

# The Green Recovery Challenge Fund Round 2 Final Report Annex: Case Studies

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# Cumbria Local Nature Partnership: Planting for Pollinators

## Interim Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £699,500

Total project cost: £821,490

Developed by Cumbria Local Nature Partnership and delivered by Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Cumbria County Council, the Planting for Pollinators project aimed to restore populations of pollinators across Cumbria through targeted restoration of nectar and pollen rich habitats. Through growing local-provenance wildflowers and providing training and volunteering opportunities, the partnership has facilitated action on 57 sites across Cumbria.



## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

Planting for Pollinators worked in collaboration with a range of local community groups, landowners and local councils to create a network of sites which support 'B-lines'. These wildflower-rich habitat stepping stones will conserve native pollinators and help wildlife respond to climate change. Each site owner has worked with the project's ecologists to conduct a site survey, to establish the most appropriate plants for the sites.

The creation of a plant nursery, which grows the wildflowers used on the project, has been a key enabling factor in the success of the project, with over 50,000 plants grown from local-provenance seed. This created a range of volunteering

opportunities for everyone, including those who might not be able carry out labour-intensive planting work on challenging terrain.

A key legacy of project is that each site is left with a 10-year management plan to enable continued maintenance, as well as an ongoing relationship with the Cumbria Wildlife Trust. The original wildflowers and seed were sourced from a local family-run business, which was a significant contract considering the volume of the plants produced by the nursery, which indirectly supports the local economy. The wildflowers grown will also contribute to the National Seed Bank Network which will support future restoration projects.



## Connecting People with Nature

Delivering the project as a partnership between Cumbria Wildlife Trust and Cumbria County Council has been positive to be able to draw on the resources and expertise of both partners and ensure continued buy-in from the local authority about the value of the project.

There has been considerable success engaging with groups at each site and responding to their needs, which all have different levels of conservation experience, tools and volunteer engagement.

In addition to engagement with groups at the different sites the project has engaged with other groups such as the NHS Stroke Rehabilitation Group and local schools.

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

The funding has enabled the project to create a number of trainee opportunities, including horticultural apprenticeship and entry-level conservation officer roles. Where the apprenticeship roles had a traditional practical focus, the conservation roles involved a range of tasks, including leading volunteering sessions and delivering training to groups involved at the sites.

Considerations of personal development and career progression was embedded from the start of the conservation officers being in post, in recognition that the roles were training opportunities to enable the conservation officers to progress into other roles in the sector. This was also important considering the timeline of the project and seasonality of tasks. Staff were incredibly positive about the contribution of the conservation officers, with one noting the transformation of the Wildlife Trust; a 60-year-old organisation, with around 60 staff, where one in five members of staff are now young people.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

Staff from the partnership highlighted a number of learnings from delivery of the project that would be used for the future. This included the need to retain a level of flexibility in project delivery to be able to respond and adapt to the needs of different sites and groups involved, as well as practical elements around building in evaluation and admin support from the start of the project. Supporting the engagement of both volunteers, community groups and local businesses in the supply chain was incredibly important for ensuring the legacy of the work delivered through the project. This led to a group of highly engaged volunteers and built positive relationships with a range of stakeholders across the county.

There was a strong recognition of the positive dynamic across a range of roles and specialists with a project team, including ecologists, horticulturalists, engagement officers and training and development officers. In this way, the project created a strong staffing model with the depth and breadth of skills across the team to be resilient during busier periods of the year such as the planting season.

# Trees for Cities: Forgotten Places

## Interim Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £1,229,600

Total project cost: £1,792,500

Delivered by Trees for Cities, the Forgotten Places project aimed to increase tree canopy cover in deprived urban and coastal towns. The project carried out a programme of community tree planting and tree-related activities in seven coastal towns and cities with high deprivation, low canopy cover, and lack of investment towards tree programmes. The 'Forgotten Places' identified through mapping were Bexhill, Brighton, Great Yarmouth, Hull, Portsmouth, Ramsgate, and Stockton.

## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

The project has planted over 55,000 trees, targeting areas of both environmental and social deprivation. A key aim of the project was to build capacity at both strategic and practical levels, both within local authorities to deliver tree planting projects, and capacity within local community groups who have engaged volunteers to upskill them to support the ongoing maintenance of the sites.

By sourcing the trees, offering the training and tools necessary to carry out the work, the project empowered local communities and gave them a sense of ownership over their local green space. Some community events were delivered by other project partners but supported by Trees for Cities, depending on the community's needs. A key legacy of the project was leaving the 'Forgotten Places' with tree planting strategies for the future.

With a focus on urban and coastal towns, the project delivered nature-based solutions and had a meaningful and tangible impact both on nature creation and restoration. The tree planting aims to minimise the effects of pollution from roads and create new wildlife habitats. Increasing canopy cover helps combat the urban heat island effect, where built up areas are considerably warmer than surrounding areas due to human activity. In targeting areas of social deprivation the tree planting also aimed to reduce inequalities which exist in access to green space.



## Connecting People with Nature

The Trees for Cities team did extensive work engaging with local community groups in the targeted areas to ensure they delivered tree planting in collaboration with local residents. This involved both desktop mapping of relevant community groups but also consultation with people on the ground.

This strategic approach meant that the delivery of the work involved people already interested in conservation work who could ensure the legacy of the project but also people who might never have done tree planting before who lived in close proximity to the sites.

The community tree planting days were also run in collaboration with the local community. For example, at one event run in Bexhill during school half term there were people of all ages. The event had face painting, colouring and a children's entertainer, as well as a steel drum band and lunch provided by a local curry house.

