of 1,186 full-time job years.

GRCF projects also engaged more than 10,000 volunteers in their activities, including 6,200 new volunteers recruited by the GRCF project. Projects reported benefiting from 255,000 hours of volunteer support during the project period.

The majority of projects (82%) reported meeting or exceeding their goals relating to jobs, skills and resilience. However, comparisons with employment projections for larger projects suggest a more mixed performance, with targets exceeded for numbers of newly created roles, but other targets missed, particularly in relation to the number of apprenticeships.

The organisations and individuals supported by GRCF funding also expect to continue to benefit in the longer term from the increased resilience of organisations, new skills developed through the GRCF projects and from jobs retained beyond the end of the project. Projects reported that two-thirds of FTE jobs were expected to be retained beyond the end of the project, while a further 20% of individuals had secured new roles, most of which were within the same organisations, elsewhere in the conservation sector or in roles linked to the skills developed during the GRCF project. The activities of GRCF projects were also expected to benefit from further volunteer hours and funding in the longer-term and had already secured more than 1,000 hours of volunteer support per week and £19.1 million of additional funding to support ongoing activities after the GRCF project had finished.

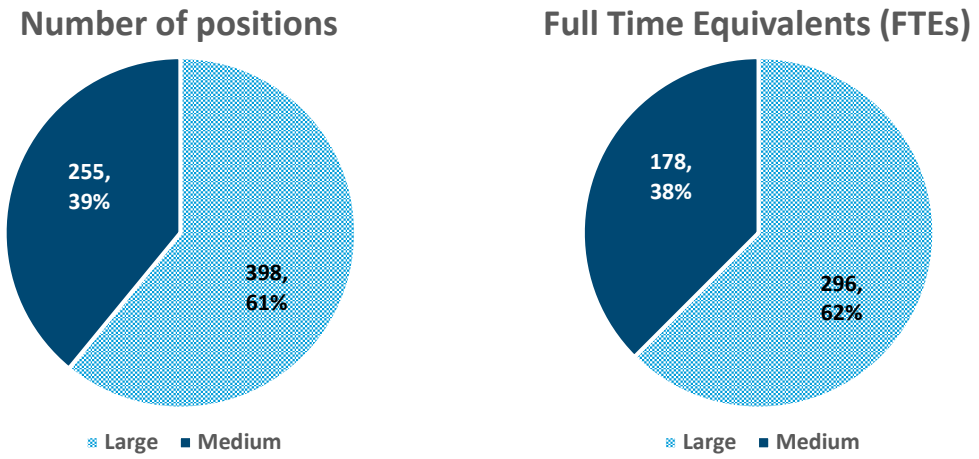
3.5.2 Performance against goals

3.5.2.1 Employment (jobs / FTEs) directly supported by GRCF

GRCF Round 1 funding has directly supported a total of 653 jobs (473 FTE jobs) in eNGOs and their project partner organisations, according to the final monitoring returns submitted by projects. This included 69 apprenticeship positions (63 FTEs), which are discussed in greater detail below. The GRCF has helped to fund new posts, as well as to sustain existing positions in supported organisations. It is important to note that GRCF funding support for employment is temporary and posts will only be supported for the duration of the funding period. However, an analysis of the jobs that have continued to be sustained after the GRCF funding period is presented in Section 3.5.3.

Large projects accounted for the majority of the employment temporarily supported by GRCF funding: 398 positions and 296 FTEs (61% and 62% of the total respectively), while medium-sized projects accounted for 255 positions and 178 FTEs (see Figure 3.18). There was a wide geographical coverage of GRCF supported employment with jobs supported across all regions of England (see Table 3.29, Figure 3.19 and Figure 3.20) as well as two positions (0.8 FTEs) in Scotland and Wales. The highest concentrations of GRCF-supported employment were in the North West and South West with these two regions accounting for around 38% of all positions and FTEs.

Figure 3.18 Number of positions and FTE jobs (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF Round 1, by project size



Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.28 Number of positions and FTE jobs (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF Round 1, by project size

Employment variables	Large projects	Medium projects	Total
Number of positions	398	255	**653**
% of all positions	61%	39%	**100%**
Number of FTEs	296	178	**473**
% of all FTEs	62%	38%	**100%**

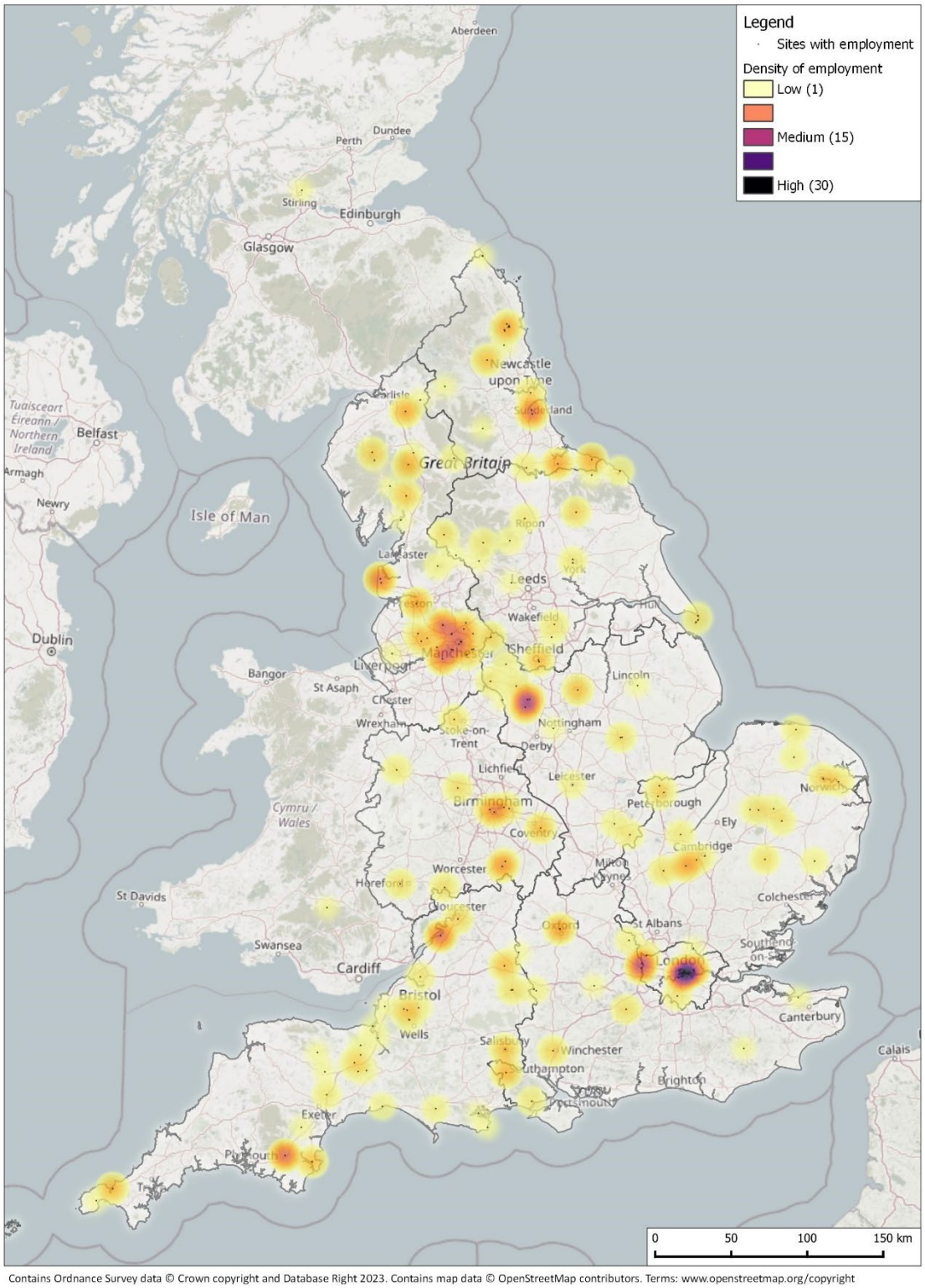
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.29 Number of positions and FTEs (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF Round 1, by region

Region	Number of positions	% of total	Number of FTEs	% of total
East Midlands	63	10%	47.2	10%
East of England	59	9%	44.7	9%
London	59	9%	45.8	10%
North East	63	10%	50.1	11%
North West	141	22%	111.3	24%
South East	59	9%	42.8	9%
South West	109	17%	67.2	14%
West Midlands	56	9%	34.5	7%
Yorkshire and The Humber	42	6%	29.2	6%
Scotland / Wales	2	0.3%	0.8	0.2%
Total	**653**	**100%**	**473.4**	**100%**

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.19 Density map of the geographic distribution of employment (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding



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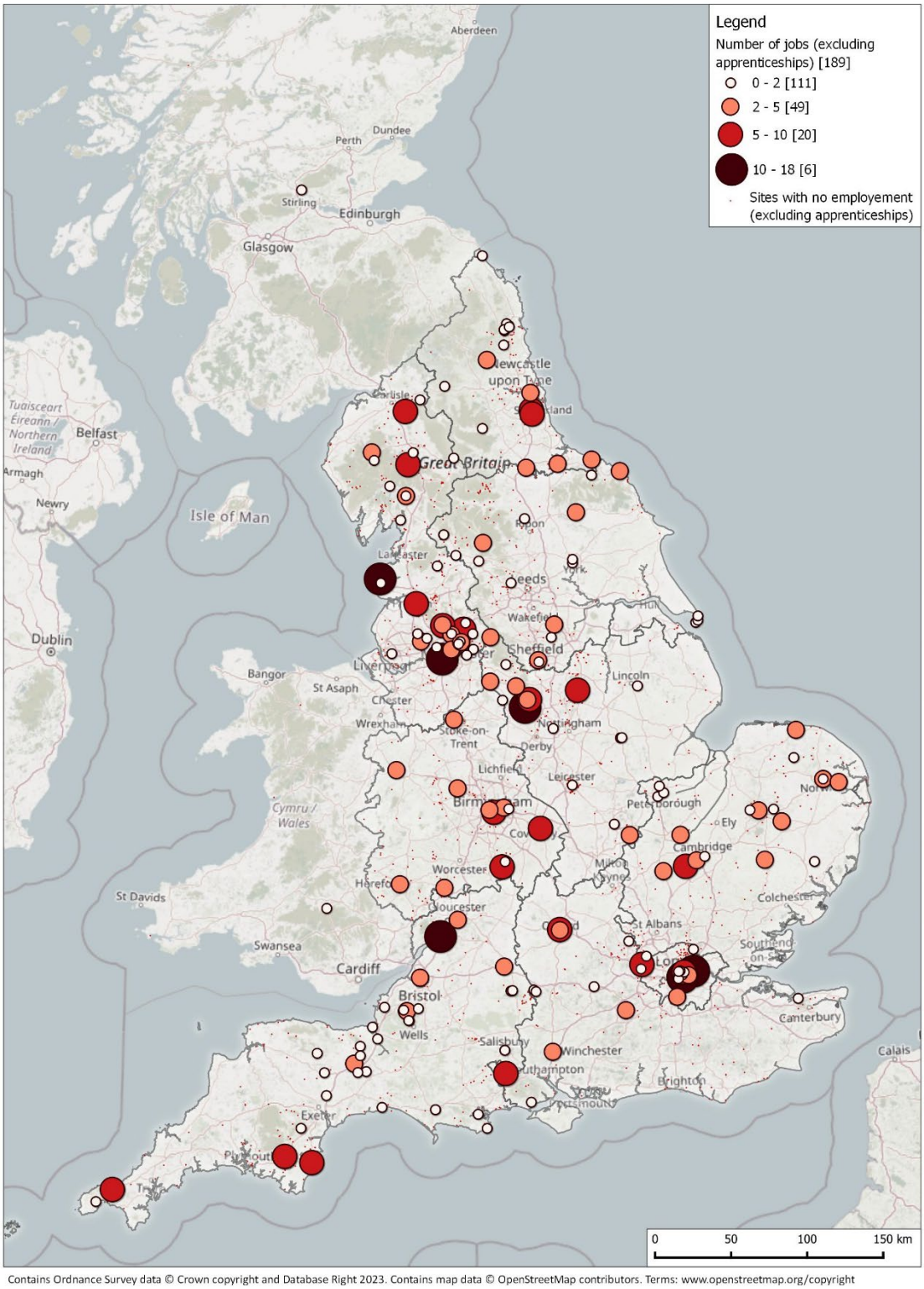
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.20 Number of jobs (excluding apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding, at individual project sites



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Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Nearly two thirds of the reported positions (423 positions, 65% of the total) directly supported by the GRCF were new temporary positions created specifically for the GRCF projects (see Table 3.30, Table 3.31 and Figure 3.21). A further 142 positions (22%) were positions that temporarily received partial support through full cost recovery and 87 (13%) were existing roles protected from redundancy. It was a similar position in terms of FTEs: 71% were new temporary positions, 17% temporarily received partial support through full cost recovery and 12% were protected from redundancy.

The data suggest that GRCF-funding was most likely to have supported newly created roles and protected existing roles from redundancy within medium-sized projects (70% were new temporary roles and 15% were protected from redundancy within medium projects compared to 62% and 12% respectively for large projects). In contrast, the large projects had a greater proportion of positions that temporarily received partial support through full cost recovery (26% of positions compared to 15% for medium projects).

Table 3.30 Number of employment positions (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding

Type of GRCF support	Large projects	Medium projects	Total
Existing role protected from redundancy	48 (12%)	39 (15%)	**87 (13%)**
Partial support - full cost recovery	105 (26%)	37 (15%)	**142 (22%)**
Role created for GRCF	245 (62%)	178 (70%)	**423 (65%)**
Unknown	No value	1 (0.4%)	**1 (0.2%)**
Total	**398 (100%)**	**255 (100%)**	**653 (100%)**

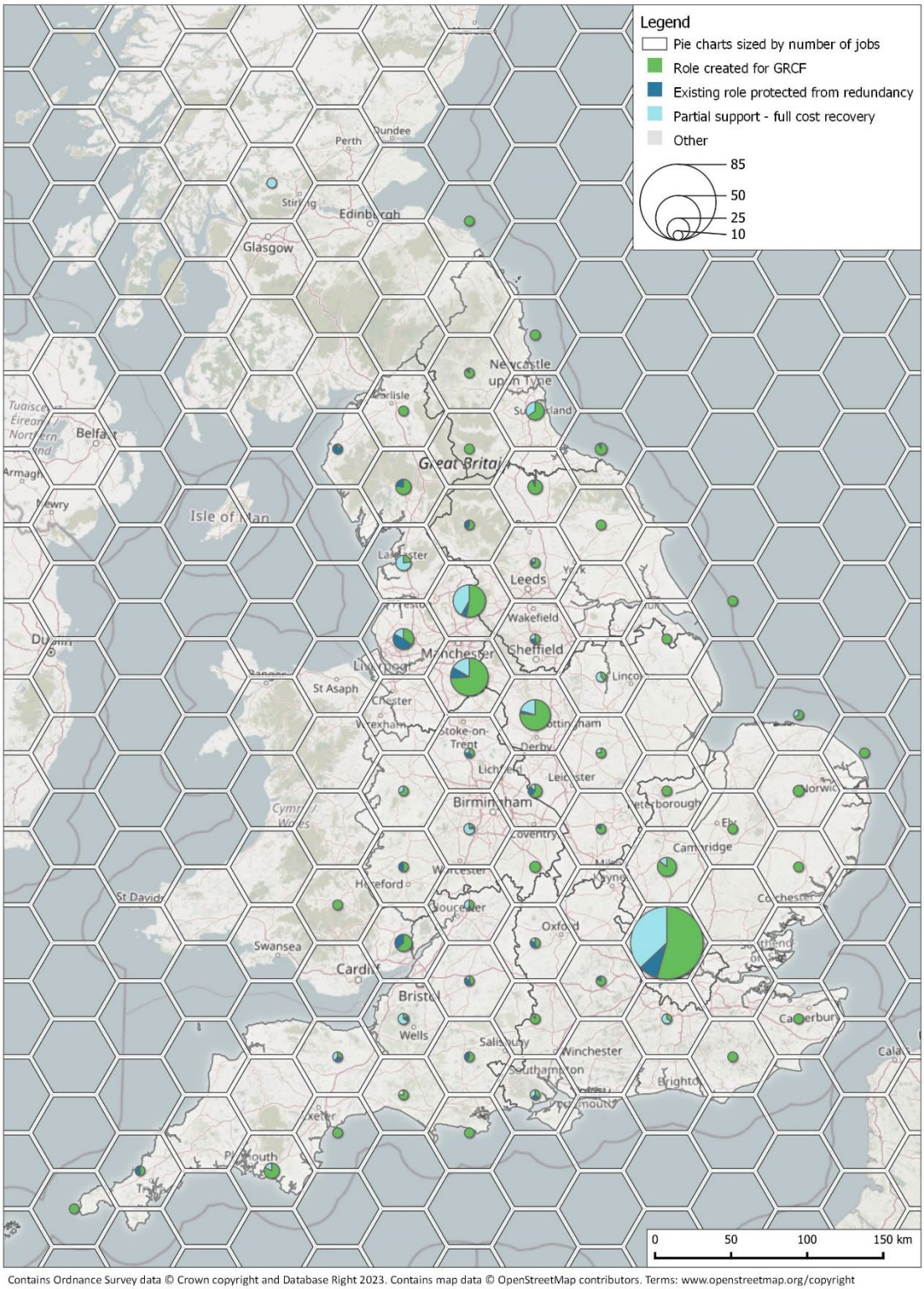
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.31 Number of Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding

Type of GRCF support	Large projects	Medium projects	Total
Existing role protected from redundancy	26 (9%)	29 (16%)	**55 (12%)**
Partial support - full cost recovery	64 (22%)	15 (9%)	**80 (17%)**
Role created for GRCF	205 (69%)	133 (75%)	**338 (71%)**
Unknown	No value	0.8 (0.5%)	**0.8 (0.2%)**
Total	**296 (100%)**	**178 (100%)**	**473 (100%)**

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.21 Number of jobs temporarily supported by GRCF funding by type of support, using a 50km Hexgrid



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** Hexagonal 50km cells with a central pie chart to show the type of employment support, summed for all GRCF project sites located within the cell*

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

The majority of jobs temporarily supported by the GRCF were within the lead organisations. Table 3.32 shows that 57% of the positions and 59% of the FTEs were temporarily supported within the lead organisations, while most of the other jobs were temporarily supported amongst partners (37% of positions and FTEs).

Table 3.32 Employment positions and FTEs (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding, by type of employer

Type of employer	Number of positions	% of total positions	Number of FTEs	% of total FTEs
Lead applicant	375	57%	279	59%
Partner	239	37%	176	37%
Freelance/Self-employed	12	2%	3	1%
Other	26	4%	14	3%
Unknown	1	0.2%	1	0.1%
Total	**653**	**100%**	**459**	**100%**

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

The descriptions of jobs in the monitoring data were matched to job titles and groups from the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). Table 3.33 and Table 3.34 present the most common SOC groups and job titles associated with the jobs supported by GRCF and show that:

- 'Officer' is the most common SOC group, representing one in three of all GRCF jobs, followed by managers, administrators, rangers and a group containing conservationists, horticulturalists, scientists, researchers and technicians. Together, these SOC groups account for three-quarters of all jobs temporarily supported by the GRCF.
- The most common SOC title is 'Project support officer' and was matched to 188 temporary positions and 147 FTEs (around 30% of the total). Other common job titles were: project management professionals, conservation professionals, agricultural and fishing trades, and youth and community workers. These job titles account for more than two-thirds of the jobs temporarily supported by GRCF.

Table 3.33 Employment positions and FTEs (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding, by SOC group

SOC group	Number of positions	% of total positions	Number of FTEs	% of total FTEs
Officer	224	34%	158	33%
Manager	108	17%	72	15%
Administrator	81	12%	64	14%
Ranger	43	7%	32	7%
Conservationist / Horticulturalist / Scientist / Researcher / Technician	38	6%	32	7%
Coordinator	29	4%	22	5%
Landscaper / Forester / Fencer / Tree surgeon	24	4%	16	3%
Adviser	20	3%	9	2%
Assistant	16	2%	14	3%
Director / Head / Chief Executive	12	2%	7	2%
Supervisor	11	2%	11	2%
Others	47	7%	37	8%
Total	**653**	**100%**	**473**	**100%**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Table 3.34 Employment positions and FTEs (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding, by SOC title

SOC title	Number of positions	% of total positions	Number of FTEs	% of total FTEs
Project support officers	188	29%	147	31%
Business and financial project management professionals	78	12%	57	12%
Conservation professionals	77	12%	49	10%
Agricultural and fishing trades n.e.c.	54	8%	41	9%
Youth and community workers	45	7%	31	7%
Office supervisors	19	3%	17	4%
Communication operators	13	2%	8	2%
Other vocational and industrial trainers	11	2%	9	2%
Forestry and related workers	10	2%	10	2%
Gardeners and landscape gardeners	10	2%	6	1%
Other administrative occupations n.e.c.	10	2%	5	1%
Business and related research professionals	9	1%	7	2%
Horticultural trades	9	1%	9	2%
Science, engineering and production technicians n.e.c.	8	1%	7	1%
Others	112	17%	71	15%
Total	**653**	**100%**	**473**	**100%**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Additional data on the characteristics of the employed individuals were available for 267 (41%) of the positions temporarily supported by GRCF funding. The data showed that the individuals in 108 of these positions did not belong to any of the equalities groups listed in Table 3.35. **The largest of the underrepresented groups was young people aged 25 years and under**, who accounted for at least 20% of supported positions and 21% of supported FTEs. Individuals from the other equality groups represented between 0% and 5% of the supported positions and between 0% and 4% of the supported FTEs.

Table 3.35 Employment positions and FTEs (including apprenticeships) temporarily supported by GRCF funding, by equality group

Equality group	Number of positions	% of total positions*	Number of FTEs	% of total FTEs*
A disability	4	1%	2	0.4%
Aged 25 years or under	128	20%	101	21%
Aged 60 years or over	15	2%	10	2%
Black, Asian or another ethnic minority	20	3%	14	3%
LGBT+	8	1%	5	1%
Social-economically disadvantaged	35	5%	20	4%
Other	1	0.1%	1	0.2%
None of the above groups	108	17%	78	16%
Unknown	386	59%	295	62%
Total positions / FTEs	**653**	**100%**	**473**	**100%**

** sums to >100% as individuals in some positions belong to more than one group.*

Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

The above analysis is based on the number of positions and FTEs that were temporarily supported by GRCF funding. Since project delivery periods were longer than 12 months, the number of 'job years' that were temporarily supported by GRCF funding would have been greater than the number of positions and FTE positions. The number of job years can be estimated using an assumption that the average FTE position was supported by GRCF funding for a period of 18 months. Applying this assumption suggests that GRCF Round 1 funding directly supported a total of 710 full-time job years.

3.5.2.2 Employment indirectly supported by GRCF activities and expenditures

In addition to the employment described above, which is directly supported within the GRCF project management and delivery teams, the expenditures of GRCF projects have also indirectly supported additional jobs amongst their supply chains. This section presents an analysis of the jobs that were indirectly supported by the GRCF, based on the budgeted costs and intended purchases of goods and services for each project.

