



# Green Recovery Challenge Fund Round 2 Interim Report

September 2022

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## List of abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
25 YEP	25 Year Environment Plan
ALBs	Arm's-Length Bodies
Defra	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
EA	The Environment Agency
eNGO	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
EOI	Expression of Interest
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GRCF	Green Recovery Challenge Fund
The Heritage Fund	The National Lottery Heritage Fund
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) is an £80m fund seeking to support nature recovery and conservation across England. In June 2020, Defra announced the formation of GRCF Round 1 with a £40m investment. In November 2020, GRCF Round 2 (with an additional £40m investment) was announced via the Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan<sup>1</sup> to further support environmental renewal while creating and retaining a range of jobs in England. The GRCF brings forward public investment to help charities and environmental NGOs to start work on projects across England that will restore nature, tackle climate change, and connect people with the natural world. With the climate crisis continuing to worsen,<sup>2</sup> the GRCF also seeks to actively support and meet goals with the UK Government's 25-year environment plan (25 YEP) to enhance people's engagement with the natural world and improve the environment within a generation.<sup>3</sup>

To ensure that delivery supports the 25 YEP, all GRCF projects are required to deliver against one or more of the following three environmental themes:

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

The GRCF was created in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and all projects are also asked to align with the GRCF's aims to:

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

The GRCF is delivered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (Heritage Fund) in partnership with Defra, utilising both organisations' knowledge and expertise regarding the environment sector, public engagement, and grant funding. Furthermore, the GRCF is supported by the following arm's-length bodies: Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission.

## The evaluation

The Heritage Fund commissioned Wavehill in February 2022 to undertake an evaluation of Round 2 of the GRCF. The focus of this evaluation is to provide insight into the delivery and outcomes of Round 2 projects, learning lessons from the second cohort of projects.

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<sup>1</sup> The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution policy paper. Accessible here: [The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#)

<sup>2</sup> RSPB and the State of Nature Partnership, State of Nature Report (2019). Accessible here: [State of Nature Report 2019](#)

<sup>3</sup> UK Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018. Accessible here: [25 Year Plan](#)

The questions that the evaluation will seek to answer include:

- What lessons have been learnt from delivering the Round 2 projects and what are their implications for future land and nature projects and investments? This will include:
  - The opportunities and challenges presented for eNGOs by a successful application to the GRCF.
  - The influence of the external environment on projects (e.g. COVID-19 restrictions or the labour market).
- To what extent have the intended short-term outcomes of the GRCF been met through the second round of funding and, where comparisons are possible, how does this relate to findings from Round 1 of the GRCF?
- What legacy does the GRCF funding leave and how should Defra and partners continue to monitor the impact beyond the end of the programme?
- Has value for money been demonstrated in terms of the delivery of environmental, engagement and economic objectives during the second round of funding and for the programme overall? This includes:
  - How does the cost-effectiveness of the GRCF compare to that of other similar programmes?
  - Which sectors and occupations have benefitted from the implementation of the programme?
  - What is the geographical distribution of the benefits of the GRCF?

This report has been informed by a wide range of data. This includes:

- **GRCF Round 2 project award and application data** – this data summarises information gathered from projects' original application bids for GRCF Round 2. This includes a description of the anticipated project delivery, the type of organisation bidding, the location of project head offices, the grant total requested and received, and the anticipated visitor numbers and roles created through the project.
- **Arm's-length body (ALB) support provision** – this includes the allocation of ALB support to applicants who submitted successful expressions of interest (EOI) for grants of over £250,000.
- **Confirmed GRCF Round 2 costs and income data** – this includes information on all project-associated costs, e.g. recruitment, training and event costs and the total match funding for each project and the source of the match funding.
- Data collected by projects through the monitoring app:
  - **Site data** – this includes all project sites and their location.
  - **Job data** – this includes all roles recruited through GRCF Round 2, the roles' FTE, whether the role is an apprenticeship, whether the role is a Kickstart placement, their employer, the support offered, equality data, the level of qualification provided (if relevant), the site on which the role is based, and its location.
  - **Conservation data** – this data documents whether any conservation activity includes the restoration or creation of habitats, tree planting, the species of trees planted, the condition of habitats, whether the area includes any designated or protected sites, the direct and indirect amount of land (in kilometres, hectares or acres) benefitting from this activity, and the location of this conservation activity.