**'At recent events in Bexhill there were so many people commenting on the sense of community and the community spirit.'** (Staff member)



## Organisational Resilience and Skills

The project has supported over 40 green jobs and trainees in a range of roles. In particular, the 17 paid trainee roles were a key opportunity to develop green skills for the sector. Staff noted these trainees were exposed to a number of practical skills, including tree planting, bushcraft and carpentry. Equally, the roles were designed to develop their social skills and build their confidence to work in public facing roles and in community engagement.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

In reflecting on the project's governance structure, the Trees for Cities team recommended the creation of a designated lead role responsible for overall project management in the future. This recommendation had been based upon the findings of a staff feedback survey, whereby respondents highlighted the difficulties associated with the project's lack of a singular named contact (e.g. not knowing who to ask about questions related to delivery and rollout). Respondents also stated that the lack of a project manager ensured that tasks were distributed between staff with busy workloads, rather than to one delegated individual. In collecting this feedback, the project team have learnt ways to restructure management models and streamline for clarity and efficiency.

In developing a methodology to target and prioritise neighbourhoods, Trees for Cities has created a strong platform from which future programmes can be developed to increase, improve and celebrate urban trees with local communities. Through 'Forgotten Places' it has developed its mapping skills in order to further refine methodologies to target and prioritise neighbourhoods where such programmes will have the greatest impact for future work.

Since the project's end, Trees for Cities has secured funding towards ongoing maintenance of the trees planted for the next three years, helping to ensure that trees establish and thrive in the future. It has begun to utilise the methodology in other projects, for example in Tower Hamlets where it plans to continue working with Treeconomics to create a Tree Planting Strategy, this time with a particular focus on air quality which is a critical issue in this inner London borough.

Similarly, it has also built on its partnership with the Field Studies Council and secured a three-year National Lottery Community Fund grant towards a Trees for Climate Action project in Bradford and Glasgow City Region.

# Freshwater Habitats Trust: Building Oxfordshire's Freshwater Network

## Interim Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £695,100

Total project cost: £810,128

The Freshwater Habitats Trust are a UK based charity aiming to protect freshwater environments and wildlife. Funding from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) enabled the Freshwater Habitats Trust to hire and train new staff to support a new project: 'Building Oxfordshire's Freshwater Network'.

## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

Water pollution and a lack of management have left a number of Oxfordshire's habitats in a poor condition. The project aimed to undertake a range of activities to restore four Oxfordshire Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) fens, some of the rarest habitats in the UK.

The activities to restore the alkaline fens included:

- Volunteer work parties to manage the spread of Common Reeds, which threaten to dominate the restoration areas.
- Baseline data collection to measure water quality, invertebrate and plant counts.
- Practical fen management through the removal of trees and scrub.
- Translocating species such as parsley water-dropwort and marsh lousewort to support the restoration effort.

Funding from the GRCF also allowed for the continuation of some of the Freshwater Habitats Trust's other activities such as the development of new wetland complexes around the River Thames and habitat restoration around the River Ock.

## Connecting People with Nature

The Freshwater Habitats Trust have engaged volunteers in many of their activities. The plant propagation scheme saw roughly 500 volunteers grow their own wetland plants (which are in decline in the wild) and keep plant diaries to note and share good practice for the propagation in the Spring. The Freshwater Habitats Trust have also developed a pipeline for volunteers to participate in other aspects of the project. Fen management taster sessions allowed volunteers to learn the basics of scything,



seed propagation and water quality testing, after which they can then join groups which meet regularly and attend training sessions to advance their skills and knowledge to support the restoration of the SSSI fens. One volunteer at a taster session noted,

**‘I’ve learnt so much about why this work needs to be done, I’ll definitely look for some training in this area in the future.’**

As well as consistent volunteer groups, the project managers noted one of their main highlights from the work was the large-scale nature events organised with families. The events generated a lot of interest and broader awareness of conservation activities.

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

The restoration of these SSSI fens has required a breadth of knowledge, expertise and resource which the Freshwater Habitats Trust have been able to recruit using funding from the GRCF. As well as safeguarding existing roles, the Freshwater Habitats Trust have been able to hire three new trainees, introducing new workers into the conservation sector with expertise in environmental sciences, geography and geology.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

Whilst the Freshwater Habitats Trust largely focused on delivering practical conservation work before project inception, the Building Oxfordshire’s Freshwater Network project demonstrated to the organisation the value in community engagement and the potential for community groups to make tangible improvement to local wildlife and habitats. In particular, the project has succeeded in raising awareness of unique and rare fen environments through large scale events and activities with schools. Project managers also felt that the GRCF has allowed the project to recruit and train new staff and volunteers, encouraging more people into the conservation sector.

Overall, the GRCF has equipped the Freshwater Habitats Trust with the means to build upon their successes. Collecting baseline data through water sampling and the plant diaries will allow them to track the progress of their work in restoring the fens, the expansion of staff and training will ensure that they have the appropriate expertise going forward, and the recruitment of volunteers ensures that there is a local and caring base to support environmental restoration in the long term.

The Freshwater Habitats Trust have been able to leverage their successes from their GRCF project to secure further funding, retain roles and ensure that the restoration

work can continue at its expanded scale. The expansion of staff and expertise in the charity has provided the Freshwater Habitats Trust with a strong framework to repeat their successes and expand to new restoration effort in the future.

# Marine Conservation Society: Inspiring Blue Recovery Through Connecting People with the Ocean

## Interim Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £248,400

Total project cost: £322,162

The Marine Conservation Society is a UK charity dedicated to cleaner and better protected oceans for all. With around 100 staff, the Marine Conservation Society has traditionally relied on volunteers for beach and river cleanups and other community service activities.