The budgeted costs of all 69 GRCF Round 1 projects totalled £44.3 million. Approximately £12.6 million was expected to cover the costs of employing the project staff described in the previous section, leaving a total of £31.7 million for projects to spend on various goods and services.

The employment supported by these expenditures can be estimated using published statistics to create metrics of turnover per job for the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) sectors that most closely match the type of expenditure. Table 3.42 provides a breakdown of the £31.7 million across different types of GRCF expenditures, as well as the SIC code that provides the best match for each type of expenditure and a 'turnover per job' metric[15] calculated using data from the Annual

[15] Calculated for each SIC code using turnover and employment data from the ONS Annual Business Survey.

Business Survey. The final columns provide estimates of the number of job years (and FTE job years) that would be supported within that sector, calculated using the turnover per job metrics and the corresponding GRCF expenditures. The results suggest that **the £31.7 million of GRCF expenditures on goods and services would support an additional 548 jobs (476 FTE job years)**.

The overall employment impacts of GRCF funding can therefore be estimated by summing the 710 full-time job years that were directly supported amongst GRCF projects and the 476 full-time job years that were indirectly supported by the expenditures and activities of GRCF projects. This suggests that **GRCF Round 1 funding has supported a total of 1,186 full-time job years**.

There would also be additional indirect and induced effects at a local level, arising from the subsequent expenditures of suppliers and employees in their local economies, when re-spending the incomes supported by GRCF expenditures. The scale of these impacts will depend on the location of the suppliers and employees of GRCF projects and assumptions about leakage, displacement, substitution and local economic multipliers.

Table 3.36 Indirect employment effects

Type of expenditure	Budgeted cost (£m)	Most relevant SIC code	Turnover per job (£)	Job years supported - Jobs	Job years supported - FTEs*
Conservation activities	£10.4m	SIC 91: Libraries, archives, museums & other cultural activities	£27,150	383	334
Construction	£3.8m	Section F: Construction	£189,000	20	17
Training	£1.6m	SIC 85: Education & training	£40,700	39	34
Professional services	£1.5m	Section M: Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	£122,400	13	11
Evaluation and promotion	£1.2m	SIC 70: Activities of head offices; management consultancy activities	£132,900	9	8
Travel	£0.5m	SIC 49: Land transport	£100,500	5	5
Events	£0.3m	SIC 82: Office administrative, office support & other business support activities	£139,300	3	2
Digital outputs	£0.2m	SIC 58: Publishing	£174,000	1	1
Land management	£0.1m	SIC 68: Real estate	£117,800	1	1
Recruitment	£0.1m	SIC 78: Employment activities	£65,800	1	1
All other costs	£11.9m	SIC Sections A-S, non-financial business economy	£164,200	73	63
Total	**£31.7m**	**No value**	**No value**	**548**	**476**

Source: ONS Annual Business Survey and The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database

3.5.2.3 Apprenticeships directly supported by GRCF

Analysis of monitoring returns suggests that **GRCF projects directly supported 69 apprenticeships (63 FTE apprenticeships)**. A total of 17 projects reported supporting apprenticeships across 31 different sites. They included at least four apprenticeships at Level 4, five at Level 3, 14 at Level 2, seven traineeship apprenticeships and six Kickstart apprenticeships, although a further 33 apprenticeships were of unknown level so the actual numbers of apprenticeships at each level are likely to exceed these figures (Table 3.37). The GRCF projects also reported supporting an additional 12 Kickstart placements, which suggests a total of at least 18 Kickstart qualifications, including the six apprenticeships. However, there is evidence that these figures have been under-reported by the Round 1 projects. A small number of projects reported apprenticeships in their own evaluation reports that were not included in their monitoring return. It is therefore likely that the figures presented in this section significantly under-report the number of apprenticeships and Kickstart placements supported by the Round 1 projects.

Table 3.37 Number of apprenticeship positions, FTEs, supporting sites and projects by level of apprenticeship

Apprenticeship Level	No. of apprenticeship positions	No. of apprenticeship FTEs	No. of sites employing	No. of projects employing
Kickstart	6	4	3	3
Traineeship	7	7	5	2
Level 2	14	14	1	1
Level 3	5	5	2	2
Level 4	4	4	5	2
Unknown / other	33	28	15	10
Total	**69**	**63**	**31**	**17**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Of the 69 apprenticeship positions (63 FTE apprenticeships) reported by projects, 67 positions (61 FTEs) were newly created for the GRCF projects, while the other two positions (1.6 FTEs) were partially supported through full cost recovery. They were evenly distributed between the lead and partner organisations, with lead organisations accounting for 52% and partners accounting for 43% of apprenticeship positions and FTEs.

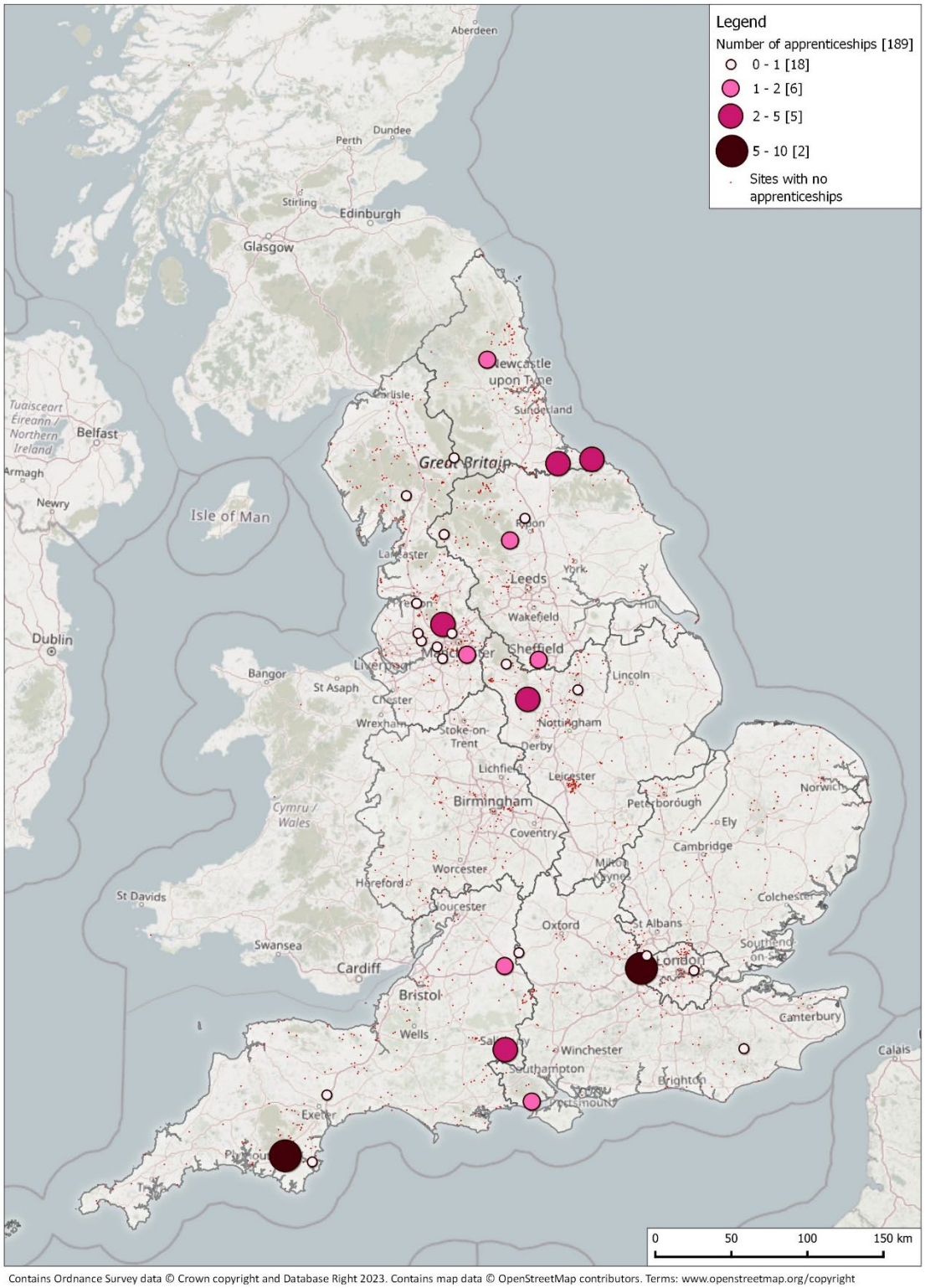
Table 3.38 presents the distribution of the 69 reported apprenticeships by region. The majority of apprenticeships were associated with large projects (61% of positions and 64% of FTE apprenticeships) and the South of England, with London (23%), the South West (20%), South East (19%) and East of England (16%) accounting for most of the GRCF-funded apprenticeships.

Table 3.38 Number of apprenticeship positions and FTEs supported by GRCF funding, by region

Region	No. of apprenticeship positions	% of total	No. of apprenticeship FTEs	% of total
East Midlands	6	9%	6	9%
East of England	11	16%	9	14%
London	16	23%	16	25%
North East	0	0%	0	0%
North West	7	10%	7	11%
South East	13	19%	13	20%
South West	14	20%	12	19%
West Midlands	2	3%	1	1%
Yorkshire & The Humber	0	0%	0	0%
Total	**69**	**100%**	**63**	**100%**

Source: ICF analysis of Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

Figure 3.22 Number of apprenticeships directly supported by GRCF funding, at individual project sites



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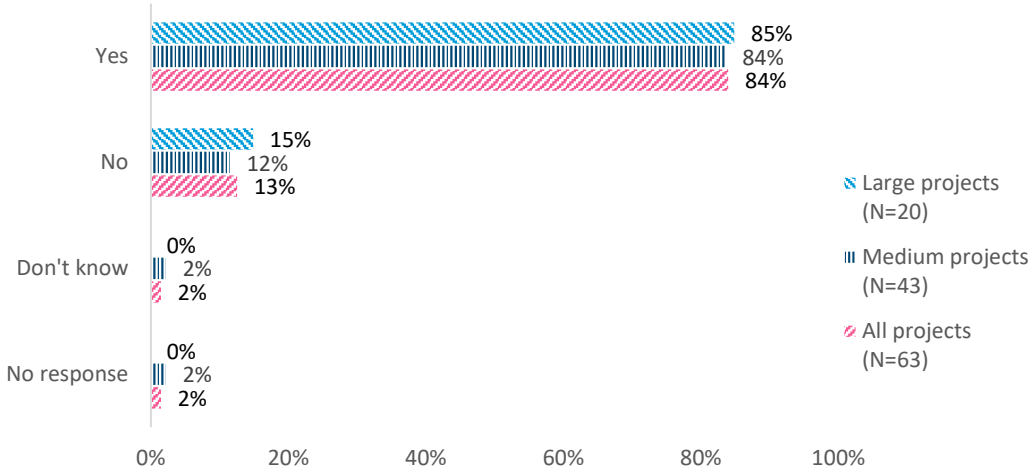
Source: Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

3.5.2.4 Volunteers and volunteer inputs

The survey and interviews with GRCF projects also collected data of the number of volunteers who engaged with projects and the number of volunteer hours that had been provided to each project. The results suggested that 84% of GRCF Round 1 projects had engaged volunteers in their activities and this was consistent across large and medium-sized projects (Figure 3.23).

Figure 3.23 Percentage of GRCF Round 1 projects that engaged volunteers, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

GRCF projects reported engaging more than 10,000 volunteers, of which most (6,200) were new volunteers recruited by the GRCF project and reported receiving 255,000 hours of volunteer support (Table 3.39). However, these figures are based on responses from 44, 39 and 33 projects respectively, which are significantly lower than the 53 projects that reported engaging volunteers, so it is likely that this is a very conservative estimate of volunteer engagement and volunteer hours.

The mean figures suggest that the average project engaged 230 volunteers (including 150 new volunteers engaged for the first time through the GRCF project) and benefited from 5,700 volunteer hours. The median figures are considerably lower, with the middle project engaging 68 volunteers (including 45 new volunteers) and receiving 1,150 hours of volunteer support, as the mean average included some projects that benefited from large numbers of volunteers and volunteer hours.

The number of volunteers engaged was similar for large and medium-sized projects, although large projects benefited from more volunteer hours than the medium-sized projects (accounting for 59% of the total). There was also a fairly even distribution of volunteers across most of the English regions, although the number of volunteer hours was more skewed towards the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber with these two regions accounting for 63% of all volunteer hours.

Table 3.39 Volunteers (total and recruited under GRCF) and volunteer hours for GRCF Round 1 projects

Response categories	Total volunteers engaged	Volunteers recruited under GRCF	Total volunteer hours
Total engaged	10,150	6,200	255,000
No. of projects for which data was provided (N)	44	39	33
Mean per project	230	150	5,700
Median per project	68	45	1,150

Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

3.5.2.5 Resilience of eNGOs (partnerships, funding)

Several interviewees and survey respondents provided comments indicating that the GRCF had supported the resilience of their organisation. GRCF was seen as providing an important source of funding at a difficult time, which enabled organisations to continue working, retain and add new employees, develop new partnerships and access additional funding. Some of the comments of projects are included below, while other positive impacts on organisational resilience are discussed as 'unexpected impacts' in Section 3.6).

> *"The fund itself was very well-timed – and really helped maintain things in the sector. This post-lockdown period was a nervous time for everyone. A lot of people had been furloughed and the GRCF helped prevent a dip in conservation activity and enabled some additional work. It was exactly what was needed for that time and place."*

> *"GRCF was incredibly useful for recruiting people into the organisation. There were three new staff brought in, which made us more resilient and introduced skills and capacity into the organisation. The funding was the kickstart to job and skills resilience for this organisation."*

> *"[GRCF] got a lot of things moving and it clearly made a difference. For example, people that were in redundancy or furlough were given opportunities to be employed and to develop professionally. We've also built a much wider base of contacts, including counsellors in the area, which wasn't really anticipated at the start of the project – these are now attending events and helping share what's going on in the project. All this is directly attributable to the fund."*

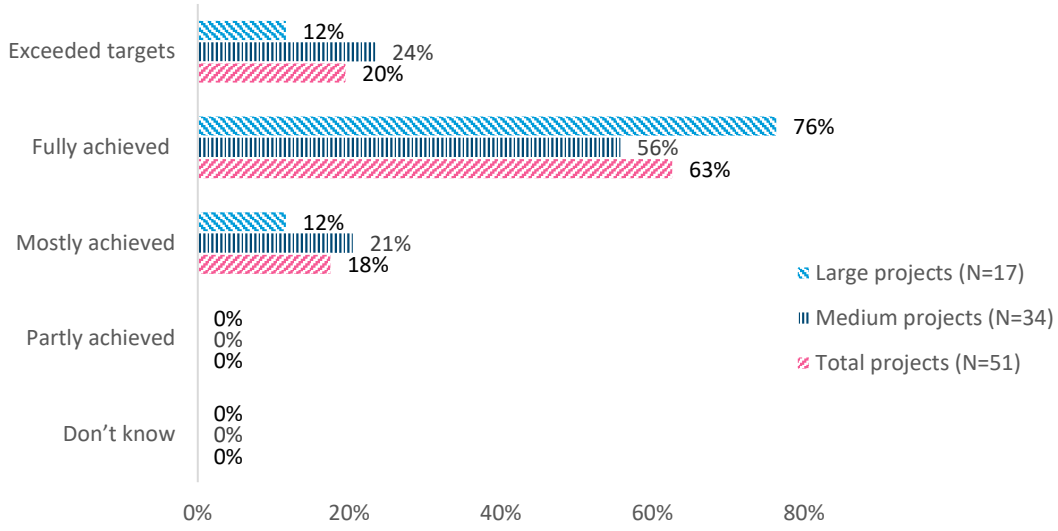
> *"[GRCF] facilitated the recruitment and retention of key resources enabling a high level of confidence in driving forward both the new build/restoration and environmental elements at a time when securing the necessary finance to do so would have been a difficult proposition."*

Achievement of project goals

The majority of projects (82%) indicated that they had either exceeded or fully achieved their goals relating to jobs, skills and resilience (Figure 3.24). The remaining 18% of projects all reported that they had 'mostly achieved' their goals. This suggests there has been high overall levels of achievement with the jobs, skills and resilience goals, particularly amongst the large projects, 88% of which reported

having exceeded or fully achieved their goals, compared to 79% for medium-sized projects.

Figure 3.24 Extent to which projects reported achieving their intended goals: Jobs, skills, and resilience



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

However, when comparing the FTE jobs figures to the estimated projections of employment benefits provided in project applications – available for large projects only (Table 3.48) – the data suggests a more mixed performance. The number of new roles created for GRCF projects in lead and partner organisations has exceeded the projected levels (164 FTEs reported vs 138 projected). However, reported FTE jobs are significantly lower than the projections across all other types of employment for large projects. For apprenticeships specifically, the number of FTE jobs reported is well below predicted levels.

To some extent, this difference can be explained by the under-reporting of employment impacts in the project monitoring data. As described above, there is evidence to suggest that the number of reported apprenticeships is significantly under-reported in the data, for example, and this may also be true of the other types of employment. Other potential reasons for the discrepancy could reflect some optimism bias and/or challenges in accurately estimating employment at the application stage, particularly given the short timescales for the GRCF programme, of reflect some bias in projects' opinions on whether they have achieved their jobs, skills and resilience goals.

Table 3.40 Employment (FTE) compared to projections at application (large projects only)

Type of employer	Employment type	Reported FTEs	Projections at application	% of projection
Lead applicant	Role created for GRCF	98	96	102%
Lead applicant	Existing role protected from redundancy	14	26	55%
Lead applicant	Partial support - full cost recovery	23	112	20%
Lead applicant	Apprenticeships	23	230	10%
Partner	Role created for GRCF	66	42	156%
Partner	Existing role protected from redundancy	11	47	24%
Partner	Partial support - full cost recovery	41	147	28%
Partner	Apprenticeships	16	441	4%
Freelance/self employed	Role created for GRCF	1	154	1%
Freelance/self employed	Existing role protected from redundancy	1	4	15%
Other / not stated	Role created for GRCF	2	0	n/a
Other / not stated	Apprenticeships	1	0	n/a
Total	**No value**	**296**	**1298**	**23%**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database (projections at application) and Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

3.5.3 Longer-term outcomes

This section describes projects' expectations of longer-term outcomes for employment and NGO resilience.

3.5.3.1 Continuation of employment supported by GRCF

The survey and interviews with projects found that a large proportion of the jobs directly supported by GRCF were expected to continue beyond the end of the project (Table 3.41). In total, **311 FTE jobs have been retained by GRCF project organisations, which represents two-thirds (66%) of the total number of FTE positions directly supported by the GRCF** during the programme period (473 FTEs). Retention was even higher amongst medium-sized projects, which had retained 125 of the 178 FTE positions temporarily supported by the projects (i.e. 70% job retention compared to 63% within large projects).

Rates of retention differed between the different types of roles. Retention rates were highest and almost 100% for roles protected from redundancy and those partially supported through full cost recovery, compared to approximately 50% for the newly created roles. Retention of apprenticeships was lower at 40% of those supported by GRCF projects but was again considerably higher amongst medium-sized projects (67% retention of apprenticeships compared to 25% for large projects).

Table 3.41 Retention of FTE jobs (including apprenticeships), by project size

Project size	FTE Apprent-iceships retained	% of all FTE apprentice-ships directly supported by GRCF	Other FTE jobs retained	% of all other FTE jobs directly supported by GRCF	Total FTE jobs retained	% of FTE jobs directly supported by GRCF
Large projects	10	25%	176	69%	187	63%
Medium projects	15	67%	110	71%	125	70%
All projects	**25**	**40%**	**286**	**70%**	**311**	**66%**

Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

The survey also asked about the job outcomes for those who were not retained by the projects (Table 3.42). The responses suggested that 133 individuals (i.e. 20% of the jobs directly employed by GRCF projects) had secured employment in other job roles, including:

- 43 people had gone on to other jobs within the lead / partner organisations (7% of jobs supported by GRCF projects).
- 41 people had gone on to other jobs in the conservation sector (6% of jobs supported by GRCF projects).
- 36 people had gone on to other jobs related to the skills they had developed during the GRCF project (6% of jobs supported by GRCF projects).
- 13 people had secured other, unrelated jobs (2% of jobs supported by GRCF projects).

Table 3.42 Other job outcomes for individuals directly supported by GRCF funding

Other job outcomes	No. of job outcomes	% of the 653 positions temporarily supported by GRCF
Within lead / partner organisations	43	7%
Elsewhere in the conservation sector	41	6%
Related to skills developed by GRCF	36	6%
Other unrelated roles	13	2%
Total	**133**	**20%**

Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

3.5.3.2 Continuation of inputs from GRCF volunteers

The legacy of GRCF projects is discussed in Section 4.3, including the preconditions and risks to securing the long-term legacy of project. The survey found that 35% of GRCF projects (22 of the 63 projects that responded to the survey) had identified volunteer time as a precondition for the legacy of their project. These 22 projects were asked whether they had already secured the volunteer time that they required and found that (at the time of the survey in July/August 2022):

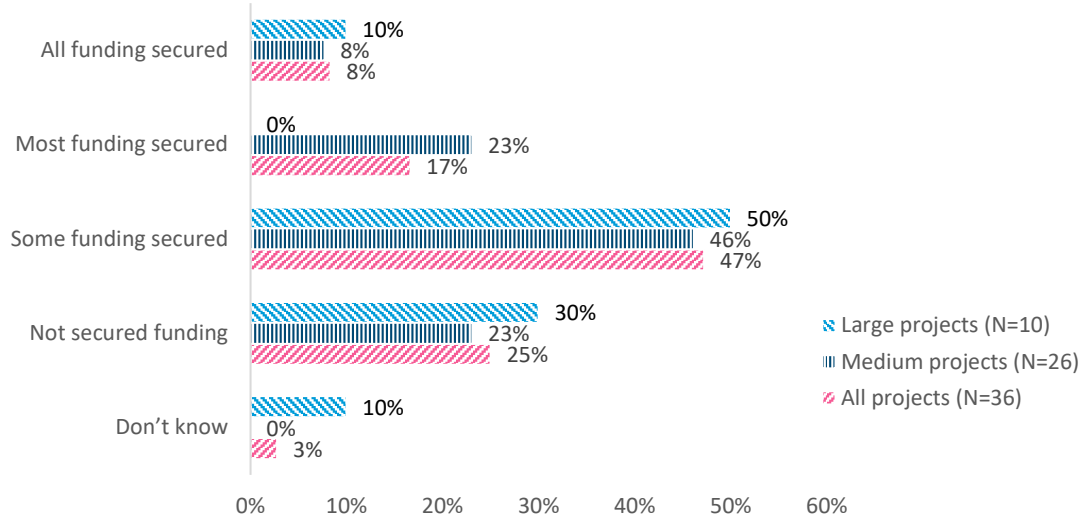
- 4 projects had already secured all the volunteer time they needed (18%).
- 14 projects had secured some of the volunteer time they needed (64%).
- The remaining projects had not secured any volunteer time (1 project) or did not know if any volunteer time had been secured (3 projects)

A sub-set of nine projects also provided information on the number of volunteer hours they had secured and/or still needed. The nine projects suggested that a total of 1,700 hours of volunteer time was required per week for the long-term legacy of the project. In total 1,075 hours per week had already been secured (63% of the total required), leaving a deficit of 642 hours per week (37% of the total required). However, these figures should be treated as indicative and a conservative estimate of the volunteer time secured and required by the GRCF projects, given the small sample size.