- **Engagement data** – this includes the type of engagement activity delivered, the number of events held within this, the total number of people engaged in said events, whether or not this involves any social prescribing activity, whether this engagement targets a specific target audience, the project sites on which events have been held, and the location of the sites.
- **Infrastructure data** – this documents the type of infrastructure activity that has taken place, the length of works if linear (in kilometres), the project sites on which these works took place, and the location of the sites.

## Portfolio of GRCF Round 2 projects

In Round 2, the GRCF funded 90 projects across England to support nature recovery, conservation, and wider sector resilience. Across this round, **projects received a total of £37.8m directly from the GRCF and £11.1m of match funding**, with projects costing a total of £49m.<sup>4</sup>

Key project trends include the following:

- **Two thirds of successful bids were for medium-sized projects** (£50,000 to £250,000). This is similar to the proportion of medium-sized awards in Round 1 (47/69; 68 per cent), suggesting that there is a continued need for this level of funding.
- **Most project costs (82 per cent) are covered by GRCF funding.** This indicates that the majority of project delivery is funded through grants, with 10 per cent of the projects indicating no match funding.
- **Almost one fifth of projects (23 per cent; 21/90) have been match-funded through reserves or eNGOs' own funding;** however, only five per cent of projects are solely funded in this way. Almost three quarters of projects (74 per cent; 60/81) have been funded solely through external sources, and a further 21 per cent (17/81) have been funded through both internal and external sources.
- **The majority of projects are taking place across more than one site.** The total number of GRCF Round 2 project sites is 1,128. The minimum number of sites is two sites per project and the maximum is 91.
- **There is a good geographical spread of funded projects within GRCF Round 2, with considerable coverage in the South West, North West and East of England.** An analysis of project site locations from the monitoring data shows the continued geographical spread of projects, with the greatest concentration of sites being in the North West and South West. One tenth of all project sites (11 per cent; 128/1,128) are also located within National Parks, with eight per cent (85/11) being located within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- **Almost all projects awarded in GRCF Round 2 suggested that they would support jobs, apprenticeships and/or traineeships (82/90; 91 per cent),** whilst 35 projects specifically described how their project would support 'green jobs and skills' (35/90; 39 per cent).

## Application process

**Applicant perceptions of the value and potential impact of engaging with the GRCF have remained positive in GRCF Round 2.** Projects described the availability of GRCF Round 2 as directly responding to an existing environmental need and helping them to

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<sup>4</sup> In the narrative, costs have been rounded to the nearest decimal place.

safeguard jobs in precarious positions due to the pandemic. Around one third of projects also perceived their application to the GRCF as an opportunity to reach new audiences, fill employment vacancies and/or train existing staff (34 per cent; 24/70 respectively).

Defra and the Heritage Fund made several minor changes to the Round 2 application process. These included:

- Reducing the highest amount for which projects could bid from £5m to £2m to ensure that funding could be distributed more widely.
- Additional detailed guidance on job creation for projects to ensure that guidance would reflect the needs of the sector and encourage the use of traineeship and apprenticeship schemes such as Kickstart.
- Additional support from the ALBs for eNGOs applying for large grants to ensure that applicants would be offered technical advice, outcomes would be optimised where possible, and mutually beneficial connectivity between partners and projects would be realised.
- Introduction of a requirement for match funding (five per cent minimum) for large projects.
- Maximum of one application per organisation per grant level.