The Inspiring Blue Recovery project aimed to connect new groups of people with the ocean and enhance volunteering, education, and training opportunities online and in person. This was done through the creation of three new roles, the retention of eight existing roles and the creation of an engagement strategy nation-wide and locally.

The Marine Conservation Society also wanted to significantly scale up their volunteering uptake, marine Citizen Science programme and their youth engagement work. In addition they wanted to connect people with nature, inspire them to take action to protect marine health and allow them to feel heard and part of a team and wider movement.

## Connecting People with Nature

Staff suggested that the Marine Conservation Society volunteering experience prior to the project was greatly dependent on area and aspiring participants could wait up to a month between signing up and hearing back from a regional manager. Through the Inspiring Blue Recovery project, a national volunteer engagement manager was hired to collaborate with regional coordinators to engage more people and improve volunteer experience. As a result of the project, all newly signed up volunteers are promptly invited to an online introductory session after sign-up, and they get involved in activities quickly, regardless of location. As a result of training and engaging in physical events, participants have said that they have greater confidence and feel a greater connection to nature and the oceans.

The project's Citizen Science programme includes beach and river cleans and the collection of data on ocean wildlife, pollution, habitat destruction, and microplastics. Through their online presence, the Marine Conservation Society has encouraged volunteers to collect data on jellyfish and marine turtles, seaweed and the amount of litter that is present on beaches and alongside rivers. This data is easily submitted onto their newly developed website and leads to greater data collection on British ocean habitats and feeds into the Marine Conservation Society's scientific research and policy campaigns.

The organisation's Citizen Science programme has also been improved and further developed to increase the involvement of all age groups, including young people in particular. The Marine Conservation Society has transformed their engagement systems and through the appointment of their Youth Engagement Officer have been able to engage both young adults and children in schools and youth groups.

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

The Marine Conservation Society has created a Youth Social Network for those aged 13-25 to support the co-creation of like-minded young people who communicate with the Marine Conservation Society on a regular basis, participate in online data collection, and help direct the youth engagement strategy. The continuation of this network will help to increase organisational resilience by providing a sustainable supply of volunteers to aid with future project and upkeep work.

Efforts to attract a strong volunteer base have been further supplemented through the creation of named volunteer roles such as Community Presenter and Media Spokesperson. This gives ambitious volunteers more responsibilities and widens the reach of the Marine Conservation Society to different communities and media channels. Not only has this resulted in the Marine Conservation Society having an expanded reach, enabling further growth of the charity, but it also helps volunteers feel more involved and ensures them that they can make a difference through their work.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

The Inspiring Blue Recovery project has created the building blocks for the Marine Conservation Society to grow volunteer numbers and community engagement both online and offline and this will lead to sustainable growth for the charity which they now are prepared to tackle efficiently. The enhancement of their Citizen Science programme made through GRCF is finished and will continue to be utilised to engage young people, as will the data collection, training and educational opportunities offered.

The data collected as part of the project and beyond will be used for scientific research undertaken by the Marine Conservation Society and feeds into the knowledge about the status of the ocean and wildlife surrounding the British Isles, and will continued to be used to base policy recommendations and campaigns for government in the future.

# Royal Society for the Protection of Birds: A Greener Thames

## Interim Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £1,833,000

Total project cost: £1,929,546

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' (RSPB) Greener Thames project aimed to support nature conservation and restoration efforts along the Thames River in England. This project has sought to restore wetland habitats, install solar pumps, improve grazing management and increase the breeding populations of priority species including redshank, lapwing and oystercatcher, contributing to the Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Kent and Essex.



## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

The RSPB's project contributed significantly to conservation and restoration activities along the Thames River. By focusing on habitat restoration and species monitoring, the project aimed to enhance biodiversity and restore natural ecosystems.

The central conservation activity within this project is the restoration of over 1800 hectares of land, co-led by private landowners and other conservation organisations. This has allowed the project to 'future proof' local grasslands and involve local people to ensure they feel like they 'have a stake' in these areas.

The installation of 29 solar pumps has also been highlighted as a key project success. It is anticipated that the installation of these will enhance hydrological management across 1200 hectares of land. One staff member said,

**‘The solar pumps are new for us and the county, they will enable us to move away from fossil fuels. [The installation of the pumps] has been quick and effective and provides us with a legacy for the future.’ (Staff member)**

Trainees have also played a key part in project conservation activities. They participated in habitat restoration efforts, such as rewilding riverbanks, planting native vegetation, and creating wildlife-friendly spaces. It is anticipated that these activities will result in increased biodiversity and improved habitat quality in the longer-term. Trainees also played a vital role in monitoring and protecting key species along the Thames River. Through their efforts, data on species populations and distribution was collected, aiding informed conservation decision-making.

## Connecting People with Nature

As a result of GRCF Round 2 funding, the Greener Thames project was able to recruit a community engagement officer and a youth panel to support the RSPB’s better engagement with a diverse range of audiences. This has led to a wide range of community events and activities at the RSPB reserves. Family friendly walks have been the most successful community outreach activity to date resulting in many local residents engaging with their local reserve for the first time. The community engagement officer undertook a range of community outreach e.g. advertisements in local newspapers and promotion materials in local community centres to reach this new audience.