3.5.3.3 Future funding secured and required

Additional funding was identified as a precondition for legacy by 57% of GRCF projects (i.e. for 36 of the 63 responding to the survey). The was slightly higher amongst medium-sized projects (60%) compared to large projects (50%). Figure 3.25 shows the extent to which these 36 projects had already achieved the funding they required (at the time of the survey in July/August 2022). They show that only a minority of projects (8%) had secured all of the funding required, while a further 17% had secured most of the required funding. Around half of the projects (47%) had secured some funding, while 25% had not secured any funding at all.

Figure 3.25 Extent to which projects have secured the additional funding required, by project size (N=36 projects for which additional funding is a precondition for the legacy of the project)



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

The 26 projects that had already secured funding were also asked about the value of the funding. **A total of £19.1 million had already been secured (at July August 2022) to support the legacy of GRCF projects**. This value includes £15.8 million of funding secured by a single, large project, in addition to a further £1.6 million secured by other large projects and £1.7 million secured by medium-sized projects. The secured funding covered a range of time periods with 2% of the funding for a

period of up to 12 months, 5% for a period of 1-2 years and the remaining 93% covering a period of 3-5 years.

Table 3.43 Value of additional funding secured, by project size (N=26 projects that have already secured at least some of the additional funding required for the legacy of their project)

Response categories	Large projects (N=6)	Medium projects (N=20)	All projects (N=26)
Total funding secured	£17,420,000	£1,728,500	**£19,148,500**
Mean value per project	£5,800,000	£100,000	**£960,000**
Median value per project	£1,500,000	£60,000	**£81,000**
Minimum value per project	£120,000	£5,000	**£5,000**
Maximum value per project	£15,800,000	£352,000	**£15,800,000**

Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Funding has been secured to support the legacy of GRCF projects in all regions and the figures are skewed by the £15.8 million of funding secured in the North West. If this project is excluded, then the funding is spread more evenly across regions with the East of England, North West, East Midlands and South West all having secured funding of more than £0.5 million.

Table 3.44 Percentage of additional funding secured by region (N=26 projects that have already secured at least some of the additional funding required for the legacy of their project)

Region*	Large projects (N=6)	Medium projects (N=20)	All projects (N=26)
East Midlands	3%	24%	**5%**
East of England	3%	22%	**5%**
London	0.3%	1%	**0.4%**
North East	0.1%	1%	**0.2%**
North West	90%	17%	**83%**
South East	1%	9%	**2%**
South West	2%	7%	**3%**
West Midlands	0.4%	1%	**0.4%**
Yorkshire & The Humber	0.4%	18%	**2%**
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

** Survey responses were provided at project level, rather than site level. For projects spanning multiple regions, the additional funding secured has been distributed in proportion to the number of sites within each region.*

Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

3.6 Unexpected benefits

This section describes some of the benefits arising from participation in the GRCF programme that Round 1 projects perceived as unexpected or unplanned. In many

cases these benefits were consistent with the overall aims and expectations of the programme, despite not being expected by the individual project.

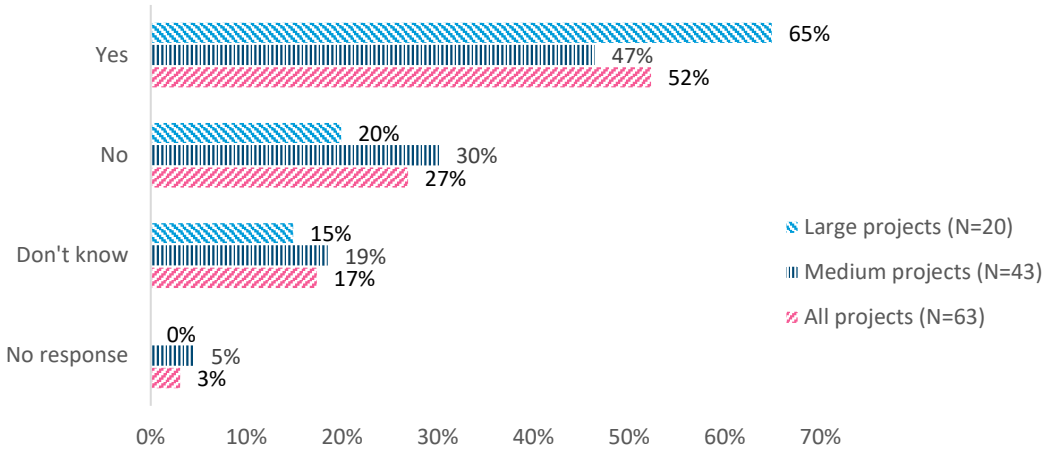
Half of GRCF projects (52%), and around two-thirds of large projects (65%), indicated that their project had delivered unexpected benefits (Figure 3.26). Several projects reported that the most significant unexpected benefits had arisen from the increased and strengthened partnerships. In some cases this was due to working more closely with partners than had been anticipated in order to meet the challenges of dealing with COVID-19, which had formed closer bonds and greater intentions to work together in future.

For others the support received during the COVID-19 pandemic had been invaluable for enabling them to continue operating, build their confidence and resilience and in some cases also provide support to others in need: *"It provided us with stability which gave us the opportunity to support other local groups as they struggled to navigate what their service offer would look like coming out of COVID-19."*

Several other projects described the catalytic effects of GRCF funding, which had helped them to raise their profiles and to secure additional funding to expand or extend their GRCF project, and to build new partnerships. Other examples of unexpected benefits included:

- The retention of staff in the conservation sector, including two projects that reported being able to secure full-time employment or study for all their trainees at the end of their placements: *"All trainees were able to secure employment or go onto further study and are now advocates of species rich grassland"*.
- Volunteers taking on more advanced roles than had been expected and supporting the coordination of the project.
- An amendment to the Wildlife and Countryside Act (to make the disturbance or harassment of seals an offence) following stakeholder engagement activities and knowledge briefings provided by one GRCF project.
- Several projects stated that they had been able to achieve an unexpected level of work that had exceeded original plans: *"We were able to survey more than 1,000 hectares of lowland heathland across 140 sites – a scale of work that had not been envisaged at the outset."*
- Engagement activities attracting more people than expected, including a community festival that attracted 2,500 visitors.
- An extension granted to one project had enabled them to take advantage of an unexpected opportunity to trial novel approaches to monitoring using emerging technologies (eDNA metabarcoding and acoustic detectors).
- The ability to secure additional funding to continue delivering activities, including: additional funding from the local authority to employ a new full time officer as a result of activities to raise the profile of their habitat restoration work; and using crowd-funding to attract further funding from private donors willing to fund planting of additional trees in deprived areas.

Figure 3.26 Projects delivering unexpected benefits, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

4 Impact evaluation: impacts of the GRCF

4.1 Introduction

This section considers impacts of the GRCF in terms of the extent to which the outputs and outcomes described in Section 3 can be attributed to the GRCF. It also considers the long-term legacy of GRCF Round 1 projects including the extent to which projects have plans to ensure it is fulfilled, and the expected preconditions and risks to achieving their plans.

4.2 Impacts attributable to the GRCF

4.2.1 Introduction

An important consideration for assessing the impact and value for money of the GRCF is the definition of a counterfactual to represent the future state of outcomes that might have still been achieved if the GRCF had not been made available to projects. This section explores the likely extent to which observed outputs and outcomes can be attributed to the GRCF. It examines attribution by directly asking funded projects whether they would have been able to progress their projects in the absence of GRCF funding; and if they could have progressed their project whether the outputs and outcomes would have been of a similar scale and delivered at a similar time.

4.2.2 Overall view

Evidence from the 2021 survey of GRCF Round 1 projects suggests that a large proportion of the outcomes expected to be achieved through GRCF funding would not have been secured without it. The majority of respondents expressed the view that their project would not have gone ahead in the absence of GRCF funding and that they would not have secured funding from alternative sources. A majority of projects also suggested that there would be negative impacts on their organisation and staffing. In the few cases where projects may have gone ahead, outcomes would likely have been smaller and delivered more slowly. This mirrored the findings of research with unsuccessful applicants: most of which had not progressed, and were unlikely to progress, in the absence of GRCF funding; while those that had progressed reported slower progress and reduced outcomes compared to what had been expected through the GRCF programme.

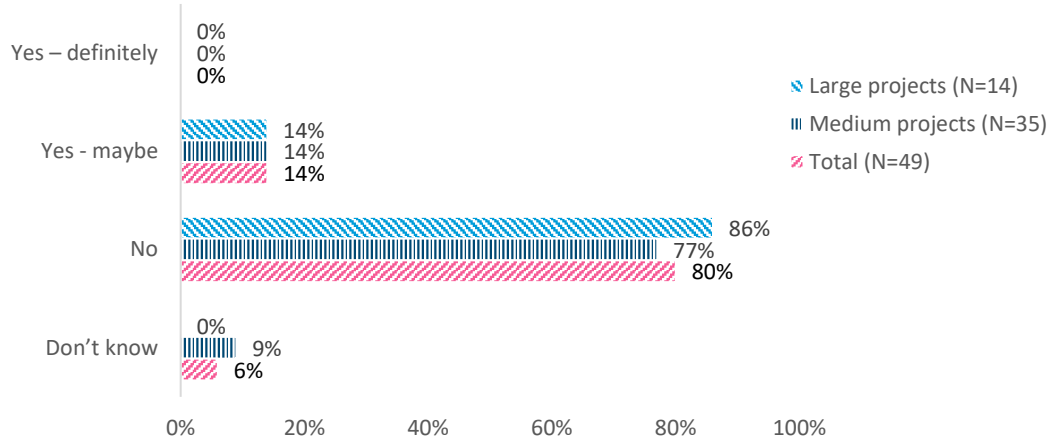
Interviews with projects and stakeholders on completion of the programme also identified projects that were unlikely to have progressed, while others may have gone ahead but at a later date or on a smaller scale. It was suggested that environmental outcomes were most likely to have been delivered in the absence of the GRCF, as well as some of the outcomes around engaging people with nature, but the outcomes involving nature-based solutions and jobs, skills and resilience were less likely to have occurred and more likely to be attributed to the GRCF. The timing of the GRCF was seen as particularly important, as it was delivered at a time when the conservation sector was facing significant problems and considerable uncertainty due to the pandemic. The GRCF is widely considered to have supported these organisations to survive the impacts of the pandemic, retain staff and enable them to continue delivering activities and outcomes in the future.

4.2.3 Attributable impacts

An earlier online survey of GRCF Round 1 projects was undertaken to inform the interim evaluation in 2021 and asked projects about issues relating to the counterfactual. This topic was also revisited in the final interviews with GRCF projects undertaken on completion of the projects. However, some caution should be applied in interpreting the responses, because of uncertainties regarding the likely outcomes in the absence of the GRCF[16].

The 2021 survey found that **80% of GRCF Round 1 projects reported that their project would not have gone ahead in the absence of GRCF funding**, with no respondent answering that their project would have definitely gone ahead without GRCF funding (Figure 4.1). These findings suggest a high degree of attribution of impacts to the GRCF. The proportion stating that their project would not have gone ahead was higher for large projects (86%) than medium-sized ones (77%). In the few cases where projects may still have gone ahead in the absence of GRCF funding, respondents[17] indicated that it may have delivered reduced impacts against the GRCF themes, particularly for jobs, skills and eNGO resilience, and would have taken longer to deliver.

Figure 4.1 Project views of the likelihood of their project going ahead in the absence of funding from the GRCF



Source: ICF interim survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2021

The 2021 survey also found that **the majority of successful applicants reported that it was unlikely that their project could have secured funding from other sources** if not funded by the GRCF (Figure 4.2), although views were mixed. Overall, 61% of projects felt it was very or somewhat unlikely that they would have secured funding from an alternative source. This was significantly higher than the 22% who felt they were very or somewhat likely to have secured alternative funding and 16% who did not know. The medium-sized projects reported being more likely to be able to secure alternative funding, suggesting that the attribution of impacts to GRCF funding may have been greatest for the larger projects.

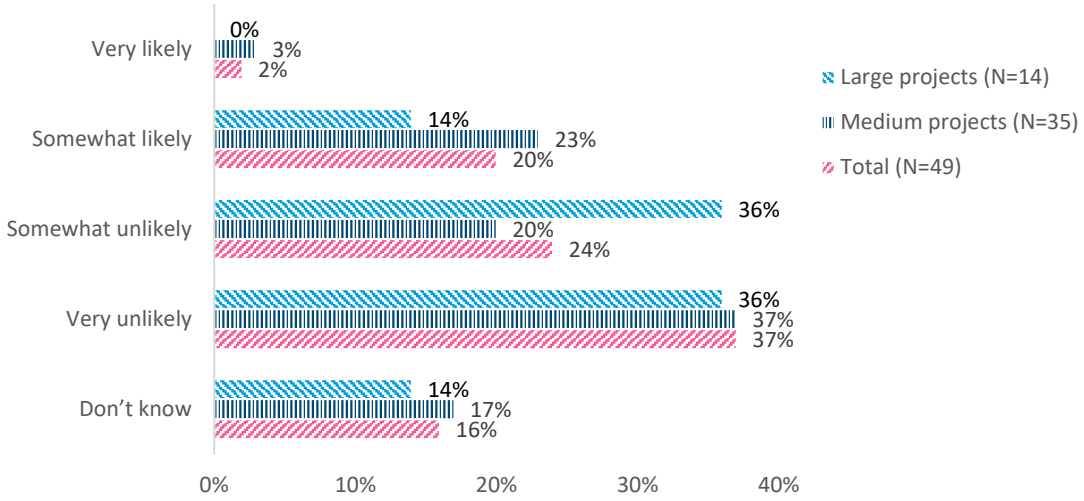
Other potential sources of funding mentioned by projects included fundraising from private sources (e.g. trusts, foundations, donations); grants from public sources (e.g.

[16] Evidence of the likelihood of outcomes in the absence of the GRCF is based on views expressed by the projects themselves so they are subjective and could be prone to bias and strategic answering.

[17] Only seven respondents answered this question, presumably because most had indicated that their project would not have proceeded without GRCF funding.

National Lottery, local authority, UK Government); earned income; and using their own reserves.

Figure 4.2 Project views of the likelihood of their project securing funding from an alternative source if they had not received a grant from the GRCF



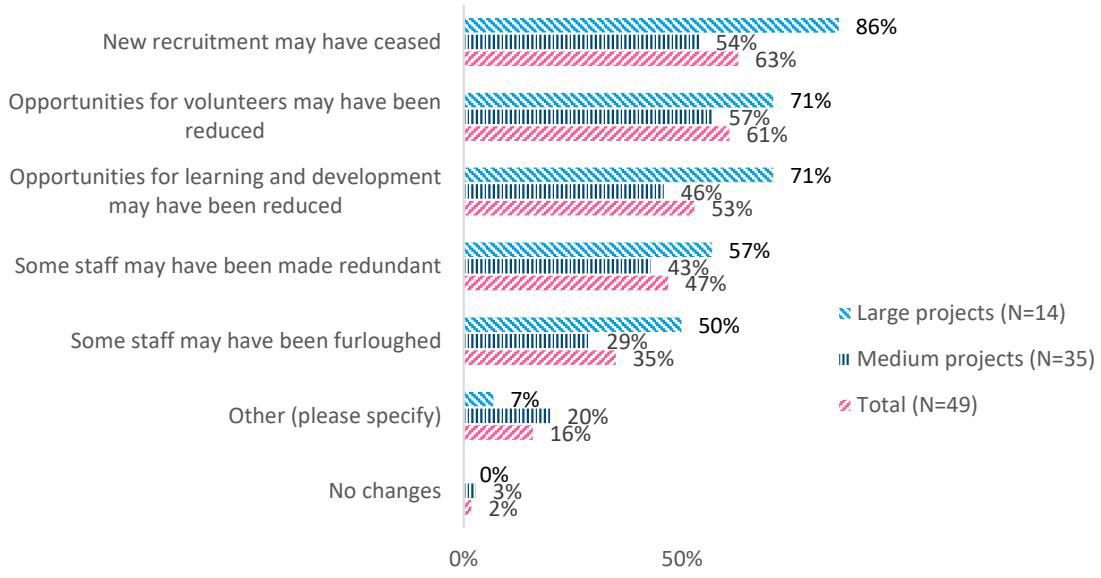
Source: ICF interim survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2021

The survey and interviews with Round 1 projects suggested that **the timing of the GRCF was critical and enabled project partners to avoid negative impacts for their organisations**. The majority of projects responding to the 2021 survey suggested that there would have been negative impacts on their organisation and staffing without GRCF funding (Figure 4.3):

- 63% suggested that new recruitment may have ceased.
- 61% suggested that opportunities for volunteers may have been reduced.
- 53% said that opportunities for learning and development may have been reduced.
- 47% suggested that some staff may have been made redundant, while 35% indicated that some staff may have been furloughed.
- Only 2% reported there would have been no change to their organisation or staffing in the absence of the GRCF.

The results of the 2021 survey also found that large projects were more likely to report negative impacts in the absence of the GRCF for their organisation and staffing than medium-sized ones. This was the case across all of the different types of impact but is perhaps unsurprising given that the absence of larger grants might be expected to have resulted in greater negative impacts on organisations and their staff.

Figure 4.3 Project views of what would have happened to their organisation and staff in the absence of funding from the GRCF



Source: ICF interim survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2021

A survey was also undertaken in 2021 with unsuccessful applicants from Round 1 (that did not reapply for GRCF Round 2). It found that **most of the unsuccessful applicants from Round 1 felt that they were unlikely to take their projects forward with other funding** (45% of respondents indicated that their project was indefinitely delayed and 8% that they did not intend to progress it). The minority of unsuccessful applicants that had managed to progress their project, in the absence of GRCF funding, indicated that their progress had been slower and their outcomes reduced to what they had expected to achieve through the GRCF programme.

Perceptions of the counterfactual and attribution were also revisited in interviews with projects and stakeholders on completion of the programme. The interviews allowed more nuanced discussions about the extent to which projects and their activities and impacts would have occurred in the absence of funding from the GRCF. The findings were mixed with **some projects suggesting that they would have been unlikely to have progressed at all, in the absence of the GRCF, while others may have gone ahead but at a later date and/or delivered on a smaller scale** (e.g. covering fewer sites, and/or delivering a narrower scope of activities and benefits). To some extent this is to be expected for a funding programme aiming to deliver projects at pace, many of which were 'shovel-ready' projects waiting for an appropriate source of funding. For example, some projects reported:

> *"The work would not have taken place without this funding from the GRCF, or at least not within the next 5 years."*

> *"The plans for our project had been developed some three years earlier. When we became aware of the GRCF opportunity, we evaluated four or five different project plans that we had developed and selected this one as the most appropriate. In the absence of the GRCF funding, the project would not have progressed at this stage but would have stayed on the priority list so we would expect it to have been delivered at some point in the future."*

Some of the stakeholders commented on the types of impacts that were most likely to have occurred in the absence of GRCF funding. It was suggested that the **environmental outcomes were most likely to have been delivered in the absence of the GRCF, as well as some of the outcomes around engaging people with nature**. In contrast, it was felt that outcomes around nature-based solutions (e.g. natural flood management) and jobs, skills and resilience (including links to the Kickstart Scheme) were much less likely to have occurred in the absence of GRCF. This suggests that **the attribution of impacts to the GRCF is likely to be most significant for outcomes relating to NBS and jobs, skills and resilience**.

> *"There is certainly an argument that some of the environmental outcomes may have been delivered by other means, such as through Countryside Stewardship, Natural England funding pots, or woodland funding – but delivery would not have been so quick or to the same extent – and this speed of delivery was key in terms of providing a rapid response to support eNGOs after the pandemic."*

More broadly, many projects and stakeholders mentioned that **the timing of the GRCF was the most critical factor**. The GRCF was delivered at a time when the conservation sector was facing significant problems and considerable uncertainty due to the pandemic. There was a lack of alternative funding sources and incomes for eNGOs and concerns that many jobs and organisations were at risk of being lost. So, any environmental and engagement outcomes that might have been delivered through alternative means in the future, would only have been possible if the eNGOs were able to survive this difficult period and retain jobs in the sector. For example, two of the stakeholders commented that:

> *"The timing was important here as the GRCF aimed to provide an emergency response to the pandemic. It is hard to say if projects would have gone ahead, but if they had been delivered without GRCF, it wouldn't have been for a while and would not have met the objective of responding urgently to the pandemic."*

> *"We had been told that charities would fail due to having no money coming through the door. They had no-one visiting sites, cafes and gift shops to spend money and funding programmes had closed. So there was a real gap and we were warned that charities would go out of business if nothing was done."*

These views were also shared by the projects, who highlighted the lack of alternative funding options at the time of the GRCF Round 1:

> *"Some of the work might have been undertaken but this would have been unlikely until a long time in the future. At the time, there were no other sources of funding for this work."*

Several projects and stakeholders also described the different ways in which the pandemic had influenced the GRCF programme. On one hand, the pandemic had caused significant problems for the conservation sector, providing the rationale and leading to the development of the GRCF in the first place. On the other, the pandemic had been a positive reinforcer of the programme, particularly in terms of driving increased public interest and engagement in nature and outdoor spaces, and creating positive attitudes, togetherness and strong partnerships within projects and a strong desire to overcome the challenges, thereby supporting the delivery of outcomes by Round 1 projects. Furthermore, some projects also reported additional catalytic effects of the GRCF funding, in terms of increasing awareness of organisations and their activities and leading to additional opportunities and outcomes. For example, one project reported that:

"Some of our sites might have secured alternative funding, but not all of them, and it would have taken a lot longer. The GRCF funding also definitely had a catalyst effect – and was a turning point for us – we were still at a very early stage before the GRCF project, which has helped generate huge interest in what we do."

4.3 Ensuring the longer-term legacy of projects

The GRCF Round 1 was a short-term funding scheme, providing grants lasting for a period of approximately 18 months, although this varied slightly between projects depending on whether they were extended. However, many of the targeted outcomes of the funded projects will take far longer to materialise, particularly those relating to ecosystem restoration and nature-based solution themes. For example, newly created habitats take time to become established and develop, habitat condition may take years to improve following restoration works, species will take time to respond to conservation actions, and trees and vegetation take time to grow, store carbon and absorb water. Similarly, some of the outcomes for engaging people with nature are likely to emerge beyond the end of the Round 1 programme, for example, as visitor numbers to enhanced woodlands increase over time, or as people's appreciation of and engagement with the natural world continues to develop.

One of the key risks of the GRCF programme, highlighted through interviews with stakeholders, has been the extent to which the GRCF programme can deliver a long-term legacy given the mismatch between the short-term nature of the funding and the longer-term time horizons necessary to achieve environmental and other outcomes. This risk has been recognised throughout the development and delivery of the GRCF programme and was considered a necessary trade-off between balancing the emergency funding required for the short-term effects of the pandemic with longer-term, strategic environmental objectives. The design of the GRCF programme has also made efforts to mitigate these risks by requiring Round 1 projects to produce long-term plans to support longer-term legacy effects.

This section considers the long-term legacy of the GRCF, including the extent to which projects have developed plans to ensure it is fulfilled, and the associated risks and challenges.