**Most projects perceived key changes made to the GRCF requirements in Round 2 as having little to no impact on their application.** A limit on the number of applications and the amount of funding provided was commonly seen to be beneficial, as it has allowed eNGOs to focus on key areas of project development and ensured that projects are not overstretched. Where projects were more critical of the limit put on project applications, they suggested that the limit was challenging because their eNGOs had several projects ready to implement that would align with the themes of the GRCF, some of which would be delivered over a number of geographically dispersed sites.

**The majority of projects perceived the Round 2 application process as clear, straightforward and transparent.** Surveyed projects reported that the webinar support provided was particularly useful for projects with grants of up to £250k, whilst larger projects found the combination of webinars and ALB support to be helpful 'to some extent'. This suggests that the application process is working well and that changes made to the process for Round 2 have been well received. eNGOs that found the process to be more challenging were also commonly new to the Heritage Fund application process; therefore, the process is a learning opportunity.

**Recommendation:**

Changes made to the GRCF Round 2 application process ensured that applicants felt supported and clear about the funding remit. Future funding opportunities should retain these changes to reduce the burden on applicants.

## **Arm's-length body support**

**Projects were largely positive about the support received from ALBs, suggesting that this amendment to the GRCF process has been a success.** Projects commonly suggested that advice from ALBs helped them to develop and design their project and activities and have an improved understanding of the outcomes that they could achieve.

**Suggestions to improve ALB support commonly centred on the timescales for support.** Timescales were perceived to be too short between receiving support from ALBs and the bid submission date. Projects reported that by the time they engaged with ALB representatives,

their applications were 'well underway', resulting in a limited capacity to make substantive amendments to delivery plans.

**Recommendation:**

Future funding opportunities should consider extending the timescales provided to bidding eNGOs to ensure that smaller eNGOs are not disproportionately impacted by their lack of capacity.

**Although all ALB representatives were trained to ensure that there was a good level of understanding of GRCF Round 2, two projects suggested that ALB representatives did not always have an in-depth understanding of its aims and requirements.** This resulted in projects using part of their allotted ALB support time to provide details and clarity as to GRCF Round 2.

**Although projects were positive about the support that they received from ALBs, the additional value of ALB support remains unclear.** Projects cited improved confidence as a result of this support; however, a substantive impact is not yet apparent. This evaluation will explore this aspect of support in further detail to ascertain whether ALB support provided additional value beyond the development of project bids, i.e. in the delivery of GRCF Round 2 projects.

## Project delivery

The following subsections explore progress to date (as documented in the monitoring data app) and project perceptions of delivery (as informed by the Wave 1 Survey completed by projects).

### Progress to date

#### Nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions

**To date, GRCF Round 2 projects have environmentally benefitted 99,752 hectares and 121 kilometres of land across England.** Projects have also commonly worked on unfavourable land, local wildlife sites and/or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Progress in this area has also included:

- 64 projects undertaking activity in relation to conservation and restoration within their project delivery (71 per cent of all projects). Within this:
  - 42 per cent delivered habitat restoration activities (27/64),
  - 23 per cent delivered habitat creation activities (15/64), and
  - 6 per cent delivered both habitat creation and restoration activities (10/64).
- 29 projects planting 88,243 trees across England. Almost one third of all trees that have been planted to date through GRCF Round 2 have been planted in the North West (31 per cent; 22/70).

#### Connecting people with nature

**Across GRCF Round 2, there have been a total of 45,055 attendees at 2,999 events across England.** Based on the high proportion of projects in the North West, it is unsurprising that over one third of the people engaged in GRCF Round 2 projects are based in this region (38 per cent; 17,126/44,928).

**Over half of all projects indicated that they were targeting specific groups through their engagement activities** (54 per cent; 49/90). This includes specifically targeting children and young people, local communities and residents, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds or areas of high deprivation.