As a result, at Rainham Marshes Nature Reserve, there is a weekly parents walk hosted by the community engagement officer where new parents can meet other parents and explore the reserve together. New parents attending the walks have

described the activity as a 'lifeline' where they have been supported by other new parents and developed friendships which in turn has improved their wellbeing and made them feel less isolated,

**'We've made friends here. We now meet up outside of the walks. You can feel quite alone when you first have a baby and like you aren't very good at looking after them. By meeting others here, it has made me feel a lot better because now I know I am not alone with those struggles.'** (Participant)

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

GRCF Round 2 funding allowed the project to support nine roles including three trainees. As highlighted above, the project provided trainees with a diverse range of activities to enhance their understanding of nature conservation and restoration. Trainees participated in practical fieldwork and were also involved in community engagement initiatives, such as leading guided nature walks and delivering educational programmes to raise awareness about the importance of the natural environment.

Throughout the project, trainees have received comprehensive support, including training, mentorship, and guidance from experienced conservation professionals and their manager. This support has enabled them to develop practical skills in wetland management and community outreach.

**'Being part of the Greener Thames project has not only deepened my understanding of conservation but has also given me the practical skills needed to make a real difference.'** (Trainee)

The development of the traineeship was also a learning curve for the RSPB as they looked to develop a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

Trainees' experiences within the Greener Thames project have had a profound impact on their personal and professional development. The hands-on involvement in habitat restoration, innovative climate resilience techniques, and species conservation has equipped them with practical skills and knowledge. Trainees also suggested that the project has an impact on their well-being and future aspirations:

**'The support and training provided through the project have been invaluable. I have grown both personally and professionally, and I now have the confidence to pursue a career in environmental management.'** (Trainee)



## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

Reflecting on the trainee experience through the Greener Thames project, staff and trainees identified key lessons learnt that they would share with other organisations looking to diversify their workforce. This included:

- Ensuring that diversity and inclusion are not just buzzwords, but actively implemented in projects and organisational structures.
- Recognising that internships and traineeships can be classist and projects should strive to provide financial support for participants where possible.
- Fostering a culture of authenticity and continuous review within the organisation to ensure alignment with diversity and inclusion goals.
- Challenging traditional narratives and paradigms within the sector to create a more inclusive and accessible environment for everyone.

Staff emphasised that the Greener Thames project has also shown them the importance of empowering local communities, particularly young people, through targeted entry-level training roles. By providing training and career development opportunities, the project not only supported the personal and professional growth of individuals but also cultivated a sense of ownership and stewardship for the natural world within the community. This approach promoted engagement with nature and fostered a lasting connection between people and their local environment.

Looking forward, community engagement activities will be continued by Royal Society for the Protection of Birds volunteers where additional funds are not available. As volunteers have engaged with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reserves for considerable periods of time, it is believed that these activities will be sustained in the longer-term.

Staff praised their colleagues and partners' efforts during the Greener Thames project. It was suggested that the short-delivery time available resulted in staff going 'above and beyond' to deliver. As a result, most capital work activity was described as largely 'self-sustaining'. The solar pumps installed are designed to be low maintenance and easy to understand whilst the maintenance of land will be taken on the ranger team.

# Suffolk Wildlife Trust: Carlton Marshes – Bringing the Broads to Lowestoft

## Final Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £247,000

Total project cost: £274,000

Carlton Marshes is situated in the Waveney Valley at the southern tip of the Broads National Park, on the Suffolk-Norfolk border.

The project aimed to contribute to the GRCF's core themes of nature conservation and connecting people with nature.

It achieved the former through the creation and enhancement of local habitat, while it accomplished the latter through the installation of infrastructure and encouraging community and public engagement with the reserve's natural environment. This multi-faceted approach contributed to the project's success in delivering on its objectives and supporting broader conservation and community goals.



## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

The Carlton Marshes project has made substantial progress in the realm of nature recovery, effectively addressing initial concerns about timeframes and contractor availability to achieve a swift turnaround. Building upon the foundations established by previous funding the project was well-positioned to commence efforts promptly.



Through dynamic wetland habitat creation, including the creation of 200 metres of new Broadland dyke and excavating 20 turf ponds, the team has significantly expanded the habitats on-site, leading to a marked increase in biodiversity.

The establishment of Broadland dykes helped to retain water on the grazing marsh, thereby encouraging the spread of aquatic invertebrates across the landscape. Simultaneously, the restoration of turf ponds fosters early succession habitats, providing ideal conditions for the development of new fen communities – a crucial component of the reserve’s long-term approach for fen restoration.

Aquatic monitoring reports consistently report positive project outcomes, with the discovery of previously unidentified snail species evident of the short-term impacts in habitat creation, with the newly established dykes integrating into existing, species rich habitats.

Furthermore, the installation of a wind pump to regulate water levels at Oulton Marshes has transformed the site into thriving grounds for breeding waders and wintering wildfowl. The programme of habitat and species monitoring has demonstrated Carlton Marshes to be one of the most productive breeding wader sites in Suffolk.

## Connecting People with Nature

Prior to the GCRF project, the site welcomed approximately 30,000 visitors annually, but with ongoing enhancements to the visitor centre and other opportunities, the number of annual visitors has risen to 120,000. This surge in attendance, also boosted by the lifting of COVID lockdown restrictions, has resulted in the attraction of a wider range and newer audiences to the reserve.

**‘We have been able to normalize people going to nature reserves’ (Project team member)**

The project's commitment to enhancing accessibility is evident through the addition of wheelchair-friendly paths and viewpoints, significantly broadening the range of participants who can connect with nature at the site. A key example includes the construction of a 300-metre all-access surfaced path leading to dipping platforms and the installation of a new pedestrian culvert, aimed at improving access for all visitors. A tower viewpoint at Horseshoe Point, complete with ramped access has also been constructed, providing panoramic vistas over Oulton Dyke and Peto's Marsh. The project expands on infrastructure improvements funded by previous National Lottery investment. The addition of viewing structures to an existing network of paths has effectively addressed historical mobility and accessibility challenges.