4.3.1 Overall view

Most Round 1 projects have either developed, or are developing, post-project plans to ensure their long-term legacy is delivered. The plans involve a range of approaches including securing additional funding from public and private sources, subsuming activities as part of the ongoing activities of lead and partner organisations, developing volunteer networks and empowering community groups, and developing new revenue streams, social enterprises, etc. for activities to become self-perpetuating. Projects described securing additional funding as being the main precondition and risk to the long-term legacy of projects. Other common preconditions and risks were identified, associated with: the ongoing engagement of stakeholders, landowners, partners, volunteers and visitors; and natural processes including weather conditions and climate change.

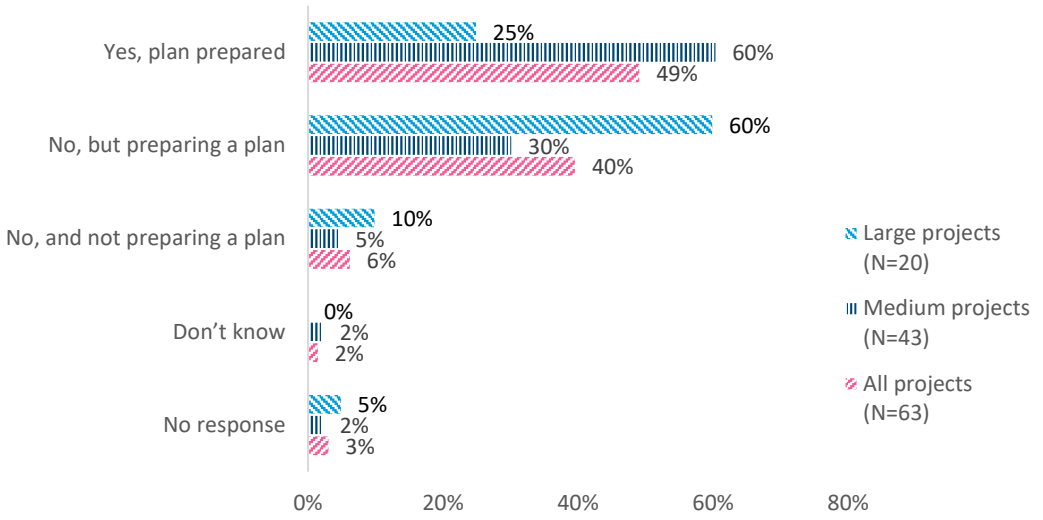
4.3.2 Legacy planning

At the time of the final survey in July/August 2022, the **large majority of Round 1 projects had either developed (49%), or were developing (40%), a post-project plan** (Figure 4.4). These findings were similar to the interim survey in 2021, when projects were split evenly between those who had developed a plan and those who were developing a plan. One small change between the surveys was the number of projects that were not intending to develop a post-project plan, which increased slightly from one project in 2021 (2% of respondents), to four projects in the final survey (6% of respondents). The changes between the interim and final surveys were not significant and could be explained by the higher response rate and coverage for the final survey but may also reflect some projects delaying or postponing the development of project plans due to a lack of time and resources on completion of the project. For example, one of the projects not intending to develop a plan stated that they were intending to continue monitoring the outcomes of their activities but needed to minimise costs. They did expect to develop and build on their GRCF activities in the future and intended to develop plans for this in due course but did not feel it was necessary at this stage.

However, most other projects had already begun preparing post-project plans. These plans tended to focus on two key areas. The first was the continuation or development of activities that had been delivered by the GRCF project. Some projects reported that their plans focused on the continuation of activities, such as continuing to deliver social prescribing activities or other activities to engage visitors with nature, while other projects were planning to develop and build on the activities of their GRCF project, for example by extending activities to restore new habitats and new sites. The second key area involved ongoing monitoring activities, to collate evidence of the outcomes and impacts of activities delivered by the GRCF project. Project plans also covered the timescales of future activities and aimed to establish how these future activities could be resourced (e.g. by subsuming activities within lead and partner organisations, developing new revenue streams, and/or securing additional sources of funding and volunteer time). For example, one project reported going through a major restructuring process at the end of the GRCF funding period, going back to their core aims, priorities and the key actions that needed to be delivered. It had reviewed all inputs and outputs to establish what needed paid staff, what needed volunteers and what staff needed to be retained and recruited.

The likelihood of preparing post-project plans was found to be broadly similar across different types of project. Those focusing on habitat restoration, tree-planting, invasive species and people engagement were more likely to have developed or were planning to develop a post project plan, compared to those projects that had focused on species conservation and those with wide-ranging objectives. There were larger differences in the preparation of post-project plans by size of project. Medium-sized projects were much more likely to have already prepared a post-project plan at the time of the final survey in July/August 2022 (60% of medium-sized projects had developed a plan compared to 25% of large projects). Large projects were more likely to still be developing plans (60% compared to 30% for medium-sized projects), or not intending to prepare a plan (10% compared to 5% for medium-sized projects).

Figure 4.4 Extent to which projects have developed post-project plans to ensure long-term legacy, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Examples of legacy plans were discussed in interviews with projects and highlighted a number of different routes being pursued, some of which (social enterprise, corporate partnerships, new revenue streams and community empowerment) are models that are intended to self-perpetuate. Examples of plans included:

- **Business as Usual (BaU) operations**: In many cases, the lead eNGO and/or partner organisations will continue to play an active role in monitoring sites and/or undertaking ongoing environmental/infrastructure management activities, subsumed as part of their BaU operations. For example, one project reported:

  "We have money from our reserves to fund ongoing activities, which will not cost as much as the GRCF project because the big capital items have already been paid for."

- **Additional funding**: As discussed elsewhere, most projects have identified future funding as a precondition of their legacy planning and most projects had already secured at least some of the funding required. Examples included:

  "We are planning to build on the GRCF project, showcasing the work we have done, and extending it to deliver work over a wider area, although this is dependent on securing additional funding."

  "We have plans to extend the project to other stretches of the river and apply the same model. These are all dependent on additional funding but we developed detailed 'bid-ready' plans under the GRCF project for the other areas that were not able to be delivered under the project."

- **Contractual agreements**: Some projects have put agreements in place obliging landowners to deliver the required management over the medium-to-long term (e.g. 10 years), which were attached to the provision of GRCF funding.

- **Volunteer networks**: Many projects are planning to use volunteers trained and engaged in implementing the GRCF funded actions, to continue to provide ongoing activity to maintain sites, monitor progress, deliver engagement events or other activities.

  "Our management plan will be taken forward with the support of volunteers. In the future the community group will be doing the main maintenance."

- **Empowerment of groups**: Some projects have empowered volunteers and community groups to act as champions and organise their own events and seek their own funding for future activities, to independently continue to deliver GRCF-themed actions.

- **Corporate partnerships**: One project is funding additional activities through corporate partnerships. Earthwatch, the lead organisation for the Tiny Forests project, is a project-orientated organisation funded by income from corporate partnerships. They reported that their future development is dependent on securing additional corporate sponsors to support ongoing activities including monitoring and community engagement:

  "Corporate funding is usually provided for two-year cycles – and we are now looking at opportunities to fund ongoing maintenance and community engagement activities to nurture our existing network of forests, as well as planting new ones."

- **Social enterprise**: One project is establishing a social enterprise to manage the site. A tree nursery within the site will provide saplings to support UK tree planting goals, the sale of which will fund the social enterprise enabling them to manage the whole site as well as offer training and employment opportunities for people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- **Generating revenue streams**: Another project has generated a revenue stream by developing a commercial wellbeing offer as part of their GRCF project. They provide services to businesses to support the wellbeing of their staff, charging fees that generate income that can be redirected to fund other activities.

Most of the above examples of legacy plans were also identified during the Phase 2 interim evaluation, which suggests that the core focus and structure of plans had not changed over this period. However, the final survey and interviews did identify some additional examples of projects developing self-perpetuating models to fund their own future activities, for example by securing corporate partnerships or generating additional revenues from commercial services.

The final evaluation also found that many projects had developed, or were developing, hybrid plans that combine the above approaches. For example, some projects intend to empower communities and use volunteers to continue delivering activities and undertake monitoring, whilst also seeking to secure additional funding to expand their activities.

4.3.3 Preconditions and risks for the long-term legacy of projects

The two most common preconditions for the legacy of GRCF projects were the ongoing support of key stakeholders and the availability of future funding. These were listed as preconditions for legacy by 59% and 57% of projects

responding to the final survey, respectively (Figure 4.5), and were also discussed in many of the interviews with projects:

> *"Funding is key. Some things would still happen without funding, but we would not be able to do them to the same extent."*

> *"We worked with lots of organisations and will keep needing their support. The problem with short-term contracts is that it takes about a year to become a trusted partner and build referral systems."*

> *"The most important thing is to keep recruiting councils to the project. This should happen given the success of the project, which has created momentum and interest and we expect more councils to come forward."*

The survey findings also suggested that the ongoing support of stakeholders was the most common precondition mentioned by large projects, while medium-sized projects were most likely to mention the need for additional funding.

Other common preconditions for long-term legacy included volunteer time and integration with other projects (both listed by 35% of GRCF projects), and **continued interest of visitors and/or the public** (mentioned by 32% of projects). The survey found that integration with other projects was much more likely to be a precondition of legacy for large projects, while medium-sized projects were more likely to highlight the importance of volunteer time:

> *"If we didn't have volunteers [to continue to deliver activities], the new habitats would not survive."*

Some of the other preconditions for legacy described by projects included:

- The **retention and additional recruitment of staff** to deliver the ongoing project activities.
- The **commitment of landowners** to continue supporting and maintaining the benefits of project activities on their sites in the future:

  > *"Long-term legacy and benefits can only be maximised with ongoing support of the landowners to continue to follow their new behaviours and land management plans to support the conservation improvements."*

- **Building new relationships with landowners**, to expand activities to new sites.
- The **availability of skilled contractors** to support and help deliver activities.

  > *"It can be difficult to find good contractors with availability because everyone is after the same contractors."*

- The **future delivery of agri-environment schemes** (to support activities alongside other funding sources).

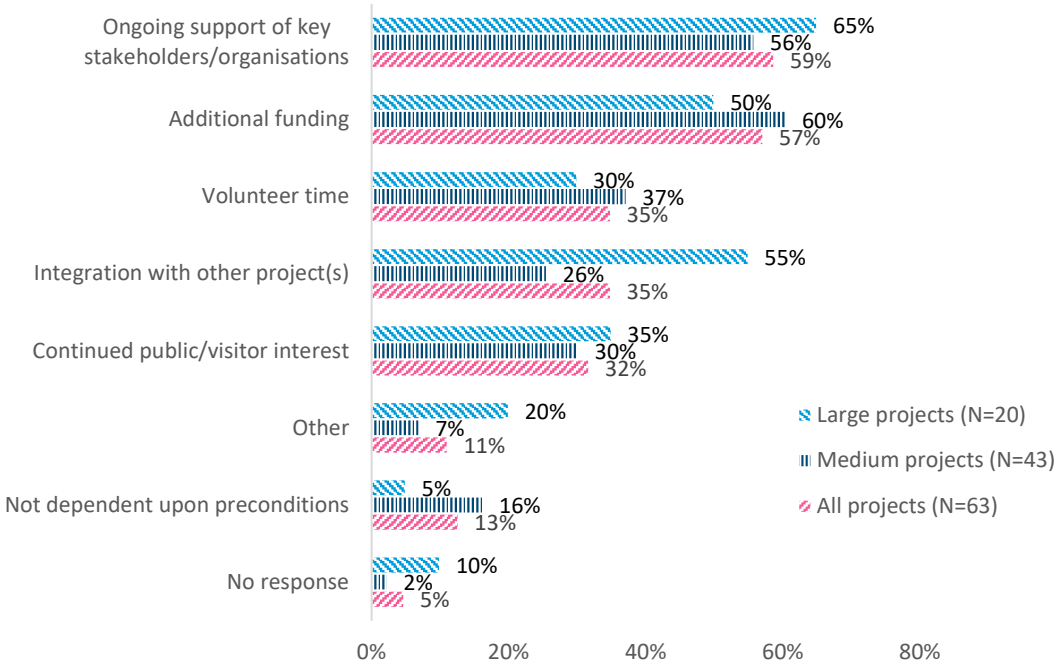
  > *"The ongoing management of the grazing unit will be through agri-environmental schemes and land owners' contributions. With the transition from Countryside Stewardship to ELM (Environmental Land Management) schemes, this should be the main source of maintenance funding."*

Only a minority of projects (13%) did not think the legacy of their project was dependent on any preconditions, accounting for 16% of medium-sized projects and only 5% of large projects.

The final survey also asked projects whether their post-project plans had considered or would consider the legacy preconditions they had listed. This question received

responses from 25 projects, of which 23 suggested that their post-project plans had considered, or would consider, all of the preconditions they had identified. For the other two projects, the legacy preconditions not considered in their post-project plans were volunteer inputs for one project, and additional funding and ongoing support from key stakeholders for the other project.

Figure 4.5 Preconditions for the long-term legacy of GRCF Round 1 projects, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

The most common risk to the long-term legacy of projects was that of failing to secure additional funding. This was listed as a risk by 60% of Round 1 projects in to the final survey, while around half of projects (48%) also suggested that future landowner engagement and action was a risk for the legacy of their projects (Figure 4.6). These risks were also highlighted during the interviews with projects:

> *"There is a risk that all the work funded through the GRCF could just stop, which is why we absolutely need additional funding."*
>
> *"There are always risks because we don't own these rivers. If landowners choose not to allow us to do this, it could be a huge issue. We don't have control over that. We are mitigating this by keeping positive relationships and communications and making it clear that we understand the benefits that landowners want and need and will work with them to achieve it."*

The other main risks identified in the survey fall into two groups:

- **Weather conditions and climate change** (reported as a risk by 38% of projects) or the **natural processes required to deliver restoration outcomes** (33% of projects). The project interviews identified similar issues. For example, several projects described risks associated with summer droughts and winter storms:

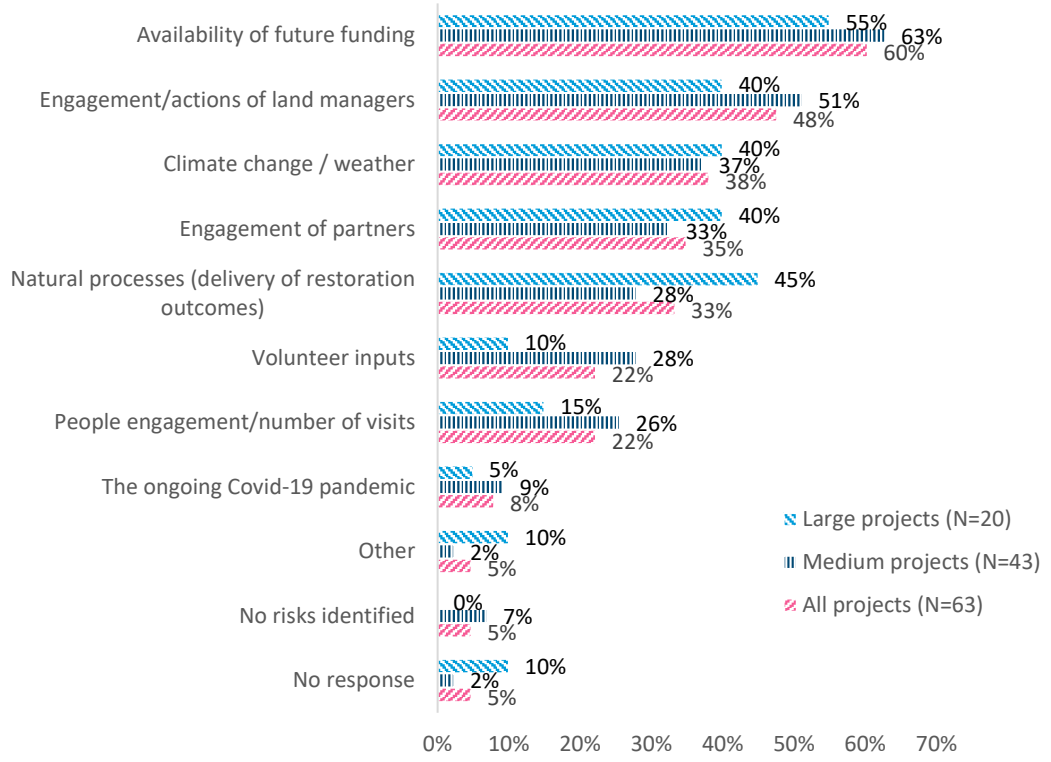
"If we were to receive another easterly storm, like the 'Beast from the East', that could cause significant problems. However the new habitat has grown so well this summer that it might be fine anyway."

- The **future engagement of partners** (reported by 35% of projects), **volunteers** (22% of projects) or **visitors and the public** (22% of projects):

  "The biggest risk is not being able to engage people and volunteers into the woodland. We need new people on board and also need more people trained."

The results also suggest some differences by project size with large projects relatively likely to mention risks relating to partner engagement, weather conditions, climate change and natural processes. In contrast, medium-sized projects were more likely to mention risks associated with the availability of funding and the engagement of land managers, volunteers, visitors and the public.

Figure 4.6 Risks to the long-term legacy of GRCF Round 1 projects, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

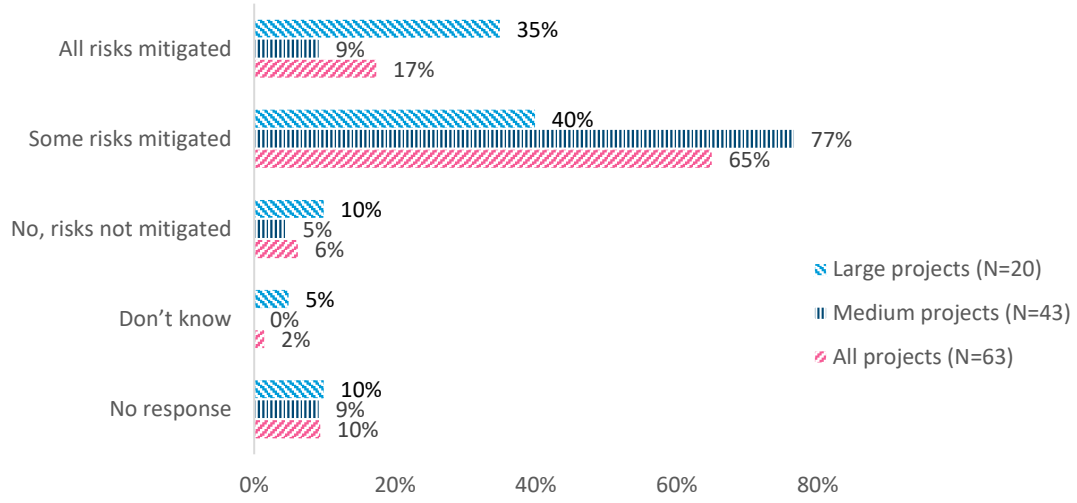
The survey also asked if projects had taken steps to mitigate the risks to their long-term legacy. Figure 4.7 shows that most projects (65%) reported that they had mitigated some of these risks, while 17% felt they had mitigated all risks. Only 6% of projects said they had not mitigated for any of these risks. The survey found that large projects were more likely to have mitigated all risks (35% of all large projects) but were also more likely to have not mitigated for any risks (10% of large projects), compared to the medium-sized projects.

It was also possible to compare the likelihood of mitigating risks against the type of risk to identify the risks that appear most difficult to mitigate, which included:

- Climate change and weather conditions.
- Availability of funding.

- Natural processes (delivery of restoration outcomes).
- Volunteer inputs.

Figure 4.7 Mitigation of risks to the long-term legacy of GRCF Round 1 projects, by project size



Source: ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

4.3.4 Future monitoring and evaluation activities

Most of the post-project plans cover ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities. Some projects described how they are already undertaking monitoring activities to check progress with conservation of habitats and species and the condition and growth of trees planted by projects (comparing against baselines created during the GRCF project period). However, a minority of projects suggested that there was unlikely to be any further monitoring activity in the absence of further planned interventions or funding. Another project described how ongoing monitoring would be difficult because they had not had time to create a baseline during the GRCF project but had now developed a plan to establish a baseline and implement future monitoring activities.

In most cases, monitoring and evaluation activities were expected to continue but, as with the ongoing project activities described above, these were likely to be dependent on a variety of factors including:

- The ability and willingness of lead and partner organisations to continue monitoring and evaluating sites as **part of their Business as Usual (BaU) activities**: For example, one project reported that: *"We will continue to monitor outcomes and impacts in the short-term. This is not dependent on additional funding but will be fairly light-touch – maybe a couple of visits in the next year. We are doing this work as it is in our own interest to be able to provide evidence of what we have done and continue to learn from the work."*
- **Additional finance**: In many cases the level of additional monitoring activity was likely to be influenced by the availability of additional funding. For example, one project stated that: *"We will continue to monitor but the level of monitoring will be subject to financial capacity. Some of the work can be internally funded but that's not much, so we are going to be dependent in external funding for major monitoring activities."*

Some projects had already secured additional funding and were progressing with their monitoring and evaluation plans: “We have secured some additional funding that has enabled us to go back to each site and run additional events to collect additional data. At the end of the year we will publish a research report covering our first two years of monitoring data across the whole network, including the GRCF funded sites.”

- **Volunteer inputs**: Many projects were planning to use volunteers to undertake ongoing monitoring activities. For example:

  “We have a team of volunteers trained by the GRCF project. They will continue to deliver the citizen science training, continue the monitoring activities, and continue to recruit and train additional volunteers to ensure the basic work continues. We would also like to undertake more comprehensive monitoring work over a wider area, particularly in relation to the natural flood management works, but this requires additional funding.”

  “Having such a large network of sites means it is no longer feasible for our team to visit them all and collect monitoring data. Instead we intend to use a more devolved method where monitoring data is collected by the volunteers. We will also run ‘science weeks’ which encourage sites to run their own events during that week, or they can just undertake their own monitoring activities at other times. Most of the equipment needed for monitoring is fairly basic, including information sheets to support biodiversity monitoring, a tape measure for measuring tree size to estimate carbon outcomes. Monitoring thermal comfort is a bit more complex and requires a weather station but we loan these out to the sites.”

- **Continued engagement and support from landowners** – One project reported including ongoing monitoring requirements as part of the GRCF funding offer for landowners. They agreed to provide follow up information over the coming years to monitor progress. They plan to undertake a short annual survey of landowners via email to monitor progress.

5 Value for money (VfM) evaluation: GRCF value for money

5.1 Introduction

This section considers whether the GRCF provided good value for money, taking account of its impacts compared to the resources invested. It also considers the cost effectiveness of GRCF funded projects in delivering their outputs and outcomes, although the ability to develop common metrics for comparison has been restricted to some extent by the breadth of different activities and outputs delivered by GRCF projects. It also considers perceptions of value for money of GRCF activities and the programme as a whole and the extent to which GRCF processes have supported value for money.

5.2 The resources used by the programme

5.2.1 Overall view

Total grants of £37.8 million were awarded to GRCF Round 1 projects. Forty-seven projects (out of 69) were awarded 'medium sized' grants of between £50,000 and £250,000 and 22 were awarded 'large grants' of between £250,000 and £5 million. The large projects accounted for 76% (£28.6 million) of the total grant value, with 24% (£9.2 million) awarded to medium-sized projects. Projects were not required to secure match funding but reported securing £6.5million in additional income and in-kind contributions (17% of the grant total), which increased the overall budget of the Round 1 projects to £44.3 million.