**Connection with nature in GRCF Round 2 has successfully included project works on infrastructure to physically support individuals' engagement with the environment.** A total of 27 projects (30 per cent) reported installing or improving infrastructure as part of their project so far. Across the projects, 78 infrastructure-based outcomes were identified. Most commonly, activities included installing or improving footpaths through the GRCF.

### **Resilience and employment**

**To date, 580 roles have been supported within GRCF Round 2, equating to 421.5 FTE roles.** Almost three quarters of roles (70 per cent) have been created directly for GRCF Round 2, with a further 19 per cent being existing roles protected from redundancy, indicating a positive contribution to job sustainability as well as job creation. However, most are described as project-specific. Whilst this is to be expected at this stage in project delivery, projects should consider how roles could be diversified post-project if additional funding is not secured.

**Projects are supporting multiple roles as a result of GRCF Round 2 funding.** Most commonly, projects have supported 2–3 FTE roles (27 per cent; 24/90), whilst one fifth have supported 4–5 FTE roles. The maximum number of roles supported per project is 29.6 FTE roles. Across all projects, officer, manager and ranger roles are the most common identified as being supported.

**The rate of creation of training roles is considerably lower than that of other FTE roles, demonstrating that the majority of roles supported are not training or progression roles.** One fifth of the roles supported to date are reported as apprenticeship/traineeship roles, with the largest proportion of these (68 per cent) being 3–4 days per week and a further 26 per cent being full-time. Monitoring data to date indicates that a total of 115 apprenticeship roles have been supported against an overall estimation at the application stage of 353.6 apprenticeship roles, equating to a 31 per cent success rate.

It is important to note that most projects provided sufficient details within the reported evidence. However, in some cases, data is patchy or incomplete, e.g. equality and diversity data. Some projects may face difficulties in collecting and reporting on this data, as some may not have the skill or capacity with which to accurately collect such information and subsequently report it in line with GDPR requirements.

**Recommendation:**

Staff managing the GRCF Round 2's should support grantees to understand the importance of completing equality and diversity monitoring and explore whether there are any key challenges.

### **Project perceptions of project delivery**

**Most projects have set up their projects as expected since the approval of their application bid.** Only one project has not been able to set up their project as anticipated 'at all' and this was due to a key delivery partner dropping out early in the project. Almost half of all surveyed projects also described being 'on track' with their project plan and to meet their project targets (48 per cent; 31/65).

**The vast majority of projects in GRCF Round 2 have successfully recruited staff for project delivery.** Once staff were in place, projects commonly described their team as a key strength in delivery. The quality of individuals recruited was highlighted by many projects, with staff in project officer roles and Kickstart roles being praised as competent and passionate.

**Recruitment challenges were, however, common, with projects identifying difficulties in filling Kickstart placements and/or a general lack of applicants or a lack of applicants with the right skills.** Whilst these are small sample sizes, this finding broadly aligns with national-level findings from the National Audit Office<sup>5</sup> and the most recent Employer Skills Survey (ESS).<sup>6</sup>

**Enabling factors for good project delivery commonly included good working relationships with partners, clear aims and delivery plans, and the skills of the staff involved.** Good partnerships were cited by 28 per cent of projects (20 projects), including examples of dedicated working groups, as well as efficient progress of project activities. Project management and reporting processes ensured that relevant permissions were granted quickly, and a good foundation was built for the ongoing success of the project delivery.

**Projects identified a range of challenges in the GRCF Round 2 project setup. These included delays in receiving the appropriate consent and permission for access to sites, delays in recruitment, issues surrounding partner organisations, and challenging winter conditions due to delayed approval of project delivery.** Projects reported a range of strategies with which to address these challenges and mitigate their impact on their delivery ambition. Forty-four per cent of projects (31) have adapted either outcomes or delivery methods in the face of challenges, whilst a further 17 per cent (12 projects) have had delivery delays or have shifted milestones. For a proportion of projects (15 per cent or 11 projects) the challenges are unresolved to date, with project teams generally hopeful that they will be resolved as the project develops.