Other key initiatives include the installation of a dyke dipping platform, constructed from recycled plastic 'timber,' to increase the capacity for visitors and highlight the value of the water beneath the surface. Whereas the introduction of the '3 good things in nature' survey as part of a family visitor trail has been instrumental in collecting memorable nature experiences and fostering a deeper connection to the natural world.

Engagement efforts extend beyond the reserve, with the project's engagement team actively reaching out to schools and the community in Lowestoft. Talks and walks have been conducted for various groups to underscore the importance of nature for well-being. This work was an important contribution in redirecting attention to the national parks accessible from Lowestoft, historically a fishing town with a strong connection to the sea.

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

In terms of staffing, the project successfully recruited a new Assistant Warden, filling a full-time position from September 2021 to March 2023. Further investment was made towards training and skill development for the recruit to manage the reserve effectively, this involved a wide range of areas, from quad bike operation to forestry and chemical handling.

Crucially, Suffolk Wildlife Trust made a commitment to safeguard this role beyond the project's conclusion, transitioning it into a permanent position. Moreover, the role's scope has expanded to encompass management responsibilities across not just Carlton Marshes but six reserves in total.

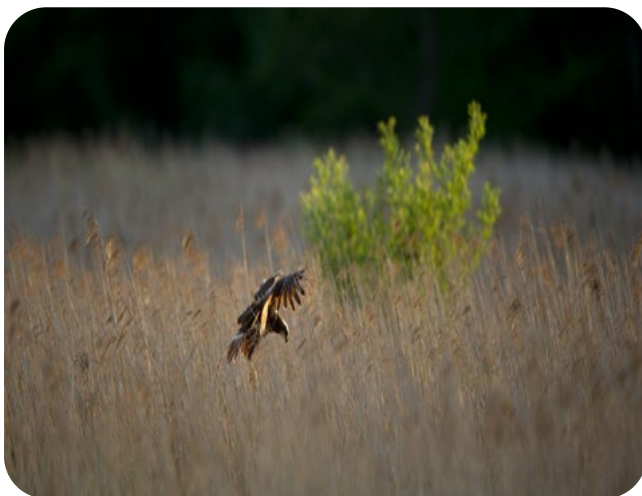
The addition of an extra staff member has increased the organisation's resilience and operational capacity, reducing its reliance on external contractors for reserve management.



## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

The Carlton Marshes project has yielded important lessons that can inform future conservation efforts of the reserve.

Firstly, the value of collaborative relationships became evident through partnerships with organisations like the Broads Authority, which contributed to project funding, shared knowledge and provided resource. The Suffolk Wildlife Trust has also developed new relationships with contractors, who, prior to GRCF, had not been frequently engaged with activity in the Carlton Marshes. As a result of project activity, said contractors now play a more significant role in the ongoing management of the site.



Engagement approaches have also evolved because of the project. While school visits were previously led by staff, they are now designed to empower volunteers by allowing them to take more responsibilities. Additionally, self-guided trails around the reserve are more actively encouraged, with the option for teacher to receive training to facilitate a session for their class. This represents a broader shift in the reserve's approach, moving to enabling rather than just leading.

In terms of laying a robust foundation for the future of the reserve, one significant contribution of the GRCF project is the development of a comprehensive 10-year site management plan, which will guide conservation efforts and habitat restoration well into the future. The project has also entered an agri-environmental scheme set to run for five years, further ensuring the sustained health and vitality of the reserve. This long-term commitment to environmental stewardship aligns with the project's overarching goals of nature recovery and connecting people to nature.

Regarding habitat monitoring, the project has established a robust baseline through fixed point photography and drone surveys. The ongoing monitoring efforts of the established volunteer team will provide critical data to inform future conservation decisions and track the evolution of the project area. As a result of these surveying and habitat creation efforts, the site is now recorded as one of the most diverse for dragonflies and damselflies in the UK.

# Chester Zoo: Nature Recovery Corridor

## Final Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £990,500

Total project cost: £1,184,533

Chester Zoo's Nature Recovery Corridor project, covering a 10-mile stretch from Chester to Ellesmere Port, has connected wildlife with wildlife, people with wildlife, and people with people. Working in collaboration with a number of partners including Cheshire West Communities Together, the Canal and River Trust, and Sustrans, it has delivered both habitat conservation activity and connected people with nature.

The project has created or restored over 62 hectares of habitat and directly engaged over 12,000 people in nature-based activities. The funding has supported 13 full-time members of staff, including five trainees as well as a wide range of local contractors.

**'The major success of this project was that all partners and audiences felt part of something bigger and we were able to create a movement and a network of collaborators.'**(Project staff member)

## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

The Nature Recovery Corridor has restored wetlands, traditional orchards, hedgerows, grasslands, and wildflower meadows across Cheshire, creating a connective habitat that will contribute to the recovery of a number of species. Connective habitats allow for the movement of wildlife between fragmented ecosystems to support the resilience of species and improve biodiversity.

As part of nature conservation activity, three shallow scrapes were dug totalling a length of 250m and a perimeter of 500m, within the Zoo estate, to the aim of restoring lowland wet grassland. The scrapes will provide open water and muddy banks for invertebrates and overwintering birds as well as connectivity through the site for amphibians and other wildlife.

62 native fruit trees (a mix of apple and pear) were planted on a site which was cited as an orchard on historic maps of the local area. Beyond the project it is planned that the orchard will be managed to maximise the opportunities for wildlife including birds, pollinators and invertebrates and will mature into a valuable resource for wildlife on the Zoo estate.