The GRCF payment data show some underspend amongst projects with actual payments totalling £36.1 million (at March 2023), which represents 96% of the grant values. The underspend was consistent across both large and medium-sized projects (95-96% of the budget for each) and was mainly caused by delays that prevented some activities from being delivered within the programme period. However, this underspend is likely to have been offset by the additional volunteer inputs and in-kind contributions that were not recorded in these figures but were reported by projects to be significant.

5.2.2 GRCF grants

Total grants of £37,778,400 were awarded to projects in GRCF Round 1. The grants varied in size from the smallest grant of £62,600 to the largest grant of £3,860,200. A total of 69 grants were awarded in Round 1 with a mean average of approximately £550,000, while the median awarded grant was £247,800. Forty-seven projects were awarded 'medium sized' grants of up to £250,000 and 22 were awarded 'large grants' of between £250,000 and £3,860,200. Large projects received a total balance of £28.6 million in funding from the GRCF (76% of the total), while medium projects received £9.2 million (24%).

Table 5.1 shows the distribution of grant values across large and medium projects. It also shows the payments made to projects up to March 2023, which totalled £36.1

million, representing 96% of the total grant values, and this was consistent across large and medium-sized projects[18].

In total, 41 of the 69 projects (59%) had not received their full grant by March 2023[19]. For most projects the underspend was relatively small but there were 11 projects where it exceeded 10% of the grant value, including two projects that had not spent around a third of their grant, and two projects that had spent less than half their grant (although this included the delayed project, due to end in March 2023). Much of the underspend was concentrated amongst the larger projects, around three-quarters (77%) of which had not spent their full grant by September 2022, compared to around half (53%) of the medium-sized projects. By far the most common reason for projects not spending their full grant was because of delays to their activities. These delays were mostly caused by COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, although some were caused by other issues like difficulties obtaining landowner consents, and meant it was not always possible to deliver all of the intended activities within the relatively short programme period.

Table 5.1 Grants awarded and payments made by project size

Grants and payments	Large projects (N=22)	Medium projects (N=47)	All projects (N=69)
Total grants awarded	£28.6m	£9.2m	**£37.8m**
Total payments made (at March 2023)	£27.4m	£8.7m	**£36.1m**
% of grant paid (at March 2023)	96%	95%	**96%**

Source: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database

5.2.3 Funding from other sources

Two-thirds of the GRCF projects (64%) had also secured some degree of match funding. The match funding was estimated to total more than £6.5 million, which increased the overall budget for the 69 projects to £44.3 million. This level of match-funding is relatively low at 17% of the GRCF grant but is likely to be due to the rapid launch of the programme, which allowed relatively little time for additional fund raising, while there was no specific requirement for Round 1 projects to secure match-funding.

Most of the match-funding (60%) was secured by only four projects, each of which secured more than £0.8 million:

- Restoring Enfield's Rivers and Connecting Communities (led by the London Borough of Enfield) – match funding of £1,201,500 (64% of the project value).
- Realising Greater Manchester's Environmental Ambitions (led by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust) - £960,200 (34%).
- Delivering nature-rich historic landscapes, resilient to climate change (led by the National Trust) - £931,175 (19%).
- Ancient woods and trees – delivering landscape recovery and ecological resilience (led by the Woodland Trust) - £804,430 (17%).

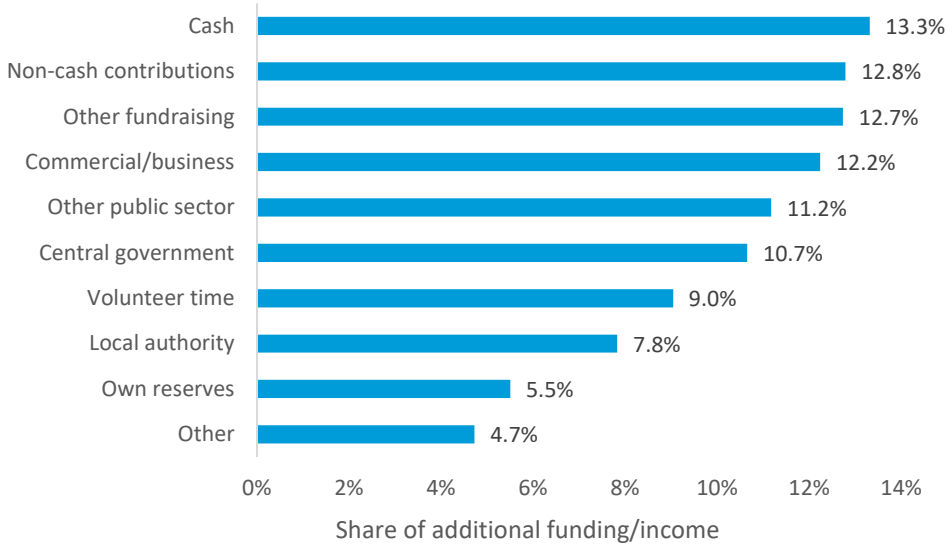
[18] The total payments figure may increase after March 2023 due to additional claims from the delayed project.

[19] The 41 projects include 40 projects that did not draw down their full grant and the delayed project that had not yet closed.

The 'Restoring Enfield's Rivers and Connecting Communities' project was one of two projects that secured match-funding of greater value than their GRCF grant. The other was the 'Cumbria Peatland Restoration' project that secured additional income of almost £292,000, on top of their GRCF grant of £249,500.

Figure 5.1 shows that match-funding for GRCF Round 1 projects was spread relatively evenly across a range of different sources including cash and non-cash contributions and other fundraising, commercial contributions, central government, local authorities and other public sector sources and volunteer time.

Figure 5.1 Sources of additional funding/income for GRCF Round 1 projects



Source: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database

The results of the survey and interviews with GRCF projects also indicate that the value of in-kind contributions to GRCF Round 1 projects was significantly higher than the above figures suggest.

For example, the above figures include £592,000 of volunteer inputs, although this is based on values of volunteer time provided by only seven of the 69 projects[20]. In comparison, the final survey found that 84% of Round 1 projects (i.e. 53 of the 63 projects that responded to the survey) had benefited from volunteer support. Estimates of volunteer time inputs were provided by 33 of the projects that responded to the survey and totalled 255,000 volunteer hours. Applying a conservative estimate of volunteer time of £10 per hour[21], provides an estimated minimum value of volunteer inputs of £2.55 million. This estimate is four times larger than the above estimate of £592,000, while the actual total is likely to be considerably higher given that many projects did not respond to the survey and/or did not provide estimates of volunteer time. There is also likely to be additional

[20] Round 1 GRCF projects were not required to provide estimates of volunteer time as additional/match funding (because it is a non-cash contribution), but these seven projects still submitted data. This therefore provides an example where the analysis of The Heritage Fund grants database will under-state the actual value of in-kind contributions for GRCF projects. Round 1 projects were required to provide data on volunteer time as part of their project completion reports but this was not provided in a format that could be extracted and analysed in bulk.

[21] A rate of £10 per hour is consistent with notes provided by two of the Round 1 projects that stated that their estimates of volunteer inputs were based on an hourly rate of £10 per hour in one case, while the other had assumed day rates of between £50 and £100 per hour depending on the activity undertaken.

volunteer time that projects were unable to quantify. For example, one project reported that:

> *"Some partners would have used some volunteer time from schools, Brownies, etc. but this information has not been captured."*

The interviews with projects also identified examples of projects that had benefited from additional in-kind contributions that had not been foreseen or included within budgets at the outset. Examples included unbudgeted time inputs of partners, stakeholders or additional time of GRCF project staff and colleagues. Some examples are provided below:

> *"The contribution from partners was significant. I would say it would add another £50,000 that hasn't been recorded."*
>
> *"Many hours were spent talking to landowners and their time could be considered an additional contribution to the project."*
>
> *"We have undercharged for my time on this project – I put in a lot of my own time, over and above what had been budgeted. The project also used a lot of colleagues' time, which was not funded either."*
>
> *"The time of local authority partners was not costed but they put a lot of time into the project, coming to planting days, helping with advertising and promotion, and helping the project to connect with local community groups. It is really hard to measure as it varied between the sites but must have been significant."*

5.3 Cost effectiveness

This section considers the cost effectiveness of GRCF Round 1 projects and their activities. It examines each of the objectives of GRCF and the relevant outputs and outcomes that have been delivered, alongside data on the costs of delivering the associated activities, in order to assess cost effectiveness and value for money.

In general, cost effectiveness analysis (CEA) is suited to projects for which the costs of delivering a single main output or outcome can be quantified. This enables a calculation of cost per unit of output or outcome, which can then be compared between projects. CEA is less suited to programmes like the GRCF, as most projects have delivered multiple outputs and outcomes across multiple objectives and have used a variety of different metrics to measure outputs. This restricts the feasibility of calculating meaningful unit costs for comparison.

It has therefore not been possible to undertake CEA for the GRCF portfolio as a whole. However, CEA has been possible to some extent, by:

- Comparing the cost effectiveness of subsets of projects with a similar focus and similar outcomes and metrics; and
- Segmenting the costs of delivering individual outcomes where possible, to enable unit costs to be calculated.

The following analysis considers the extent to which it has been possible to undertake CEA for key outputs and outcomes associated with subsets of projects based around different GRCF objectives and activities. A typology was developed to segment projects across GRCF objectives. The analysis draws on: cost information provided by GRCF projects in their applications; monitoring data submitted during and on completion of the programme; and findings from the surveys and interviews undertaken with projects.

5.3.1 Overall view

It was not possible to undertake CEA across the GRCF portfolio as a whole due to the breadth of different projects, activities and outputs delivered by the GRCF Round 1 projects. The CEA has therefore focused on comparisons between subsets of projects delivering similar activities and outputs, and where it was possible to segment costs to identify those relating to each type of activity.

The results of the CEA suggest unit costs of habitat restoration activities of approximately £340 per hectare of land benefiting directly and £260 per hectare when indirect benefits are also included over a larger area. These figures refer to habitat creation and restoration activities but do not include any of the areas that were excluded from the analysis in Section 3. Nevertheless, these costs appear very low for the full restoration of habitats and should be treated with caution as the areas quoted by other projects may not always be directly linked to the measured restoration outcome (i.e. they may represent the total area in which restoration activity was undertaken rather than focusing exclusively on the specific area being restored). The CEA found considerable variation between the unit costs associated with different projects. The unit costs estimated for restoring seagrass, wetland, peatland and meadow habitats appear most realistic, ranging between £1,000 and £5,000 per hectare, and are within the ranges expected for these types of restoration activity[22].

There was also considerable variation in the unit costs of delivering activities to engage people with nature depending on the type of activity. Projects focusing on the delivery of in-person activities were found to have average costs of approximately £1,000 per event and £100 per person engaged. However, when looking across all projects, the addition of online and communications and media activities significantly increases the numbers of people engaged, resulting in a much lower average cost of £0.35 per person engaged, while the cost per event is slightly higher at £1,200.

The unit costs of tree-planting were estimated to be £5 per tree, averaged across more than 1 million trees planted by the GRCF projects, although there was variation between projects depending on the number and type of trees and their location (e.g. urban versus rural sites). The projects targeting invasive species were found to have very low unit costs of up to £3.20 per hectare. These estimates are very low and reflect the relatively small-scale activities undertaken across the very large areas of land covered by these projects.

The Round 1 projects are estimated to have spent £13.4 million on staff costs. This has temporarily supported 473 FTE jobs during the 18-month programme period, which represents a total of 710 job years. The average staff costs equate to approximately £30,000 per FTE and around £20,000 per job year. The projects have also reported retaining 311 FTEs beyond the end of the programme, which represents an average staff cost of approximately £46,000 per retained FTE.

[22] Source: ICF and Eftec (2021). Costs and Benefits of England's Biodiversity Ambition.

ICF and Eftec were commissioned by Defra to undertake this research and estimate representative unit costs for restoring different priority habitats, which ranged from £200 to £4,900 per hectare. The unit costs estimated in this section for GRCF projects were found to fall within the specific ranges identified for the restoration of seagrass, wetland, peatland and meadow habitats, but appear relatively low for the restoration of some other habitats (e.g. for woodland, grassland and for mixed lowland and upland habitats).

5.3.2 Projects mainly focused on habitat restoration

Twenty of the GRCF Round 1 projects had a primary focus on habitat restoration. Some of these projects also targeted the delivery of nature-based solutions (e.g. improvements in carbon sequestration, water quality, flood prevention, etc.), though in all cases the delivery of these outcomes occurred as a result of the restoration/ creation of a natural capital asset. Most of these projects also included activities targeted at engaging people with nature (e.g. involving volunteers in restoration work, engaging farmers, communications and awareness raising), but the primary focus of each project was on habitat restoration.

This group of projects was assessed to identify those focusing on similar types of habitats, applying similar restoration measures and reporting similar metrics. The assessment also considered the extent to which project costs could be disaggregated to identify those relating to habitat restoration. While the cost categories in the central cost database were not considered able to provide a close match for habitat restoration activities, the responses to the survey could be used to identify the proportion of project costs that focused on habitat conservation activities. This analysis found there was sufficient data available to estimate unit costs for the habitat restoration activities of 15 of the 20 projects that mainly focused on habitat restoration, plus one of the 'multi-objective' projects that had delivered activities targeting the restoration of grassland.

Unit costs for the habitat restoration activities of these 16 projects are presented below in Table 5.2 and described in the following sections. The overall cost of these 16 projects was estimated to total £15.5 million, of which £9.5 million (61%) was allocated to habitat conservation activities. Disaggregating the £9.5 million across the corresponding areas of land, suggests unit costs of £343 per hectare of land directly benefiting from the activities of these 16 GRCF projects and £256 per hectare of land benefiting in total (directly and indirectly).

These figures are relatively low for habitat restoration activities and the evidence suggests a very wide range of unit costs between projects. The following sections provide comparisons against representative unit costs for restoring different types of habitat. In summary, the higher unit costs (such as those estimated for restoring seagrass, wetland, peatland and meadow habitats) appear more realistic and within the ranges expected for these types of restoration activity, while the unit costs for the other habitats appear relatively low. While this analysis does not include the four largest sites described in Section 3.3, it is likely that the low unit costs reflect less intensive restoration activity and/or activities undertaken across part of the reported areas. Further details are provided below for projects focusing on each type of habitat.

Table 5.2 Cost effectiveness of GRCF activities focused on habitat restoration

Type of habitat	Number of projects	Direct area of habitat restoration (hectares)	Total: direct + indirect area of restoration (hectares)	Total project cost (£m)	Conser-vation costs (£m)	Direct unit cost per hectare (£)	Total: direct + indirect unit cost per hectare (£)
Meadow	2	293	376	£1.05m	£0.42m	£1,434	£1,118
Peatland	2	357	485	£0.78m	£0.73m	£2,040	£1,504
Woodland	2	18,343	18,608	£4.84m	£4.52m	£246	£243
Mixed lowland	5	7,825	16,519	£6.03m	£2.66m	£340	£161
Seagrass	1	40.9	40.9	£0.25m	£0.19m	£4,584	£4,584
Wetland	1	189.0	304.0	£1.58m	£0.53m	£2,792	£1,736
Mixed upland	1	352	352	£0.53m	£0.25m	£704	£704
Rivers	1	1.5	103	£0.14m	£0.07m	£47,035	£685
Grassland	1	120	120	£0.30m	£0.09m	£745	£745
Total	**16**	**27,522**	**36,908**	**£15.5m**	**£9.5m**	**£343**	**£256**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

5.3.2.2 Meadow restoration projects

The unit costs for the two projects focused on meadow restoration were estimated to be approximately £1,400 per hectare of land directly benefiting from the restoration activities, and £1,100 per hectare when also including land that benefits indirectly. The two projects had delivered a similar range of activities including surveys and analysis, site clearance and preparation, and seeding and planting to create and restore meadows. The main difference between the two projects was the scale of their activities, expenditures and the areas expected to benefit.

Their unit costs were estimated to be between £1,300 and £2,650 per hectare of land directly benefiting from the restoration activities, and between £1,000 and £1,800 when adding areas that benefit indirectly. Given the similar nature and activities delivered by the two projects, it is likely that the lower unit costs are due to the greater economies of scale associated with the larger of the two projects. These unit costs are comparable to other costs previously identified for the meadow restoration (i.e. representative unit costs of £1,500 per hectare for restoring lowland meadows and £1,688 per hectare for upland hay meadows)[23].

5.3.2.3 Peatland restoration projects

The two projects focused on peatland restoration had also delivered similar activities associated with the restoration of blanket bog habitat. The main difference between the projects was again the different scale of their activities.

However, the results of the CEA suggested very different unit costs when only considering the land directly benefiting from the restoration activities, ranging from £1,500 to £12,400 per hectare, with an average of just over £2,000 across both projects. In contrast, when indirect benefits are also included, the unit costs across the total area benefiting from peatland restoration activities are estimated to be the

[23] Source: ICF and Eftec (2021). Costs and Benefits of England's Biodiversity Ambition.

same for both projects, at approximately £1,500 per hectare. These unit costs are also within the ranges expected for peatland restoration with representative unit costs ranging from £1,430 per hectare for restoring blanket bog to £4,369 per hectare for restoring upland raised bog[24].

5.3.2.4 Woodland restoration projects

The analysis also identified two projects focused mainly on the restoration of woodland, although the nature and scale of their activities was very different:

- One project was focused on restoring and protecting ancient and veteran trees (AVT). It included a range of different restoration activities across a wide area and a large number of different sites.
- The other project had focused on the creation and restoration of woodland and the maintenance of previously created woodland on a much smaller area of land on a single site.

Despite the differences in the scale of these activities, both projects reported that benefits were concentrated on the immediate area of restoration activities, while their unit cost estimates were also similar at between £240 and £270 per hectare. These unit costs are relatively low compared to some of the other habitat restoration costs, which is likely to reflect the focus of the AVT project on individual trees within the habitat, rather than restoring the whole habitat in this area, while the costs of maintaining previously created woodland are likely to have reduced the unit cost estimates for the smaller project. The unit cost estimates are also relatively low compared to other evidence of the costs of woodland restoration (e.g. representative unit costs for the restoration of deciduous woodland of £4,405 per hectare)[25].

5.3.2.5 Projects restoring mixed lowland habitats

While not strictly focusing on a specific habitat, the analysis identified five projects that shared similar activities aimed at restoring different lowland habitats including grassland, woodland, heathland and wetlands. There are significant differences between the unit costs associated with the five projects. These range between £10 and £1,400 per hectare for land directly benefiting, and between £10 and £480 per hectare for all land benefiting directly and indirectly.

The large differences in costs should be treated with caution as this is again likely to be due to relatively small-scale restoration activities taking place on much larger sites for some of the projects, while there were also differences in the nature of activities being undertaken. For example, the three projects with the highest unit costs described a more comprehensive list of activities including habitat creation and restoration, control of invasive species, and site management and maintenance including the construction of leaky dams and other infrastructure. In contrast, the two projects with lower unit costs had focused on a narrower list of activities including surveys/monitoring, installation of fencing and the introduction of conservation grazing. The higher unit costs appear more comparable with other sources of evidence of restoration costs (e.g. representative unit costs range from between £1,012 per hectare for restoring lowland heathland to £2,797 per hectare for restoring lowland calcareous grassland)[26].

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

5.3.2.6 Other habitat restoration projects

The analysis also identified a further four projects that were mainly focused on habitat restoration, but for habitats that were not being targeted by any other GRCF projects of a comparable nature. These habitats and projects are described below:

- **Seagrass** – One project focusing on seagrass restoration had created a growing facility and delivered planting activities across two sites. The activities covered an area of 41 hectares at a relatively high unit cost of £4,600 per hectare. While it was not possible to identify comparable restoration unit costs for restoring seagrass, this figure is towards the high end of representative unit costs for restoring a range of different habitats[27].
- **Wetlands** – One project had focused on the creation and restoration of freshwater wetlands including natural flood management measures. Activities has been delivered across four sites and almost 200 hectares at another relatively high unit cost of £2,800 per hectare, while 304 hectares of wetlands were expected to benefit in total (including indirect benefits) at an overall unit cost of £1,700 per hectare. These unit costs are within the ranges expected for the restoration of wetlands with representative unit costs ranging from £1,430 per hectare for restoring upland fens flushes and swamps to £3,846 per hectare for restoring reedbeds[28].
- **Mixed upland habitats** – One project involved the creation and restoration of approximately 350 hectares of mixed upland habitats including woodland, grassland, rush pasture, blanket bog and rivers at a single site. The unit cost of these activities was £700 per hectare. This figure appears relatively low with representative unit costs for restoring similar habitats ranging from £1,178 per hectare for purple moor-grass and rush pastures to £4,405 per hectare for restoring deciduous woodland.
- **Rivers** – One project focused on the restoration of a section of river across two sites. Activities included the re-profiling of bends in the river, planting trees, installing fencing, and taking soil samples. The area of land directly benefiting from these activities was relatively small at 1.5 hectares, which suggested a very high unit cost of £47,000 per hectare. However, the project is also estimated to give rise to indirect benefits across a much larger area of more than 100 hectares with an overall unit cost of less than £700 per hectare. It was not possible to identify comparable representative unit costs for rivers.
- **Grassland** – It was also possible to disaggregate the costs and metrics of one 'multi-objective' project to focus only on activities relating to habitat restoration. The associated activities included the installation of a new perimeter fence and introduction of free-roaming cattle to graze the site and support the restoration of grassland and scrub on 120 hectares of former arable land, at a relatively low unit cost of £750 per hectare. This figure is at the low end of representative unit costs for restoring grassland which range from £788 per hectare for restoring upland calcareous grassland to £2,797 per hectare for restoring lowland calcareous grassland[29].

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

5.3.3 Projects mainly focused on tree planting

The GRCF projects that focused primarily on tree planting were particularly well suited to CEA because they all involved common activities (planting trees) and metrics (numbers of trees planted). Six projects were categorised as being mainly focused on tree planting, while the analysis also identified a further 20 Round 1 projects that had planted trees and for which the costs of tree-planting could be segmented using responses to the survey.

The results of the CEA are presented below in Table 5.3, which shows that these 26 Round 1 projects were expected to spend a total of £5.2 million on tree-planting activities and had planted more than 1 million trees at a unit cost of £4.99 per tree. This was consistent with the findings for the six projects that mainly or solely focused on tree-planting activities, which were estimated to spend almost £2 million on activities to plant 360,000 trees at a unit cost of £5.42 per tree.

However, there was variation in the unit costs for planting trees between individual projects, which ranged from less than £3 to almost £200 per tree. The highest unit costs were for projects that incorporated wider activities such as:

the development of a tree sponsorship scheme;

- the creation of a tree nursery to provide saplings for nature reserves as well as generating revenue through sales to the public or other organisations to fund future nature conservation work.

There were also differences in the unit costs of tree-planting in different locations. For example, some of the higher unit costs reflected differences in the complexities and additional preparation activities, ground works and infrastructure requirements associated with planting trees in urban areas compared to rural sites.