15 hectares of existing grassland was managed through the 'cut and lift method'. This method constitutes simultaneously cutting the grass and collecting it to prevent nutrients from further improving the soil, which helps to maintain floristic diversity and create the bare ground needed for flowering plants to germinate in. This area of grassland has had no active management before the project's inception and likely would have remained uncut without the funding from the GRCF.

Project staff were incredibly positive about the scale of activity delivered, and noted that such large-scale habitat works would not have been possible without the level of funding offered through the GRCF.

## Connecting People with Nature

The project sought to connect people with nature through a range of engagement activities. Building on models of engagement tested through previous projects, the project developed its long-term engagement package with schools and community groups. The goal of these models was to build up capacity within these groups, to enable them to continue hosting and engaging in nature-based activities themselves.

For schools, this involved supporting a family wildlife club and training teachers. Through this the whole school was engaged, and it encouraged them to take action in their school grounds. The school groups that they worked with were selected based on having free school meals and being in areas of multiple deprivation. In addition to hosting a programme of activities and events for pupils (such as developing ponds, bug hotels and bog gardens), the engagement offer also extended to local families through ongoing provisions such as the Family Wildlife Club.

**'[The Community Engagement Officer] has done and continues to do a fab job, the children love wildlife club and it is making a positive difference in so many ways.'** (School staff member)

An equivalent model was set up with community groups running wildlife and wellbeing clubs. The project offered training to the community group leaders, so they have the skills to maintain these activities in the future, and are empowered to do so. These groups represent new and diverse audiences including a mental health charity, groups that combat loneliness, and a multicultural group. The engagement offer focused specifically upon increasing knowledge of and access to local nature amongst communities who are less likely to engage with green spaces and nature more generally.

**'We are currently looking at extending our wildlife area accessing more space where we can plant flowers and shrubs to attract butterflies and bees. Our garden is a joy to work in,**



**the bird song which for so long has been missing is now something of beauty.’ (Community group member)**

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

Thirteen jobs were supported through the project, with five Kickstart trainees. The Government’s Kickstart scheme had been set up to create new jobs for 16-24-year-olds on Universal Credit at risk of long-term unemployment. Project staff noted that Kickstart trainees had a broad programme of training, and could get involved with all aspects of the project delivery.

**‘They’ve gone on into related careers, so it was obviously a good stepping stone for them.’ (Staff member)**

By the end of project delivery, four of five trainees had secured further employment within the conservation field; furthermore, one of these trainees continued employment at the Zoo in a new role. Alongside sustaining the positions of already employed staff within the Zoo, the project has helped to increase organisational resilience by equipping trainees with valuable skills to contribute to both the Zoo and the sector.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

Reflecting on the project overall, Chester Zoo reported that the most valuable learning centred around the partnership model and the strengths of a collaborative approach to delivery. The Canal and River Trust, for example, retained capacity to arrange additional paddle day activities for the removal of invasive species in the Shropshire Union Canal, whilst staff from the Zoo were able to share their expertise on wildflower restoration with other partner organisations to support delivery.

The delivery of the Nature Recovery Corridor project has positively impacted Chester Zoo as an organisation as the project area covers around a third of the local nature recovery area, meaning the project can act as a landscape-scale case study and contribute to Local Nature Recovery strategies and policy conversations.

Building on the delivery models and partnerships developed through the project, Chester Zoo launched Networks for Nature (N4N) in 2023 as a legacy project to Nature Recovery Corridor. Whilst N4N retains the same overall aims as its predecessor (e.g. connecting local communities and individuals with nature), the project aims to operate across a broader area and aims to deliver activities not previously undertaken, for example habitat improvements with private landowners. This legacy project has since secured a Development Phase grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and Chester Zoo is currently in discussion with partners regarding project delivery.

# The Renewal Trust: New Roots

## Final Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £109,900

Total project cost: £109,900

The Renewal Trust is a Nottingham-based charity focusing on developing happier, healthier, and connected communities within St Ann's, Sneinton and Mapperley. The Renewal Trust's New Roots project aimed to engage and empower marginalized communities in Nottingham, particularly in the St Ann's area. Focused on St Ann's Allotments, a 75-acre site, the project aimed to involve residents in land-based activities and convert unused areas into inner-city woodlands, generating income and enhancing sustainability.

Responding to a skills gap in green space management, identified in a previous project, the New Roots project sought to upskill local people, attract volunteers, and promote community engagement in nature and biodiversity initiatives. Volunteers played a key role in trialling innovative approaches to enhance plot-holder retention and improve the site's accessibility. This was particularly crucial in areas of the allotment that were previously deemed unsuitable for sustainable gardening.

## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

Within its upskilling initiative, the New Roots project delivered multiple hedge laying workshops with local volunteers. This resulted in previous hedgerows that had died or been ripped out being replaced with new hedgerow whips. In total, 180 hedgerow whips were planted. Volunteers now also have a better understanding of sustainable hedge-laying and maintenance which will allow them to confidently apply a range of maintenance techniques and identify suitable hedgerows for laying.

The New Roots project has also transformed Lotus Gardens, which comprises of eight large plots, from an overgrown and inaccessible space into a flat and easy to use space. The eight plots have been divided into 20 smaller functioning horticultural plots. Project activity also included the clearing of 50 overgrown plots across the allotments. These plots are now being used as traditional horticultural plots and new woodland and wildlife spaces.

The New Roots project activities have resulted in improvements to the allotment site. In particular, staff reported that the quality of the soil and hedgerows has

considerably improved, with earthworms being observed for the first time at the allotments.