Table 5.3 Cost effectiveness of GRCF tree-planting activities

Type of project	Trees planted	Total project cost (£m)	Tree-planting costs (£m)	Unit cost per tree (£)
Six projects mainly focused on tree planting	360,617	£6.18m	£1.95m	£5.42
Another 20 projects that planted trees & could segment costs of tree-planting	678,206	£16.94m	£3.23m	£4.76
Total	**1,038,823**	**£23.13m**	**£5.18m**	**£4.99**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

5.3.4 Projects mainly focused on species conservation

Nine projects were identified as being primarily concerned with species conservation and the results of the survey enabled project costs to be segmented to focus exclusively on those relating to species conservation. However, an analysis of the nine projects identified highly variable activities and outputs both within and between the projects and a lack of common metrics to measure their outputs. This meant it was not possible to undertake CEA for projects mainly focused on species conservation.

5.3.5 Projects mainly focused on removing invasive alien species

Three of the GRCF Round 1 projects focused primarily on the control of invasive alien species including Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam, grey squirrel and European Mink. All three projects have recorded both the area directly covered by control measures and the wider area that benefits indirectly from those measures. This enables a cost per hectare to be calculated for both the area directly covered by control measures and the total area benefiting from these activities.

Table 5.4 shows that all three projects have been undertaking invasive species control measures across very large areas totalling 2.7 million hectares (including 39,000 hectares for the project controlling Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam, 168,000 hectares for the grey squirrel project and 2.5 million hectares for the European Mink project). The total areas, including areas benefiting indirectly, are much larger again, totalling 3.6 million hectares. While the combined costs of the control measures are also significant at £545,000, the large areas covered by the measures have resulted in relatively low unit costs per hectare of £0.20 for land directly benefiting from the measures and £0.15 for all land benefiting directly and indirectly. Results for the different types of invasive species are described below:

- Conservation costs for the project targeting Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam totalled £125,000 and covered the release of biocontrol agents for Japanese Knotweed, the application of biocontrol agents for Himalayan Balsam and subsequent testing and monitoring. This resulted in a unit cost of £3.20 per hectare for the area reported to have directly benefiting from measures and £0.50 per hectare for the total area benefiting. However, the actual treatment areas were much smaller than the reported areas of land and focusing exclusively on these areas would have generated much larger unit costs.
- The project controlling grey squirrel populations involved a range of activities including the installation of monitoring cameras, feeding stations, capture traps, high seats and alarm systems across eight different sites. The estimated cost of these measures was almost £200,000, which equated to a unit cost of £1.17 per hectare of land directly benefiting from measures and £0.59 per hectare for all land benefiting directly and indirectly.
- The costs for the project targeting the European Mink are particularly low, due to the very large areas expected to benefit from these activities, which include the four largest sites described in Section 3.3. The project aimed to be an exemplar for controlling invasive species on a large scale and activities focused on deploying hundreds of ‘smart’ traps, training volunteers to manage the traps, developing a database to record and monitor progress, and raising public awareness. The costs of the conservation activities exceeded £220,000, but the large area covered by these activities resulted in very low unit costs of less than £0.10 per hectare.

All three projects had a particular focus on delivering control measures across large areas, which resulted in very low unit costs per hectare. It is therefore difficult to find comparable data from similar control schemes as other evidence has focused on more intensive restoration activities undertaken in much smaller areas. For example, the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) reports the costs of squirrel control in an oak plantation at the Sotterley Estate in Suffolk. The Estate is reported to spend £10,000 per year on grey squirrel control, which is mainly due to the cost of labour to manage 125 traps across the 172 hectare site. This equates to an annual cost of

approximately £58 per hectare[30], compared to a cost of only £3.20 per hectare for the GRCF project. The financial incentives available from the Countryside Stewardship scheme are also higher at £50 per hectare for controlling grey squirrels[31] and £347 per hectare to support the management and eradication of severe infestations of Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam (as well as other invasive plants)[32].

Table 5.4 Cost effectiveness of GRCF activities to remove alien species

Type of alien species	Direct area covered by control measures (hectares)	Total: direct + indirect area covered by control measures (hectares)	Total project cost (£m)	Conse-rvation costs (£m)	Direct unit cost per hectare (£)	Total: direct + indirect unit cost per hectare (£)
Japanese Knotweed / Himalayan Balsam	39,170	249,460	£0.18m	£0.13m	£3.20	£0.50
Grey squirrel	168,349	336,699	£0.23m	£0.20m	£1.17	£0.59
European mink	2.5m	3m	£0.25m	£0.22m	£0.09	£0.07
Total	**2.7m**	**3.6m**	**£0.66m**	**£0.54m**	**£0.20**	**£0.15**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

5.3.6 Projects mainly focused on people engagement

Seven of the GRCF Round 1 projects focused primarily on activities to engage people with nature. These projects covered a wide range of different engagement activities, as described above in Section 3.4. The breadth of these activities meant there was also a similarly wide range of outputs associated with the activities (e.g. attendance at events, visits to reserves, activity days, volunteering, training, engagement with excluded groups, etc.). The output metrics were highly variable, and difficult to compare between projects given the range of activities being delivered by most projects. Without being able to segment costs and outputs between different types of engagement activity, the combined figures are less meaningful given the large differences between in-person attendance for an activity day at a nature reserve and the delivery of online apps or streaming content from wildlife cameras, for example.

The CEA therefore analysed all GRCF Round 1 projects to identify those that had focused on delivering individual types of activities to ensure the output metrics were directly comparable. This was only possible for projects that had focused on delivering different in-person activities, as those delivering online activities (or communications and media activities) were more likely to be delivering a range of

[30] https://rfs.org.uk/insights-publications/case-studies/counting-the-cost-of-squirrel-control-in-an-oak-plantation/

[31] https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/ws3-squirrel-control-and-management

[32] https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants/control-of-invasive-plant-species-supplement-sp4

different activities. Those projects that could also segment the costs of their people engagement activities were included in the CEA presented in Table 5.5.

The CEA identified 20 projects that had focused exclusively on delivering in-person activities (and were able to segment their costs associated with people engagement). Of these projects:

- Three projects had focused exclusively on delivering citizen science or volunteering activities. These activities included tree planting, removing tree guards from a site of woodland restoration, and community science days to monitor changes in habitats. They had been delivered through 63 events and engaged 919 people across all three projects at a combined cost of approximately £170,000. This resulted in a unit cost per event of £2,660 or £182 per person engaged.
- One project had focused exclusively on delivering in-person training events. The events were used to train volunteers to support the delivery of activities to help control an invasive alien species. A total of 350 events were delivered, engaging 500 people, at a cost of just under £15,000. This suggested a unit cost per event of £42, and £30 per person trained.
- One project had focused exclusively on delivering in-person meetings. The habitat restoration project had delivered a number of consultation events to engage the local fishing community and other stakeholders. A total of 11 events were delivered and engaged 120 people. The people engagement costs totalled approximately £40,000, which equated to a unit cost of £3,400 per event and £310 per attendee.
- Another 15 projects had also focused on in-person activities but had delivered more than one type of activity. These projects had delivered a total of 2,140 events and engaged 22,700 people at a unit cost of £1,070 per event and £100 per person engaged.

Overall, the 20 projects that had focused exclusively on in-person activities had delivered more than 2,500 events and engaged more than 24,000 people. The estimated cost of these activities was £2.5 million, equating to unit costs of almost £1,000 per event and just over £100 per person engaged.

A further 13 projects were able to segment their people engagement costs and had delivered a range of in-person and online activities (but had not delivered any communications and media activities). These projects reported delivering approximately 1,850 events at a much higher cost of more than £2,200 per event. However, the inclusion of online activities had also engaged larger numbers of people (almost 54,000), resulting in a smaller unit cost of £77 per person engaged.

Overall, there were 33 projects delivering in-person and online activities (excluding communications and media activities), for which it was possible to segment their costs of delivering people engagement activities. These projects delivered 4,400 events at a cost of £1,500 per event. A total of 78,000 people were engaged in these activities at a cost of £85 per person[33].

[33] A further 14 projects were also able to segment their people engagement costs but their activities included communications and media activities. These projects were excluded from Table 5.5 because their communications and media activities were not comparable with the other in-person and online activities as they included activities such as distribution of leaflets and appearances on TV programmes that were reported to reach very large audiences with low unit costs. Overall, these 14 projects were reported to have delivered a further 2,100 events, at a relatively low cost of approximately £640 per event and reached an estimated audience of 22.5 million people at a very small unit cost of £0.06 per person.

Table 5.5 Cost effectiveness of people engagement activities

Event type	No. of projects	No. of events	No. of people engaged	Total project cost (£m)	People engag-ement costs (£m)	Unit cost per event (£)	Unit cost per person engaged (£)
In-person citizen science / volunteer events only	3	63	919	£0.55m	£0.17m	£2,660	£182.38
In-person training events only	1	350	500	£0.25m	£0.01m	£42	£29.66
In-person meetings/ external events only	1	11	120	£0.25m	£0.04m	£3,409	£312.50
In-person events - multiple sub-types	15	2,141	22,734	£10.44m	£2.29m	£1,071	£100.82
Sub-total – In-person events only	**20**	**2,565**	**24,273**	**£11.49m**	**£2.51m**	**£979**	**£103.49**
Multiple event types (excl. comms & media)	13	1,843	53,759	£14.88m	£4.13m	£2,238	£76.74
Total (excl. comms & media)	**33**	**4,408**	**78,032**	**£26.37m**	**£6.64m**	**£1,506**	**£85.06**
Multiple event types (incl. comms & media)	*14*	*2,130*	*22.50m*	*£5.28m*	*£1.36m*	*£638*	*£0.06*
Total (incl. comms & media)	*47*	***6,538***	***22.58m***	***£31.65m***	***£8.00m***	***£1,223***	***£0.35***

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

5.3.7 Projects mainly focused on professional development

One of the Round 1 projects focused primarily on the development of professional capacity for nature conservation in the county, while also helping to deliver a range of conservation outcomes. However, the uniqueness of the project, and the broad mix of its professional development and conservation outcomes, meant that CEA was not feasible beyond looking at the employment outcomes included below.

5.3.8 Multi-objective projects

Twenty-four of the 69 Round 1 projects were identified as having multiple objectives and delivering a wide range of activities for nature conservation and people engagement. The breadth of activities and the diversity of outputs and associated metrics meant it was not possible to undertake CEA for this group specifically, although these projects have been included in the above analysis of habitat restoration, tree-planting, and people engagement activities, where relevant and for projects that were able to segment their costs accordingly.

5.3.9 Cost effectiveness of employment outcomes

Employment outcomes are more amenable to CEA as they are measured using standard metrics, while staff costs can also be segmented in the cost data. However it is still important to recognise that employment is one of a range of GRCF outcomes and this is likely to affect the cost effectiveness of employment outcomes,

particularly when comparing costs per job with other programmes that may focus more exclusively on employment outcomes.

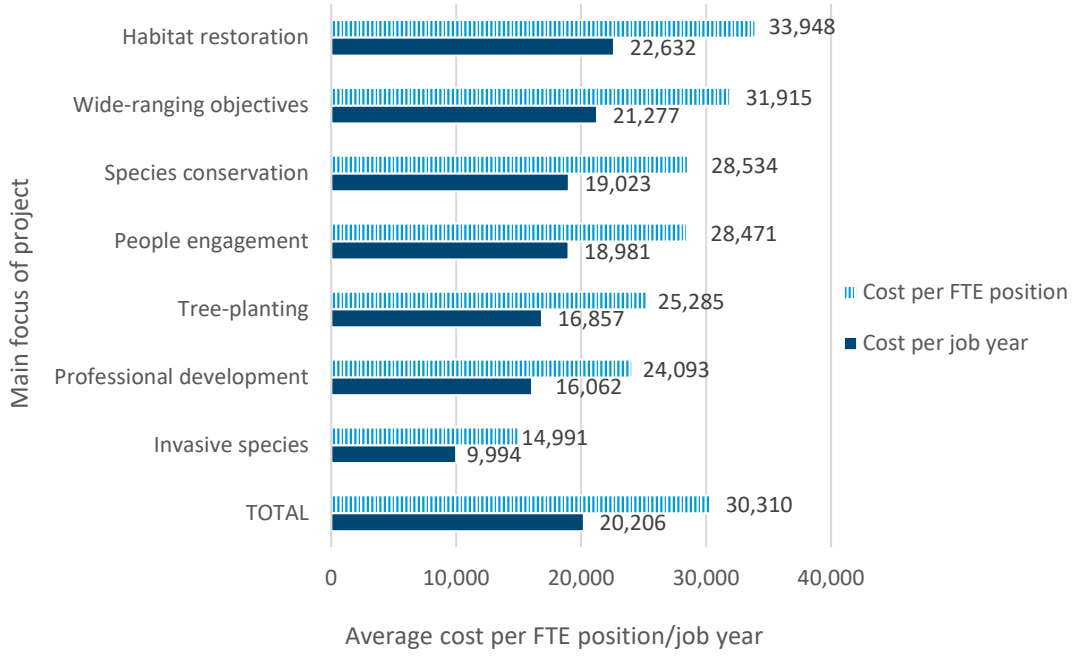
Common metrics are used to measure the employment outcomes of all GRCF projects:

- Employment temporarily supported during the project period – measured as job years of work supported by the GRCF, which can be broken down into new employment and existing jobs safeguarded;
- Ongoing employment retained beyond the life of the GRCF funded project, measured in full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs.

The following analysis focuses on each of these metrics in turn. Figure 5.2 and Table 5.6 show the average staff costs for the employment temporarily supported during the project period. The Round 1 projects reported that GRCF funding temporarily supported 473 FTE positions at a cost of £14.3 million, equating to an average of just over £30,000 per FTE position.

However, since project delivery periods were longer than 12 months, the number of 'job years' supported by GRCF funding would have been greater than the number of positions. Assuming that each of the FTE positions was supported for a period of 18 months, suggests that the £14.3 million has supported a total of 710 job years at an average cost of just over £20,000 per job year. This estimate suggests that the GRCF has funded an average wage of approximately £20,000 per year of work for NGO employees to help deliver their projects and support the GRCF objectives. There was some variation between different types of projects with those mainly focusing on habitat restoration, or having wide-ranging objectives, found to have the highest average staff costs, while projects focusing on invasive species had the lowest staff costs.

Figure 5.2 Average staff costs of employment temporarily supported by GRCF, by type of project (£ per temporary FTE position / £ per job year)



Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database and Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

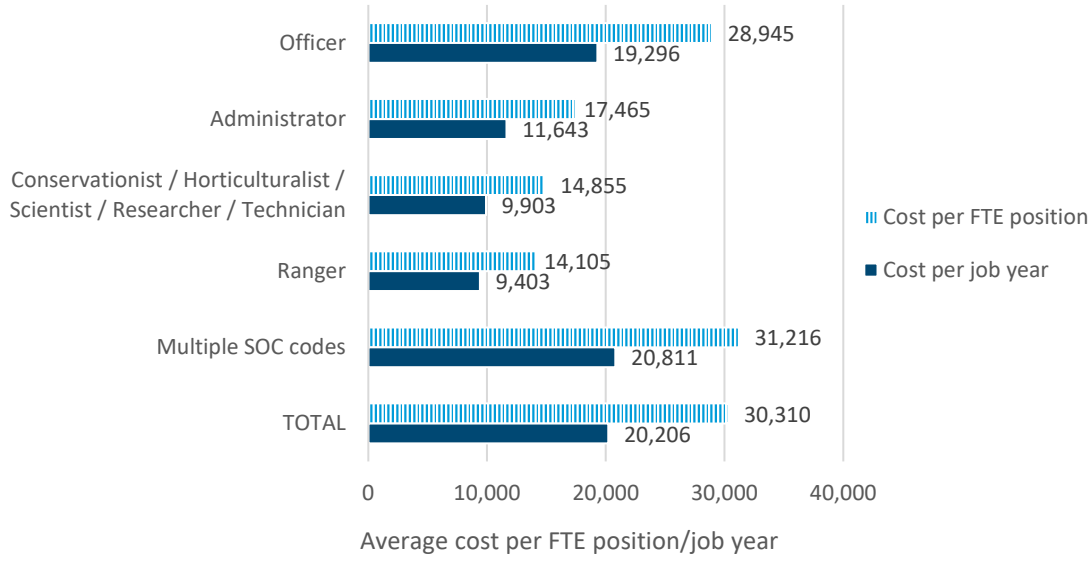
Table 5.6 Average staff costs of employment temporarily supported by GRCF, by type of project (£ per temporary FTE position / £ per job year)

Main focus of project	No. of projects	Total staff costs (£m)	FTEs	Cost per FTE (£)	Job years	Cost per job year (£)
Habitat restoration	20	£4.0m	119	£33,948	179	£22,632
Wide-ranging objectives	23	£5.8m	181	£31,915	272	£21,277
Species conservation	9	£0.7m	24	£28,534	36	£19,023
People engagement	7	£1.8m	65	£28,471	97	£18,981
Tree-planting	6	£1.7m	67	£25,285	100	£16,857
Professional development	1	£0.1m	5	£24,093	7	£16,062
Invasive species	3	£0.2m	13	£14,991	19	£9,994
Total	**69**	**£14.3m**	**473**	**£30,310**	**710**	**£20,206**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Figure 5.3 and Table 5.7 present a similar analysis by the type of job role, based on an analysis of SOC codes. This was only possible for projects employing a single type of job role as it was not possible to disaggregate staff costs between different roles. The analysis identified 18 projects that had employed a single job role, most of which were at an officer level. The data suggest that all 18 projects had relatively low staff costs per temporary FTE position and per job year compared to projects with a range of different roles.

Figure 5.3 Average staff costs of employment temporarily supported by GRCF, by type of job role (£ per temporary FTE position / £ per job year)



Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database and Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, 2022

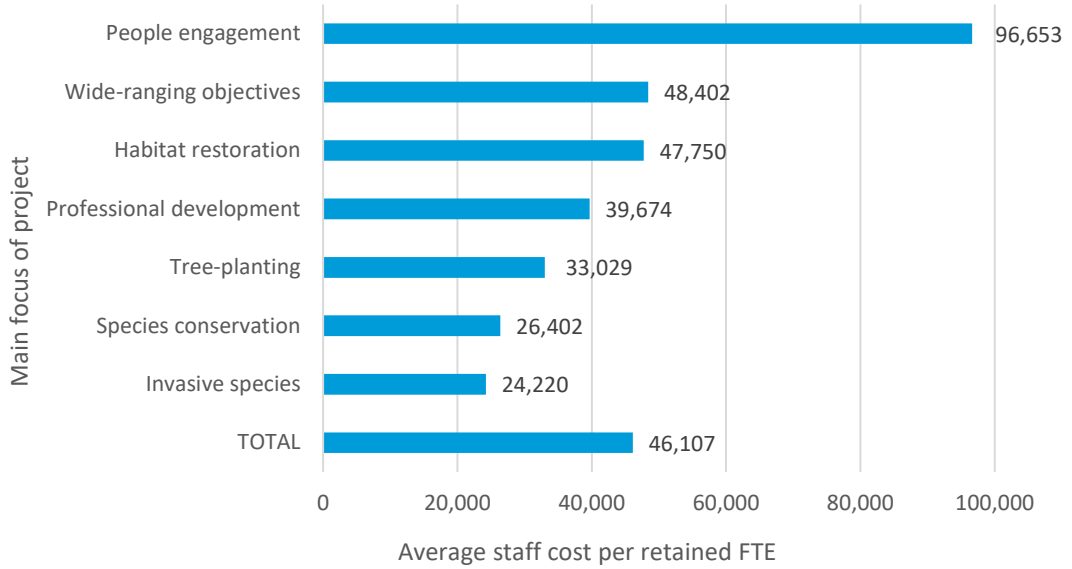
Table 5.7 Average staff costs of employment temporarily supported by GRCF, by type of job role (£ per temporary FTE position / £ per job year)

Main focus of project	No. of projects	Total staff costs (£m)	FTEs	Cost per FTE (£)	Job years	Cost per job year (£)
Officer	14	£1.14m	40	£28,945	59	£19,296
Administrator	2	£0.25m	14	£17,465	22	£11,643
Conservationist / Horticulturalist / Scientist / Researcher / Technician	1	£0.08m	6	£14,855	8	£9,903
Ranger	1	£0.04m	3	£14,105	5	£9,403
Multiple SOC codes	51	£12.83m	411	£31,216	616	£20,811
Total	**69**	**£14.34m**	**473**	**£30,310**	**710**	**£20,206**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

The following analysis compares the same staff costs against the 311 ongoing FTEs that have been retained by the GRCF Round 1 projects. This provides estimates of average project costs per ongoing FTE but it should be noted that the ongoing wages are not being paid by GRCF but are instead being paid by the NGOs, their supporters or other funded schemes. The analysis suggests an average cost of £46,000 per retained FTE. The costs vary significantly between the different types of project from only £24,000 per FTE retained by projects focusing on invasive species, to almost £97,000 per FTE retained by projects mainly focusing on people engagement activities. This reflects both the relatively low staff costs in the projects targeting invasive species as well as lower rates of job retention amongst the projects focusing on people engagement.

Figure 5.4 Average staff costs of FTEs retained by type of project (£ per FTE)



Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

Table 5.8 Average staff costs of FTEs retained by type of project (£ per FTE)

Main focus of project	No. of projects	Total staff costs (£m)	Retained FTEs	Cost per retained FTE (£)
People engagement	7	£4.0m	19	£96,653
Wide-ranging objectives	23	£5.8m	119	£48,402
Habitat restoration	20	£0.7m	85	£47,750
Professional development	1	£1.8m	3	£39,674
Tree-planting	6	£1.7m	51	£33,029
Species conservation	9	£0.1m	26	£26,402
Invasive species	3	£0.2m	8	£24,220
Total	**69**	**£14.3m**	**311**	**£46,107**

Sources: The Heritage Fund GRCF Round 1 grants database, Final GRCF Round 1 monitoring data, and ICF final survey of GRCF Round 1 projects, 2022

5.4 Perceived value for money

5.4.1 Overall view

Overall, GRCF stakeholders and projects felt that GRCF-funded activities had generally delivered good value for money. There were many examples of activities that had exceeded expectations, while volunteer inputs were often cited as helping to support and enhance value for money. Suggestions for improving value for money included: allowing more time for a thorough planning process; working with quality, trusted contractors; engaging the local community; making good use of volunteers; and providing longer delivery periods.

The GRCF processes were also reported to have contributed positively to value for money of the funded projects and the programme as a whole. The administrative burden for projects was generally felt to be proportionate to the levels of funding received. However, there were suggestions that the underspent budget could have been used to further enhance the value for money delivered by the programme.

5.4.2 Value for money of project activities

Unsurprisingly most projects felt that their activities had delivered good value for money, while the GRCF stakeholders also agreed that most projects had delivered good value for money. These views were supported with many examples of different **activities that delivered particularly good value for money**:

> *"The health and wellbeing activities were particularly impactful and delivered big benefits. We were able to pump-prime these activities with GRCF funding, and they have since snowballed and are now being taken forward by volunteers, delivering even greater impacts and value for money."*

> *"Liaison with landowners has been very good and we have been able to go further than expected and develop plans for many of them."*

> *"The management plan has delivered very good value for money. It didn't take a lot of time, so the cost of putting it together was small but it has provided huge benefits."*
>
> *"Media coverage helped take our project to a wider audience. We exceeded our targets by getting coverage on tv news and in print and online media for relatively little money – and just a few days of staff time."*
>
> *"The learning courses delivered by a lecturer from the college generated greater impacts and value for money than we expected. We had to deliver them online due to the pandemic but that meant we reached a larger audience, a proportion of whom then engaged with our other activities."*

Volunteer inputs were frequently mentioned by projects as having supported value for money.

> *"Volunteer inputs have contributed significantly to value for money. Volunteers have taken on both monitoring and delivery work, which helps support the legacy of the project."*
>
> *"[Support from volunteers] was highly valuable as it helped us meet our engagement targets and helped with reducing the overall costs of the project."*
>
> *"Volunteers played a key role. They had knowledge of the communities they worked with and knowledge of the environment. They were very passionate people. They could also develop their skills, which has a great long-term effect on their lives, so that also created long-term value for them."*

Projects also provided some examples of **where they felt they could have improved value for money** and these typically related to activities that were not delivered as intended due to delays or other problems combined with the relatively short time period. For example:

> *"If we had been able to do everything we had set out to do with the river restoration, we would have delivered better value for money."*

Some projects also identified activities that were more resource intensive and could potentially have been delivered more cheaply. For example, one project suggested that natural regeneration of woodland would have saved a lot of time and money compared to planting trees but would have taken longer. Another project suggested:

> *"Some of our science days were quite resource-intensive for low numbers of participants. But, having said that, if they become engaged and continue as volunteers then it would still offer good value for money."*

There was also a suggestion that travel costs had been relatively high due to staff needing to travel between sites. It was felt that value for money could have been further enhanced if these costs could have been reallocated to other activities. Another project reported having allocated a 10% contingency budget which was not needed. They regretted not having allocated this budget to activities during the application phase, which would have enhanced value for money, rather than going unspent.

Projects also provided **suggestions for improving value for money**, which included:

- The importance of allowing **sufficient time for planning**, particularly with shorter projects, as it is easier and quicker to deal with problems that have been foreseen.

- Working with **good quality, trusted contractors**, who are flexible and able to work through solutions to help overcome issues.
- Allocating **sufficient time for engaging the local community**, which can support project delivery and provide a range of additional benefits:

"Having time to engage with the local community, particularly for coordinating and managing volunteers, is very important. This provides high value for money and achieves many goals including building relationships with local communities, connecting people to nature, and raising awareness of our work, while volunteer work parties help to reduce costs."

- **Making good use of volunteers** and upskilling volunteers and existing staff, which not only helps project delivery but also supports better legacy impacts too as there is increased likelihood that activities will continue to be delivered.
- **Longer projects** can also help support value for money by providing more time for planning and working more strategically, thereby minimising unnecessary inefficiencies, duplication of effort and allowing better decisions to be made. Two examples were provided during the interviews with GRCF projects:

"Short timescales can work against value for money. You can only plant trees at a certain time of the year and we only had a year for the whole project so could not work as efficiently as we would have liked"

"Short-term funding has a purpose and can instigate change, but it's also reliant on the commitment of small organisations, and they might suffer from that, as access to financial support is critical for them."

"We were very stretched and there wasn't time to liaise with other projects. We found out during the project that another charity was developing a similar app to us – if we had more time, we could have communicated with them and worked together. Duplication happens when you do not know what else is going on."

5.4.3 Impacts of GRCF processes on value for money

The GRCF application and project selection processes were designed to provide funding quickly to environmental NGOs in response to the financial crisis caused by the pandemic. This process also needed to attract applications from, and award funding to, high quality projects that would deliver GRCF's objectives, while also delivering value for money for the taxpayer. GRCF stakeholders reported that pre-engagement activities were undertaken with the eNGO sector in advance of the fund being launched to give warning it was coming and inform the shape of applications. This was felt to have supported value for money by encouraging a high number and quality of applications.

The application and project selection processes were also reported to have worked well, and stakeholders expressed a common view that they resulted in **the selection of good quality projects that met the objectives of the GRCF and had delivered good value for money**. GRCF stakeholders also agreed that the programme processes had been delivered to a high standard and had provided good value for money, evidenced by:

- The efficient delivery of the programme using a relatively small delivery team.
- Relatively low administration costs of around 5% across the programme as a whole.

- The significant qualitative outcomes that had been delivered by the GRCF projects alongside the core quantitative outputs and outcomes.
- The absence of any suspected fraudulent activity.
- An administrative burden that was generally described as proportionate by the projects.

However, there were some suggestions that the underspent GRCF budget could have been better used to further enhance the value for money delivered by the programme.

The GRCF **projects also considered the process to have provided good value for money for the resources they had invested** in terms of both the application and project selection stage and the ongoing monitoring and reporting requirements. For example, one project stated that: *"I didn't feel like they were asking too much. It was a manageable workload and would say it was justified by the funding we received."*

6 Lessons learnt

This section discusses the key lessons learnt from the GRCF Round 1 in terms of potential improvements that could be made to: programme delivery, project and programme outputs, outcomes and impacts; the long-term legacy of Round 1 projects; and the value for money provided by the programme.

The GRCF has shown it is possible to set up grant scheme in a short amount of time, when there is a clear purpose, such as providing emergency funding and support to the eNGO sector. Many of the challenges encountered and lessons learnt were an inevitable consequence of the unique context in which the GRCF was introduced and related to the very tight timescales in which it was designed and implemented. This unique context may limit the extent to which general lessons can be learned which would be relevant to the delivery of future programmes.

The lessons set out below are based on the findings of the Phase 3 research activities with GRCF projects and stakeholders. In some cases, the evidence pointed to lessons already mentioned in the Phase 2 evaluation report and these are repeated below (denoted with an [R]) but are otherwise in addition to those lessons already set out in the Phase 2 evaluation report.

6.1 Lessons to improve grant-making processes and administration

- Allocating sufficient time for preparing and reviewing applications and for setting up projects (e.g. for recruitment and project design). Even though the GRCF was an emergency response fund, and designed to be launched rapidly, Round 1 projects and stakeholders reported that, with hindsight, slightly longer application and set up processes would have allowed projects to plan and then deliver more effectively by foreseeing and thinking through problems in advance.
- Ensuring that online application portals are fit for purpose and capable of handling heavy demand from applicants, particularly around the period close to the application deadline. [R]
- Ensuring that application forms and guidance notes are consistent and fit for purpose as Round 1 projects reported some discrepancies that caused confusion during the application process.
- Reviewing requirements for landowner consents to be secured prior to the commencement of projects to provide a solution that still offers reassurances for funders, but also minimises barriers and burdens for projects during the bidding stage.
- Considering the development of common indicator sets which can be used to measure the outputs and outcomes of Defra funding programmes earlier in the process, to inform programme design, guidance to applicants (to enable better forecasting of outcomes at application stage), and definition of project M&E plans (to reduce the burden on funded projects from retrofitting project monitoring plans to the requirements and to ensure quality of data). This would improve tracking of progress against targets. [R]
- Ensuring monitoring tools are streamlined and fit for purpose (e.g. that they are appropriate for projects with single sites and large numbers of sites and

can be accessed by multiple people to share the admin burden within projects).

- Improving project monitoring guidance for specific indicators, including jobs and spatial data, in order to improve the quality of data provided and reduce the extent of data gaps. [R]
- Lighter-touch approaches to monitoring and reporting requirements for medium-sized projects were effective at ensuring the admin burden was proportionate to the funding received and should be applied to other funding programmes.
- Providing greater clarity and guidance on using the GRCF name and logo, so that projects do not need to ask for permission and approval every time it is used (e.g. on plaques and press releases).
- Providing greater clarity and guidance on reporting requirements and expectations for monitoring beyond the end of the GRCF project.
- The flexibility of Investment Managers to authorise changes to budgets and project plans in response to unexpected challenges was also well received and should be adopted elsewhere. Projects also suggested that there should be greater flexibility around grant payments (to support smaller organisations that face barriers relating to cashflow), while stakeholders felt that earlier confirmation of project extensions would have enabled projects to plan their activities more effectively.
- Maintaining and further developing the positive working relationship and shared understanding built between Defra group and The Heritage Fund, through ongoing dialogue and moving to a Memorandum of Understanding, thus reducing the need to reinvest in partnership development in future. [R]

6.2 Lessons to improve project and programme outputs, outcomes and impacts

- Increasing the scale of funding to better match the scale of demand to ensure more of the sector are able to access emergency funding. [R]
- Offering a parallel emergency funding stream to provide core funding to support eNGO existing activities (which may be at risk), which would be particularly beneficial for (often smaller) eNGOs less able to put forward shovel-ready projects, or those with less capacity to develop a bid at pace. [R]
- Accounting for the risk that projects undertaking seasonally dependent activities early in the project programme may not be sufficiently advanced to deliver, by considering a longer overall timeframe or the potential for ad-hoc project extensions – particularly for future GRCF funding rounds when the potential for COVID-19-induced staff redundancies is less than at the time of GRCF Round 1. [R]
- Maintaining good communications with funded projects to ensure they are aware that, when necessary, they may be flexible in how awarded funding is spent across a project's planned activities and adjust their plans (for example, diverting money from activities that are no longer viable to those where there are cost increases). [R]

- Improving understanding of in-kind contributions by collecting data from projects on volunteer inputs in a format that can be extracted and analysed alongside other monitoring data on projects and their activities.
- Providing a longer-term perspective and greater clarity on the UK Government's strategy and targets for the eNGO sector and a clear picture of funding plans for the longer-term in order to further enhance the resilience of eNGOs by enabling them to plan more effectively for the future.

6.3 Lessons to improve the long-term legacy of GRCF projects

- Providing additional funding to support the longer-term legacy of the GRCF programme and Round 1 projects. Specific examples included:
  - Providing longer-term funding that is more appropriate for the delivery of conservation outcomes. While the short-term funding of the GRCF was well conceived and fit well with the emergency needs of the sector, it was also suggested that short-term funds risk creating peaks and troughs and longer time periods can help support more sustainable projects and activities.
  - Ensuring agri-environment schemes are viable for landowners to continue to manage habitats restored by GRCF projects and expand benefits across wider areas. Some habitats, such as rivers, were reportedly in need of prioritisation to encourage their restoration.
  - Providing funding to build on the successes of the GRCF projects and support community engagement to maintain people interested and engaged with nature (and continue supporting gains made as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Requiring projects to set aside budgets to support the legacy of their activities through maintaining ongoing management plans and delivering monitoring activities. This would help to maximise legacy impacts and learning about the outcomes of project activities that may not be possible in the absence of funding for additional monitoring activities.
- Providing support to address gaps in capacity in the environmental sector. One area of concern highlighted in interviews was a lack of capacity within the forestry sector, which could be addressed through further interventions to make the sector more attractive to young people and potential employees.
- Providing opportunities for projects to network, exchange knowledge and learn from each other's experiences. Several projects said they were interested to learn about other projects, which would have provided useful learning and an opportunity to network with potential partners.

6.4 Lessons to improve value for money

- Restricting the number of applications per organisation (as was done in GRCF Round 2), which was reported by stakeholders to have delivered a more efficient application process for applicants and reviewers.
- Considering whether there are benefits in applying a two-stage application process. For example, including an Expression of Interest (EoI) or another light touch project shortlisting process – to medium-sized as well as large

projects, to limit the overall volume of full-scale applications and resources devoted to them. This would need to take into account resource required to administer this process but could support value for money where heavy demand is anticipated. [R]

- Prioritising a streamlined market research action appropriate for rapid fund design processes, before launching similar funds in future in order to better understand and manage demand and tailor application processes accordingly. [R]
- Reviewing match funding requirements, and their effects on demand, scheme objectives and overall value for money. [R]
- Examining opportunities to extend the delivery timetable for nature investment projects, even for emergency response funds, which would help in securing and measuring impact and value for money. [R]
- Reviewing how underspent budgets can be avoided at the programme level to further enhance the value for money delivered by the programme.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 Case studies

A1.1 Case study: Bringing the Limestone Becks Back to Life

A1.1.1 Project outline

The Limestone Becks are a unique network of springs in Lincolnshire. Limestone Becks is an isolated habitat which supports a rich aquatic fauna and flora rarely found in the eastern England and is home to a range of protected species (e.g. water vole, brown trout and otters). The project intended to contribute toward the improvement of, and prevent the deterioration of, spring-fed water bodies in central Lincolnshire through a programme of capital and habitat management works. Through this work the project intended to encourage the development of natural flood management measures as well as provide opportunities for improved local community engagement in nature-based activities.

- **Lead**: Lincolnshire Rivers Trust
- **Partners**: Environment Agency, Wild Trout Trust, landowners and the local community
- **Project costs**: Total: £206,000; GRCF funding: £206,000 (100%)

A1.1.2 Project highlights

A1.1.2.1 Key successes

- **Habitat restoration**: The project's key achievement in terms of nature conservation was the restoration of 1.2 km stretch of Branston Beck river habitat
- **Integration with wider strategic plan:** The partnership between landowners, local community, Wild Trout Trust, Environment Agency and LRT has been very successful and has taken place on sections of the Dunston, Welton and Scopwick Becks. The work done throughout this project has allowed the scope of this work to extend to the Limestone Becks. As a result, the project has contributed to the delivery of the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Action Plan targets
- **Change in community opinions and understanding about Branston Beck**: the project engaged with new audiences about the need to restore rivers and wetlands. Much of this work was facilitated through hosting a pop-up stall at the Parish Council in Branston, engaging with local schools and awarding Water Vole Warrior badges to local Scout and Guides. Other actions included wellbeing walk and talks along the route of the becks. These had a positive impact on community views.

A1.1.2.2 Challenges

- **Presence of water voles in the area led to delays and changes in the project**. The first ecological survey did not detect water voles due to time of year it was conducted. As a result project plans had already been detailed by the time water voles were found to be present. This mean that parts of the project had to be reconsidered and adapted several times. It is considered that the contractors' ecological assessment could have been strengthened
- **Dealing with delays in a short time-limited project**: COVID-19 and national lockdowns caused delays to hiring for a new position at the LRT. It took around 3 months to recruit the right candidate and catch-up with time lost as a result of lockdowns. This combined with the short timeline of the GRCF was particularly challenging.

A1.1.2.3 Value for money

- **Overspend**: 30% was spent on administration, which was higher than expected; time to manage volunteers, community engagement and conservation was significantly higher than expected.
- **Volunteer input**: Volunteers were involved in a range of activities including invertebrate surveys, planting and support with events. Volunteer input has been highly valuable in achieving engagement targets and reducing overall cost of the project.

A1.1.3 Project activities

A1.1.3.1 Nature conservation

The project delivered improvements to riparian and in-channel habitats, watercourse and body creation, reconnection of habitats, habitat enhancement, landowner liaison and catchment sensitive farming. Activity was undertaken to restore a 1.2 km stretch of Branston Beck .This included the creation of two new channels to provide habitat for water voles, brown trout, and aquatic invertebrates, enhanced by adding limestone gravel to make pool and riffle sequences and to make side bars to add diversity to the habitat and create suitable spawning habitat for brown trout. Surveying has provided a rich baseline to which improvements can be measured and subsequently can inform the future management of the area.

A1.1.3.2 Nature based solutions

Natural flood management was undertaken to alleviate flooding:

- De-channelisation to alleviate flooding: the river margins are in a better condition to absorb more water during periods of heavy rainfall and channel improvements will decrease the peak flow and height.
- Development of a catchment sensitive farming framework to support improvements to water and habitat quality through the reduction of run-off and management regimes

A1.1.3.3 Connecting people with nature

Engagement of local people with the natural heritage of becks and engaging new audiences with the need to restore rivers and wetlands through community liaison, planting and sampling activities as well as two school events. In total, 257 people attended events, site visits and education programmes, with volunteers planting 650 native plug plants, grass seed was sowed, and a wildflower strip covering 0.5ha.

A1.1.3.4 Employment

The project created one new post and supported an existing post through Full Cost Recovery.

A1.1.3.5 NGO resilience

The LRT has also benefited from improved organisational resilience as a result of the project, which was not an intended outcome of the project. For example, it increased skills and capabilities within the LRT, increased capacity, increased profile/credibility and strengthened networks.

A1.1.4 Project legacy

The project has been designed to need little intervention going forward, ensuring ongoing benefits are achieved.

- **Maintaining key relationships**: Ongoing efforts are required to maintain the existing good relationships between land manager and LRT to ensure the legacy of the project. Landowners will undertake maintenance, and LRT will monitor the ecology and make recommendations for future actions where needed.
- **Maintaining volunteer inputs**: Volunteer time is essential in the delivery of future work. For example, to undertake ecological walk over surveys each year for at least three years to monitor the improvements of the area, including testing water quality and surveying invertebrates. Retaining volunteers is recognised to be challenging, particularly whilst trying to ensure they are interested and committed to the work being carried out.
- **Securing funding**: The project has already secured £10,000 from the Environment Agency to support survey monitoring work for up to 12 months. Additional funding options are being explored, including private investment from businesses that rely on the river (e.g. water companies) or those who would be willing to sponsor the area. In addition, future funding from The Heritage Fund is being considered.
- **Managing external factors**: LRT are working with a group to develop farming advice for catchment sensitive farming in order to minimise the indirect risk of pollution impacting the project area.

A1.2 Case study: Realising Greater Manchester's Environmental Ambitions

A1.2.1 Project outline

The project delivered a programme of habitat restoration and community engagement facilitated through the Greater Manchester Environment Fund (GMEF). This was delivered by 16 different projects across over 50 sites covering the Greater Manchester area.

- **Lead**: Lancashire Wildlife Trust
- **Partners**: Canal and Rivers Trust; Cheshire Wildlife Trust; City of Trees; Greater Manchester Ecology Unit; Mersey Rivers Trust; Northern Roots; RSPB; Environmental Finance
- **Project cost**: Total: £2,820,500; GRCF funding: £1,860,300 (66%)

A1.2.2 Project highlights

A1.2.2.1 Key successes

- **Exceeded ecological targets**: Delivered 948 hectares of habitat restoration and nature recovery against an original target of 537 hectares.
- **Supported nature recovery strategy**: the GRCF funding enabled partners to work together to align project activities around Greater Manchester local nature priorities.
- **Connecting people to nature and society through volunteer work**: 846 volunteers provided 8,200 volunteer days undertaking environmental actions (e.g. site clearance) and supporting community environment events (e.g. event stewards).

A1.2.2.2 Challenges

- **Sourcing**: COVID-19 and the impact this had on obtaining materials. For example, buying wood for birdboxes was difficult and there was a nine month wait to rent an electric vehicle.
- **Time-dependent activities**: Delivery of season-dependent activities (e.g. site works, planting, nesting seasons) in time-limited windows due to short duration of project. Extreme weather conditions caused delays to obtaining materials, however sensible project planning allowed for delays without major impacts on delivery.
- **Employee retention**: the delivery timescales required of GRCF funding meant short-term contracts were used for new jobs. This meant some staff were lost before the end of the project as they sought new jobs towards the end of their contract period.

- **Developing novel market solutions**: the peatland code was not suitable for use with habitat banks and offsetting for lowland peat, requiring the LWT to work with IUCN to amend the code.

A1.2.2.3 Value for money

- **Flood damage savings**: Delivered 446 hectares of natural flood management solutions, which will mitigate flood damage to property and infrastructure from future storm events across five Greater Manchester boroughs. The project estimates the monetary benefit at £3.2 million[34] of future flood damage costs avoided per future storm event.

A1.2.3 Project activities

A1.2.3.1 Nature conservation

The project had a positive impact on the management of 948 hectares of woodland, grassland, heathland and wetlands throughout the Greater Manchester area. It improved 9 km of riverbank and riparian habitat and 4.5 km of hedgerow management to increase natural connections. It led to the plantation of 53,225 Sphagnum plugs, 9,000 green willow pins, 3,000 woodland wildflowers and 420 trees, and the creation of 1,010 peat dams. Produced 67 surveys and reports to map data or monitor the improvement in biodiversity and habitat condition. The project undertook conservation works across 56 sites to improve habitat and condition for species such as willow tits, water voles, dragon flies, bees, butterflies and swifts.

A1.2.3.2 Nature based solutions

The project undertook various activities – including installation of 150 willow dams at Dove Stone; woodland management and the creation and restoration of new ponds, reedbeds and leaky dams to enhance biodiversity and slow the flow, and installation of nature-based solutions at Bickershaw – all targeted at slowing river flow and thereby reducing flood risk.

A1.2.3.3 Connecting people with nature

The project delivered 1.5 km of access improvements and 33 pieces of new interpretation and digital material to improve awareness of and access to local nature. It provided 387 different activities, walks, events and campaigns to raise awareness attended by 5,459 people and granted 41 Wildlife Gardening Awards. It engaged 846 volunteers, who were involved in all the project activities (the equivalent volunteer time was estimated at £342,310 or 8,200 volunteer days).

A1.2.3.4 Employment

All the objectives initially set under this theme were fully achieved and exceeded. The project created 12 jobs, safeguarded 18 jobs and employed 22 trainees. 13 of these trainees and 7 volunteers moved to other full employment before project completion in March 2022.

[34] Source: Project Completion Report (June 2022). Calculation based on protecting 100 properties with damage cost savings per avoided flood event of £32,000 per property.

A1.2.3.5 NGO resilience

The project has created greater opportunities for existing and new employees and has seen an increase in skillsets, employee contract length and new staff.

A1.2.4 Project legacy

The project is expected to have a strong legacy, through activities already conducted and follow-on activities, underpinned by successful efforts to secure future funding.

- **Landscape and habitat activity**: The project team completed a Water Framework Directive feasibility study and developed a 5-year programme. Specific activities will continue, for example work in the Manchester Mosslands and also wetland restoration in the Wigan Wetlands.
- **Resilience**: Canal and River Trust will have new positions with a similar focus of the GRCF project, allowing for the project learning to be incorporated in the organisation.
- **Volunteering**: Volunteer groups will continue to operate and deliver the conservation objectives across various sites like Cutacre, the RSPB Dove Stone, the Kingfisher Trail and Phillips Park.
- **Jobs**: Several jobs will continue beyond the GRCF funded project, working on ongoing activities, new activities on the project sites, and stimulated by secured follow-on funding and newly recognised potential opportunities. In addition, 13 trainees and 7 volunteers managed to secure other employment.
- **Future monitoring**: Monitoring led by the Canal and River Trust to track new and enhanced habitats. RSPB Dove Stone vegetation monitoring will be conducted annually to ensure SSSI stipulations are adhered too. Volunteers will be supported to continue with their citizen science surveys and submit their data to the Greater Manchester Local Record Centre.
- **Future funding**: A total of £15.8 million has been secured from Greater Manchester Mayor, the SUEZ Communities Fund, the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF), the Towns Fund, Community Renewal Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, , Landfill Communities Fund (LCF), Defra, Environment Agency, local authorities and corporate funding, and it will allow the project to be continued for the next 3-5 years.

A1.3 Case study: Green Recovery in the Heart of England

A1.3.1 Project outline

The Heart of England Forest charity owns over 7,000 acres of land in Warwickshire and Worcestershire. This includes a range of habitats such as new woodland, mature and ancient woodland, grassland, wetland, heathland and farmland. The project was designed to contribute to each of the GRCF goals by creating woodland and enhancing hedgerows and grassland, setting up a new tree nursery and creating jobs and training opportunities.