## Connecting People with Nature

The project sought to establish training and employment opportunities for young people and disadvantaged individuals in Nottingham. The Renewal Trust established partnerships with a diverse array of bodies, community organisations and groups to reach residents in St Ann's as well as ex-offenders.

One example of the New Roots engagement and outreach activities was its probation and community service scheme, which engaged people on community sentences or suspended sentence orders in supporting the site maintenance team in a variety of tasks on the allotments, such as: plot clearance and hedge maintenance, tree and hedge planting, engaging and preparing for workshops and events, and the restoration of the site's heritage assets.

Delivered in partnership with the Nottingham Probation Service, the project successfully involved 258 people on probation service in over 7800 hours of community service benefitting both nature and their personal development through engaging in new skills and learning about useful nature-based activities, such as green management skills and the use of power tools. The scheme has enabled ex-offenders, who are not likely to engage in nature, to gain an interest in the local environment and green skills, with some expressing interest in sustaining a connection with the St Ann's allotment in the future.

The project also extended its reach further by collaborating with community groups, specifically targeting groups focusing on engaging members of the targeted populations. These partnerships have facilitated visits and experiences at the St Ann's allotments for groups such as: BAC-IN, an organisation offering specialist drug and alcohol recovery services aimed at people belonging to BAME communities, Nottingham Legacy Makers which aims to increase awareness of Black contributions to material wealth in Britain, and When Women Gather which focuses on supporting women's emotional, mental and physical health and wellbeing.

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

The project has helped strengthen the organisational resilience of The Renewal Trust and has demonstrated the organisation's capacity to quickly develop and act upon strategies and plans, even in challenging circumstances. The lessons learned on the topics of project management and organisation alongside the training and staff development embedded within its team have equipped the trust with a range of skillsets important in continuing their activity and attracting new funding.

Furthermore, through the provision of training courses and workshops, six members of allotment staff and twenty individuals identified as stakeholders developed skills ranging from mental health awareness and first aid to heritage building and hedgerow maintenance. These provisions have served to ensure that staff and stakeholders have been equipped with expertise within a wide range of areas such as community engagement, nature and heritage conservation, and activities within these areas can be sustained beyond the life of the project.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

The successes of New Roots have allowed for the continuation of the project in the form of 'New Roots 2', which builds on the achievements and insights gained during the first project and further amplifies the positive impacts seen on both the local communities and the environment.

The project has also opened doors to continued collaboration with new partners not previously worked with and the possibility of collaborating on the development of future projects. This would extend the work on tree nurseries, crop cultivation, tree and hedgerow maintenance, and resource development on-site.

The New Roots project has not only left a profound impact on the community and the local environment within the St Ann's allotments but has also set the stage for promising a future of continued resilience and sustainability for the organisation and St Ann's site.

# Torbay Council: Clennan Catchment Blue Resilience

## Final Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £226,300

Total project cost: £314,559

Clennan Catchment Blue Resilience was a multi-agency nature restoration project operating within green spaces and natural assets across the Clennan catchment area in South Devon. Torbay Council were awarded GRCF funding to deliver job creation and community engagement programmes and a capital works scheme alongside partner organisations SWISCo and Groundwork.

By the project's end, all KPIs as stated in the original GRCF application were either met or exceeded. Its primary successes included its implementation of a natural flood management scheme to build climate resilience within the local ecosystem, in addition to a range of infrastructure improvements within Westerland Valley. Representatives from partner organisations also reported that the project has been largely successful in achieving its aims regarding physical restoration in Westerland Valley, engagement with the local community and creating jobs within the sector.

## Nature Conservation, Restoration and Nature-Based Solutions

The implementation of a natural flood management scheme has seen the restoration of the headwaters of the Clennan catchment, with the narrow fast flowing stream sections restored to a more natural state in addition to the creation of permanent and seasonal pools and attenuation areas. Outputs have also included the creation of wildflower areas in addition to hedgerow and tree planting, whilst infrastructure works took place to make the valley more publicly accessible.

The success of the scheme was considered a project highlight by members of the delivery team, as it contributed towards the safeguarding of local homes and businesses, as well as the flood resilience of the Paignton area more generally.

## Connecting People with Nature

Community engagement and participation from residents and local groups had been retained consistently throughout delivery, with the project filling over four hundred Citizen Science positions and engaging a similar number of individuals from

disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds. As well as providing both students and residents with opportunities for personal and skills development, these programmes served to inform target audiences of the site, increase their feelings of ownership and foster a communal desire to conserve the local area.

The project has also installed permanent signage in the park in Westerland Valley and alongside surrounding walking trails. The newly created map and information boards should ensure that the increased accessibility of the valley is retained beyond the life of Blue Resilience.

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

An additional success for the project had also been achieved in the field of job creation and retention. The delivery of Blue Resilience enabled the creation of 11 new environmental positions and the retention of two more positions.

The project also supported 10 Kickstart trainees through a six-month 'Countryside Trainee' programme. Staff described initial issues concerning non-compliance and punctuality amongst the trainees. However, trainees gradually overcome these issues as they grew to understand their responsibilities and expectations as set by the programme. All ten individuals who were recruited from the 'Kickstart' programme as 'Countryside Trainees' went on to enter employment or enrol in further training.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

Members of the project's management team have reported that the actions delivered as a result of GRCF funding has allowed Torbay Council and partners to better prepare for further development work ahead of recent environmental legislation, such as the 2021 Environment Act. Due to the project's ongoing volunteer programmes set up to monitor and record information on invertebrate species along the Clennan Waterway, it was reported that both the Council and potential future partners are better placed to evidence fulfilment of planning permission requirements surrounding biodiversity net gain. This foundation may pave the way for potential legacy projects aiming to build on the development works already completed.

# The National Trust: Delivering Upland Landscapes for Nature, Climate and People

## Final Stage Case Study: Project Overview

Grant amount: £1,950,000

Total project cost: £2,716,397

The Delivering Upland Landscapes for Nature, People, and Climate project was a large-scale conservation initiative delivered across a series of different landscapes owned by The National Trust including areas within Exmoor, Shropshire Hills, and the Lake District. Managed by local project teams, it was a collaborative effort between The National Trust, local landowners, and farmers. The project covered all green recovery themes through the focus on activities such as the planting of trees and hedgerows, restoration of multiple historically and environmentally important habitats, and engagement and volunteering programmes.

The project was highly successful in achieving key aims set out by The National Trust. This included expanding work beyond their own land, working on whole landscapes, and working with local partners and communities.

## Nature Conservation, Restoration, and Nature-Based Solutions:

The project showcased substantial achievements in nature conservation and restoration, with specific interventions tailored to each region. Achievements included the revitalisation of 415 hectares of coastal heathland on the Holnicote Estate, a methodical regeneration of landscapes in Shropshire Hills, and the adoption of sustainable farming practices by North Devon farmers. These efforts also included the creation and restoration of 518 hectares of broadleaved woodland and wood pasture involving the planting of approximately 160,000 trees and 16,473 metres of new hedgerow.

Across the different sites, project teams also worked closely with a range of local stakeholders including farmers, landowners, non-for-profit organisations and community wildlife groups to support benefits to nature both inside and outside of site boundaries. In Tilberthwaite in the Lake District, the project prioritised heathland restoration at Coniston Hall Farm and the protection of key species such as juniper,

bilberry, and cross-leaved heath. In the Shropshire Hills, farmers were supported to engage in sustainable farming, and the project successfully linked up habitats via the creation of wildlife corridors covering 220km<sup>2</sup>. This will ultimately support improving the condition of 3,190 hectares of habitat.

## Connecting People with Nature

The National Trust's engagement programme to connect more people to nature empowered volunteers with skills, fostered community bonds and increased public awareness and connection to the nature and the environment. The overall project directly engaged over 7,350 individuals through events, activities, and volunteering opportunities, including 1,962 young people, and 3,457 volunteers contributing over 25,000 volunteer hours.

Engagement initiatives included workshops on conservation grazing and regenerative farming practices on the Holnicote Estate in Exmoor. In North Devon, the project also worked for people's connection to nature by creating new volunteer and visitor facilities and the development of a web-based platform allowing viewers to learn more about Exmoor and its history.

In the Shropshire Hills, a focus on community involvement and nature-friendly farming practices was reported as improving local residents connection to the natural landscape. Community engagement in the Shropshire Hills site was largely focussed on improving the accessibility of the site to increase public access to nature.

In Tilberthwaite in the Lake District, the project launched a volunteer programme, engaging a diverse range of communities and groups, including youth groups, mental health charities, and a local prison, in over 835 hours of conservation work, including the planting of 2,500 trees. The efforts undertaken helped sustain The National Trust's High Wray Basecamp volunteering programme, which was previously ended in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has led to the continued opportunities offering practical experience to people aspiring to work in nature conservation and gives vulnerable people a chance to engage in outdoor activities.

## Organisational Resilience and Skills

Resilience and skills improvements have been cultivated across The National Trust project. Evaluation and lessons learned will enhance future project delivery, developing the Trust's ability to compete for funding and showcase their skills in managing and delivering projects in partnerships with other groups and individuals.



The GRCF funding allowed for the creation and retention of a total of 22.4 FTE roles, including the full-time employment of four apprentice rangers. Furthermore, the project has also allowed for 1.2 FTE roles to be directly supported at partner organisations. Many of the roles created or retained have either been extended or made into permanent roles after the completion of the projects.

The projects engaged their own staff, volunteers, landowners, and members of the local communities in training and skills development activities, helping to boost the skills, qualifications, and opportunities available to the organisation and the public in making positive changes to nature in the future. The projects have also had positive impacts for the community groups and organisations that have been partnered with the National Trust throughout the GRCF-funded projects, increasing their skillsets and resilience.

## Lessons Learnt and Project Legacy

The National Trust reported that time-related pressures surrounding delivery deadlines necessitated the formation of partnerships with smaller organisations, which served to increase capacity and evenly distribute duties between bodies. This organisational structure was hailed by The National Trust as a great success and will be maintained as a project legacy, with The National Trust now actively working on strategic and implementation plans to continue these partnerships into the future.

Holnicote's river restoration and water management interventions have resulted in longer-term learning, allowing project partners to better manage future river restoration and water management interventions. By contributing to partnership working and knowledge-sharing in the sector, other organisations have gained the ability to learn and implement river restoration techniques.

Project delivery implemented in North Devon on the Exmoor coast and its introduction of using grazing animals for soil health and biodiversity has immediate and long-term benefits. Investment in facilities has broadened the volunteering offer, notably in wildlife monitoring which is accessible to a large group of people regardless of skillset and age.

In the Shropshire Hills, the project has produced an action plan for trees, hedgerows, and priority species, ensuring a lasting impact will continue to be made. The project has also marked the facilitated transition of local farmers to the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which will ensure the positive changes to farming practices will continue.

By increasing tree and scrub quantities and changing grazing regimes, the project has established a change in land management in Tilberthwaite that continues to

benefit wildlife. Hedgerow creation and riparian fencing have created green networks across the landscape, increasing biodiversity and environmental strength.