- **Lead**: The Heart of England Forest
- **Project cost**: Total: £1,871,083; GRCF funding: £1,746,300 (93%)

A1.3.2 Project highlights

A1.3.2.1 Key successes

- **Established a 32-acre social enterprise tree nursery**: 2.5 million tree seeds were drilled and are now growing. New offices have been set up and welfare facilities installed, both partially powered by solar energy. Specialist tree nursery equipment was purchased and a reservoir constructed, which is aided by an integrated and bespoke irrigation system. The reservoir will mitigate the risk of dry periods.
- **Creation of the largest broadleaf forest in the country**: Over 115,000 trees and shrubs were planted as part of the project, bringing the total number of trees in the forest to an estimated 2 million. In addition, coppicing and underplanting works at Hawkes wood were undertaken to restore and enhance the existing woodland.
- **Successful internships**: 9 intern opportunities were provided, all paid in line with the national living wage. Interns were reportedly satisfied that the internships were well-structured, varied and helped develop their skills, whilst project team members recognised the level of commitment, enthusiasm and talent of the interns.

A1.3.2.2 Challenges

- **Adapting to unexpected costs**: rapid price inflation due to COVID-19 and Brexit resulted in significantly higher costs for some project activities. For example, elements of the reservoir construction were 100-200% more expensive than budget; fencing materials were 50% more expensive than budgeted. The GRCF offered the flexibility necessary to enable the project to redirect funds from other activities, and the project used their available contingency fund, to cover cost increases for essential project elements.
- **Recruiting specialist roles**: While significant time and effort was expended to recruit a qualified tree nursery manager, this was not successful. The tree nursery industry was

found to be very niche, with few skilled workers in the sector. The project identified that there were very few specialist tree nursery managers in the country, and those identified tended to be part of owner managed tree nurseries with no desire to move. The post of tree nursery manager was subsequently filled by providing training and mentoring opportunities for the assistant tree nursery manager who had demonstrated a high level of capacity and capability. The project's own evaluation concluded that this challenge reflects a capacity gap in the market which may impact on the UK Government's ability to meet tree-related policies and targets.

A1.3.2.3 Value for money

- **In-kind contributions**: Volunteers were critical to the delivery of several project activities. These were provided specific biodiversity training offered by external partners. Their inputs will be important also in future monitoring, as they will be involved in wildlife surveys.

A1.3.3 Project activities

The project met or exceeded all of its GRCF project targets.

A1.3.3.1 Nature conservation

In addition to the planting of 115,000 trees and providing woodland restoration and enhancement works, the project installed infrastructure to enable conservation grazing to take place across the Forest – for example, 9,673 metres of stock-proof fencing and 29 field gates at 5 locations. The infrastructure will enable improved land management in the future with the goal to enhance the diversity of the grassland sward, providing a Nature Recovery Network for a range of wildlife. Furthermore, 18 hectares of land in the Forest have been enhanced through seeding with 20 species of wildflowers and grasses, which should provide a greater nectar source for native pollinators.

A1.3.3.2 Connecting people and nature

A variety of activities were delivered helping to connect people with nature. These included: development of an interactive online map attracting 2,500 online page views a month; creation of trails and interpretation, including 20 virtual walks/events and downloadable audio information, and 19 face-to-face events; and over 100 new volunteers were recruited and were regularly engaging in activities – in total over the April 2021 to March 2022 period there were 2,790 volunteer visits to the Heart of England Forest, of which the Project estimated that 1,931 visits (7,630 volunteers hours) were directly attributed to the GRCF.

A1.3.3.3 Employment

The project met its target of creating 12 new full-time jobs, 9 of which were retained beyond the GRCF funding period. These included nine paid internships gaining experience in forestry, biodiversity, conservation farming, environmental communications, community engagement and outdoor learning - 7 of the 9 interns were successful in securing fulltime paid positions: 6 within the Heart of England Forest and one with a private company. In addition, it met its training target, providing training opportunities for over 50 people (including the 9 interns).

A1.3.3.4 NGO resilience

The GRCF helped to build the Heart of England's capacity across several areas of the organisation, such as the development of community partnerships including with local governments, developing learning and skills resources and building knowledge of engaged and less engaged audiences, as well as developing communication and social media strategies and content.

A1.3.4 Project legacy

- **Future income streams**: Income to support the project in the future will come from the revenue-generating social enterprise tree nursery as well as internal resources from the original founders. On top of these, the organisation is actively applying for additional funding.
- **Ecological data**: Baseline ecological survey data has been collected across multiple sites. Long-term monitoring of the habitats created and enhanced will be carried out by undertaking wildlife surveys with staff and volunteers trained through the GRCF programme. Surveys will be carried out annually, and after 5 years they will be able to establish whether the land management decisions made were effective in delivering the intended outcomes and will support future management decisions.

A1.4 Case study: Restoring Enfield's Rivers and Connecting Communities

A1.4.1 Project outline

The Restoring Enfield's Rivers Project (RERP) was conceived to deliver large-scale ecological improvements to Enfield's rivers using nature-based solutions whilst helping people to connect with the nature in their local environment. The project intended to build on a successful multi-year partnership between Enfield Council and Thames21.

- **Lead**: Enfield Council
- **Partners**: Thames21
- **Project cost**: Total: £1,880,200; GRCF funding: £678,700 (36%)

A1.4.2 Project highlights

A1.4.2.1 Key successes

- **One of the highest numbers of trees planted by a GRCF project**: The partnership achieved its goal to turning 60 hectares of low-grade arable farmland into publicly accessible woodland by planting 100,000 trees.
- **Securing the benefits of nature-based solutions over grey infrastructure**. The project delivered large-scale nature-based solutions in the Enfield area, achieving its woodland planting targets and creation of rural sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). The project's modelling data indicates that this will have a greater impact on flood-risk than the previously installed hard-engineering in the Salmons Brook area.
- **Positive impact on wellbeing**: pre- and post-event survey data (collected by the project) indicated a positive impact on participant wellbeing from volunteer events and particularly from nature prescribing sessions. Respondents cited physical and mental health benefits including benefits resulting from socialising, having a sense of purpose and self-worth, and being active outside[35].
- **Engaging school children**: this was not a primary focus of the project proposal. However collaborating with The Enfield School Climate Action Network helped to identify opportunities to engage local schools, and with Enfield Council provided for transport of children to site by minibus, enabling the project to deliver 28 events engaging 2,149 children

[35] Source: Enfield Council and Thames21 (2022). Restoring Enfield's Rivers. Evaluation Report.

A1.4.2.2 Challenges

- **Weather affecting tree survival rates**: Summer 2022 was exceptionally dry, a situation that put a strain on the woodland created during the project. It is anticipated that the trees that survived should be able to regenerate the part of the forest that was most affected. The team is creating a monitoring strategy to keep track of tree health, to be supported by additional funding that is being sought.
- **Finding the right local organisations who can facilitate access to target groups**: social prescribing activities benefited from setting up working arrangements with local organisations. The project was not receiving any nature prescribing referrals through the Enfield Social Prescribing Network (ESPN) so set up new referral pathway arrangements directly with several local healthcare providers which resulted in the project providing activities for 214 referred people through 26 sessions.
- **Demographics of people engaged**: a disproportionately high proportion of people, compared to the local population profile, engaged by the project were white British. The project concluded that more engagement with communities to understand what communities need and how they'd like to engage in volunteering to help tailor volunteer opportunities to make them more appealing to a wide cross-section of society.

A1.4.2.3 Value for money

- **Natural regeneration**: the partnership concluded that more effort to enable natural forest regeneration rather than tree planting could have enhanced value for money of woodland creation activities.

A1.4.3 Project activities

A1.4.3.1 Nature conservation

The partnership achieved its goal to turn 60 hectares of low-grade arable farmland into publicly accessible woodland by planting 100,000 trees during the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 winters. Tree care and survival surveys have also been carried out in spring and summer 2022, with remedial action taken where required.

A1.4.3.2 Nature based solutions

Construction of 30 new rural SuDS, exceeding the target for 20 rural SuDS, on existing arable farmland and/or within new woodland areas of Enfield Chase.

A1.4.3.3 Connecting people with nature

The project engaged 2,208 volunteers and trained 62 individuals, compared to its targets of 2,250 volunteers and 60 people trained. In addition, 111 people were involved in 8 guided walks, 362 people in 10 online and in-person talks.

- Weekly River Action Days included wetland vegetation management, bankside vegetation management, river clean-ups and removal of old fencing to make way for the beaver enclosure in Archer's Wood.
- Tree planting was delivered by a mix of community volunteers, corporate volunteers and primary school children.
- A partnership with the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) identified polluting outfalls and trained Enfield and North London resident in surveying of river invertebrates.

A1.4.3.4 Employment

The partnership created 4.7 FTE jobs and retained 2.1 FTE jobs.

A1.4.3.5 NGO resilience

The project tightened the partnership between Thames21 and Enfield Council, which has already resulted in further joint initiatives that are currently being carried out or in the planning phase.

A1.4.4 Project legacy

- **Formal groups to sustain environmental volunteer activities into the future**. The project has provided the impetus for existing volunteer groups to expand and new groups to form, who will continue to build on the work of the project. For example, the Pymmes BrookERS river action group have expanded their activities into new areas of the river, whilst new groups have been set up by people involved in project volunteering activities including the Friends of Enfield Chase, Friends of Albany Park, and Friends of Boundary Brook. Some of the project's budget was used to purchase tools and equipment for use by these groups.
- **Securing funding for continued large-scale activity**. The project has been included among 15 projects in the "Landscape recovery pilot" led by Enfield council under the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). The development phase will begin in January 2023, with funding provided for 20 years. This will come from blended finance, partly from the government and partly from corporate funding (e.g., biodiversity and carbon credits).

A1.5 Case study: Connecting to Green Spaces: Reconnecting BAMER communities to green spaces for health and wellbeing

A1.5.1 Project outline

The Sheffield Environmental Movement developed a programme of activities to support Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) groups in Sheffield to engage with nature and access the countryside. The programme aimed to instil knowledge, skills and passion for the environment that will enable participants to become mentors, champions and ambassadors within their communities and feel empowered to follow pathways into volunteering, training and employment.

- **Lead**: Sheffield Environmental Movement
- **Partners**: Thalassemia South Yorkshire (TSY), Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association (SADACCA), Roshni, and Sheffield College.
- **Project cost**: Total: £77,600; GRCF funding: £62,600 (81%)

A1.5.2 Project highlights

A1.5.2.1 Key successes

- **Surpassing their target for engagement**: The project engaged with 163% of their original target. The project aimed to engage 90 people of BAMER origin in the activities and actually engaged 147.
- **Increases in leadership capacity**: 15 BAMER group leaders benefitted from the opportunity to mentor others in their communities. 12 of these group leaders attended a three-day residential which focussed on developing their skills, knowledge and confidence in championing environmental opportunities. Survey results[36] show that there have been increases in group leaders' knowledge of the natural environment, awareness of volunteering, employment and training opportunities, leaders' abilities to organise group trips to the countryside and increases in their confidence and interest in being out in green spaces.

[36] Source: Sheffield Environmental Movement (March 2022). Connecting to Green Spaces: Reconnecting BAMER communities to green spaces for health and wellbeing. Project Reference Number OM-20-02598. Evaluation Report.

- **Increases in enjoyment of nature**: The participants survey[37] results show that participants reported an increase in their enjoyment of green spaces as well as a feeling of safety whilst in green spaces. Participants also reported increases in knowledge and interest in the natural environment as well as awareness of volunteering or job opportunities.
- **Promoting inclusivity within environmental organisations**: The project collaborated with eight environmental organisations who each delivered up to three presentations. This collaboration aimed to create change within environmental organisations to encourage them to become more inclusive. The Sheffield Environmental Movement team feel that the project has demonstrated that environmental organisations are keen to engage in outreach work. However, the level of cultural changes needed within the environmental organisations means more work will be needed before the aim of greater representation of BAMER communities in environmental organisations is achieved.

A1.5.2.2 Challenges

- **Adjusting to Covid-19 restrictions**: Covid-19 related restrictions caused delays in planning as group leaders were unable to meet when originally planned. This meant that activities started later in the summer than originally planned. The number and range of activities were adjusted to fit within the project time available and restrictions on numbers of people allowed to meet up.
- **Working within constraints of the academic year**: The Sheffield college group of participants was most affected by the delays caused by the Covid-19 restrictions as it meant that activities took place at the end of the academic year.
- **Barriers to participation for the BAMER community**: These included:
  - **Worsening financial circumstances**: due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated measures.
  - **English communication skills**: English often not being participants first language and low confidence in speaking English.
  - **Physical illness and mobility issues**: fitness levels, pain and disability discourage walking or leaving the house.
  - **Motivation to participate**: Many factors such as low self-confidence, mistrust of others and poor mental health, particularly following isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic, had a negative impact on participants willingness to participate.
  - **Transport**: Few participants had cars and lacked confidence to use public transport.

A1.5.2.3 Value for money

- **Longer-term funding would create more sustainability**: Although the SEM team report a ‘brilliant’ experience with the funding they would like to see more longer-term funding become available to support the sustainability of group programmes. They feel that this could support more volunteer activities and create longer-lasting health and wellbeing benefits for the BAMER community.
- **Volunteer time and expertise have been invaluable**: Sheffield Environmental Movement suggest that the contributions of volunteers have been key as they bring knowledge of the communities being engaged and are passionate about the cause.

[37] Source: Sheffield Environmental Movement (March 2022). Connecting to Green Spaces: Reconnecting BAMER communities to green spaces for health and wellbeing. Project Reference Number OM-20-02598. Evaluation Report.

Volunteers have also been able to increase their capacity and knowledge around group leadership and the environment. This means that the funding could have a multiplier effect.

A1.5.3 Project activities

A1.5.3.1 Connecting people with nature

The project focussed solely on the GRCF goal of connecting people with nature. In total 21 activities were carried out by five group leaders and involved a total of 147 participants, many of which attended more than one activity. The key activities carried out by the projects included:

- Two visits to Whirlow Hall Farm with 49 attendees from Sheffield college and TSY.
- Two herbal medicine/foraging workshops and walks with eight different groups. Workshop 1 involved 46 attendees and workshop 2 involved 47 attendees from Roshni, TSY and SADACCA.
- Four visits to Peak District National Park- Moors for the future, with a total of 37 attendees from Roshni, SADACCA and Sheffield College.
- One deer sighting trip attended by 16 attendees from TSY.
- Five workshops on air pollution with 27 attendees from Roshni and Sheffield College.
- One environmental tutorial with 28 attendees from Sheffield College.
- Four weekend group residentials which included talks from environmental NGOs with approximately 63 attendees.
- One group leader residential attended by 13 group leaders.

A1.5.3.2 NGO resilience

The project collaborated with eight environmental organisations and aimed to increase their awareness of the employment needs and motivations of the BAMER community to promote inclusivity. The Sheffield Environmental Movement team recognise that more long-term work will be needed to create tangible change through this collaboration. It was promising that both the environmental organisations and the BAMER groups were very willing to engage.

A1.5.4 Project legacy

- **Future activities**: A plan for action for future activities is in place and incorporates recommendations from a focus group of project participants. Recommendations included:
  - Conducting an internal skills audit and offering more training or accredited outdoor group leadership training courses to increase the skill base of staff,
  - Following up further with environmental organisations about opportunities discussed during the activities,
  - Reaching out to other local BAMER groups to expand the networks and offer opportunities to more people.
- **Securing funding**: SEM were successful in securing core funding for four years from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation which will allow them to continue their activities. They are also in the process of applying to other funding streams.

- **Continuing progress**: Planning is underway for further engagement with group leaders and members to assess medium- and longer-term outcomes and learning outcomes from this phase of the programme. A mentoring programme will be developed to continue to provide support to the groups involved and create opportunities for individuals to become environmental champions. Sheffield Environmental Movement plan to continue being a broker between BAMER communities and environmental organisations.

A1.6 Case study: Loftus Community Woodland

A1.6.1 Project outline

The Loftus Community Woodland has historically been disused and neglected. Funding from the GRCF aimed to make this woodland a beautiful and tranquil space for the community to enjoy, whilst ensuring flood management and restoration of wetlands.

- **Lead**: Beyond Housing
- **Partners**: Groundwork North East and Cumbria, Loftus parish council, Esh Housing, Loftus walking group, local councils, community groups, schools and residents.
- **Project cost**: Total: 216,800; GRCF funding: £124,100 (57%)

A1.6.2 Project highlights

A1.6.2.1 Key successes

- **Partnership working** has been successful during the project, with many groups being brought together to deliver high quality community events.
- **Kickstart programme**: 9 Kickstart placements were provided for people on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment, under the guidance of a full-time supervisor. The trainees on the Kickstart programme reported gaining a lot of knowledge and expertise and feeling empowered.
- **A new accessible path has been created**, cleaning areas from invasive and fast-growing plant species.
- **Engagement events** have been managed and delivered successfully.

A1.6.2.2 Challenges

- **Budgeting**: Several aspects of the project were more expensive than budgeted, due to both internal accounting issues and external market forces, presenting challenges to delivery. The Groundwork core fund was not as high as it should have been as VAT was missed on some things and staff time was underestimated. Material costs were very expensive, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Wood charges went up by 20% and fuel prices increased. Some materials were purchased to ensure sustainability (e.g., metal benches) but were considerably more expensive than alternatives.
- **Achieving consensus amongst partners on activity plans**: Balancing stakeholder/partner priorities was challenging at times in determining the best actions for delivery and specific aspects of activities being delivered.

A1.6.2.3 Value for money

- **Volunteer input** was a key element in the project, and a large number of hours were contributed through in-kind contributions.
- **Cost-effective event delivery**: More events were delivered within budget than anticipated, all of which were considered very successful.

A1.6.3 Project activities

A1.6.3.1 Nature conservation

The project planted more trees than originally planned (697) as well as fruit shrubs (195). It also created a pond system, which was an unexpected benefit and was discovered during the work being conducted. The project successfully removed 16km sqm of bramble and invasive species, created a wetland are around 50 square meters, saw an increase in the number of deer, rabbits and toads and introduced a number of areas to support nature (bird boxed, bug areas, etc.).

A1.6.3.2 Connecting people with nature

In total, 44 engagement events were held, of which 473 people were involved, 5 schools engaged, 35 people engaged in the Beat the Street campaign and various planting sessions attended by the community and volunteers. The project improved access to the woodland through widening paths and creation circular routes and installed new seating areas and resting points installed. The cost of some activities, including putting a path in, was considerable higher than first anticipate. It cost around £36,000 to £37,000 to introduce a path. Despite the cost, the project deemed this necessary and it is considered a part of the project that 'money could not buy' in terms of the level of engagement the path generated.

A1.6.3.3 Employment

The project secured one full-time post and created another from December 2021, with an additional three further posts supported. To date, one of the Kickstart employees has gone into full-time employment, one has continued their placement and the remaining seven are being supported by employment officers.

A1.6.3.4 NGO resilience

Specific sessions were held to develop the skills of both volunteers and Kickstart individuals. There were considered particularly beneficial for the project and have provided a lasting legacy among volunteers who can continue this work in the area.

A1.6.4 Project legacy

A strategy and vision to deliver this legacy is being prepared and discussed among stakeholders to identify priorities and ways of working. The project is in a good position to continue the legacy of the project, as many purchased assets and tools necessary to continue the work have been purchased, and the partnership working group share a joint vision.

Additional funding sources are being identified to ensure the legacy of the project. The project has received £2,000 from the Co-op Community Fund to work on a garden on the site, which includes activities such as introducing grasses, lavender and dense borders.

Other potential sources identified include the Community Garden Awards and other funding types from the Co-op Community Fund.

The main legacy plans for the Loftus Community Woodland include:

- Continuing to introduce native species and some non-native to benefit the wildlife (duration of 5-10 years).
- Increase volunteer and education opportunities around conservation and environmental issues (no timescale).
- Enhancing wetland ecosystems with oxygenated plants and natural vegetation filters, attracting amphibious creatures (5-10 years).
- Increasing feeding areas for pollinators (1-5 years).

The main risks to the project legacy include:

- Ensuring there is enough funding from Loftus Town Council to engage volunteers in the woodlands.
- Reliance on the engagement and interest of younger generations to deliver the work, become trained in activities and remain interested.
- Continued engagement and support of partners and land managers.

Annex 2 Evaluation questions

List of evaluation questions and section in which addressed

Was the GRCF delivered as intended?

- EQ1. Was the rationale for the GRCF clear, appropriate to the circumstances, and understood and shared by partners and stakeholders?
  - Section 2.1 and ICF (2021) Evaluation of the GRCF: Interim Evaluation - Final
- EQ2. Was the GRCF effectively delivered at pace and were there any unintended consequences?
  - Section 2.1 and ICF (2021) Evaluation of the GRCF: Interim Evaluation – Final
- EQ3. Was the application process proportionate to the needs of applicants, and did it work well?
  - Section 2.1 and ICF (2021) Evaluation of the GRCF: Interim Evaluation – Final
- EQ4. Was the permission to start phase appropriate to the needs of applicants, and did it work well?
  - Section 2.1 and ICF (2021) Evaluation of the GRCF: Interim Evaluation - Final
- EQ5. Were the programme monitoring and evaluation processes appropriate to the needs of applicants, partners and stakeholders, and did they work well?
  - Section 2.2
- EQ6. Was the 'end of project' process appropriate to the needs of applicants, and did it work well?
  - Section 2.2
- EQ7. Are adequate processes in place to manage risks and ensure the longer-term legacy of the projects?
  - Section 4.3
- EQ8. Have lessons been learned that could improve the processes of programme delivery in future?
  - Sections 2.3 and 6

Is the GRCF on track to achieve its intended outcomes?

- EQ9. What outputs and outcomes are the projects expected to achieve, when, and how will these be measured?
  - Section 3
- EQ10. What are the achievements of the programme to date, and have these met the expectations of The Heritage Fund/Defra and the projects?
  - Section 3

- EQ11. Are the projects on course to meet their intended outcomes, and are there risks and uncertainties?
  - Section 3
- EQ12. What has worked well and less well, and why?
  - Sections 2.3, 3, 5.4 and 6
- EQ13. How has the wider context influenced the outputs, outcomes and impacts of GRCF?
  - Section 3
- EQ14. What additional outcomes has the programme delivered compared to the counterfactual (no GRCF)?
  - Section 4.2
- EQ15. What longer-term outcomes and impacts are expected, over what timescales, and how could these be monitored and evaluated in future?
  - Sections 3 and 4.3

Did the GRCF provide good value for money, taking account its impact compared to the resources invested?

- EQ16. What resources were used by the programme (including Defra funding, other co-funding, in-kind resources)?
  - Section 5.2
- EQ17. What benefits has the programme delivered/ is the programme expected to deliver, and how do these compare to its costs?
  - Section 5.3
- EQ18. Is there evidence that some types of activities and/or sizes of project deliver better VfM than others?
  - Sections 5.3 and 5.4
- EQ19. Did the processes of project selection, programme management, monitoring and evaluation contribute to VfM?
  - Section 5.4
- EQ20. Does the allocation of 5% of the programme budget to administration represent good VfM?
  - Section 5.4
- EQ21. Did the compressed application, grant award and project delivery timetable have implications for VfM?
  - Section 5.4
- EQ22. Could better VfM have been delivered and have lessons been learned that could improve the VfM of future schemes?
  - Sections 5.4 and 6