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<sup>5</sup> The National Audit Office, Employment Support: The Kickstart Scheme, November 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Employer Skills Survey 2019: Summary Report, November 2020. Accessible here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/936488/ESS\\_2019\\_Summary\\_Report\\_Nov2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936488/ESS_2019_Summary_Report_Nov2020.pdf)

# 1 Introduction

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) is an £80m fund seeking to support nature recovery and conservation across England. In June 2020, Defra announced the formation of GRCF Round 1 with a £40m investment. In November 2020, GRCF Round 2 (with an additional £40m investment) was announced via the Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan<sup>7</sup> to further support environmental renewal while creating and retaining a range of jobs in England. It is a short-term, competitive fund that has kick-started environmental renewal while creating and retaining thousands of jobs in England. The GRCF is supporting a range of projects to restore nature, use nature-based solutions to tackle climate change, and connect people with the natural environment.

With the climate crisis continuing to worsen,<sup>8</sup> the GRCF also seeks to actively support and meet goals with the UK Government's 25-year environment plan (25 YEP) to enhance people's engagement with the natural world and improve the environment within a generation.<sup>9</sup> Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, Wildlife and Countryside Link identified that 330 projects across England were 'shovel-ready' and requiring investment.<sup>10,11</sup>

To ensure that delivery supports the 25 YEP, all GRCF projects are required to deliver against one or more of the following three environmental themes:

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

As the GRCF was created in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all projects are also asked to align with the GRCF's aims to:

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

Job retention and creation constitute a key component of the GRCF, particularly for people aged between 16 and 24. Applicants were encouraged to apply to the government's Kickstart scheme, which pays 100 per cent of costs for 6-month job placements and can be used as a source of partnership funding for projects.

The GRCF is delivered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (the Heritage Fund) in partnership with Defra, utilising both organisations' knowledge and expertise regarding the environment sector, public engagement, and grant funding. Furthermore, the GRCF is

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<sup>7</sup> The ten point plan for a green industrial revolution policy paper. Accessible here: [The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#)

<sup>8</sup> RSPB and the State of Nature Partnership, State of Nature Report (2019). Accessible here: [State of Nature Report 2019](#)

<sup>9</sup> UK Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, January 2018. Accessible here: [25 Year Plan](#)

<sup>10</sup> Wildlife and Countryside Link, Shovel-ready green recovery projects, May 2020. Accessible here: [Nature Projects compendium](#)

<sup>11</sup> Within this compendium, Wildlife and Countryside Link stated that a £315m investment could result in 5,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs in the environment sector, 5,000 FTE jobs in delivery, the creation or enhancement of at least 200,000 hectares of priority habitat, and a wide range of other impacts such as the planting of 4.5 million trees, which would support the UK's environmental and conservation targets.

supported by the following arm's-length bodies: Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission.

Overall, 159 projects have been funded through the GRCF.<sup>12</sup> In June and July 2021, 90 projects were awarded through GRCF Round 2. These 90 projects are scheduled to complete by the end of March 2023. This evaluation is predominantly focused on the 90 GRCF Round 2 projects.

## 1.1 The evaluation

The Heritage Fund commissioned Wavehill in February 2022 to undertake an evaluation of Round 2 of the GRCF. The focus of this evaluation is to provide insight into the delivery and outcomes of Round 2 projects, learning lessons from the second cohort of projects.

The questions that the evaluation will seek to answer include:

- What lessons have been learnt from delivering the Round 2 projects and what are their implications for future land and nature projects and investments? This will include:
  - The opportunities and challenges presented for eNGOs by a successful application to the GRCF.
  - The influence of the external environment on projects (e.g. COVID-19 restrictions or the labour market).
- To what extent have the intended short-term outcomes of the GRCF been met through the second round of funding and, where comparisons are possible, how does this relate to findings from Round 1 of the GRCF?
- What legacy does the GRCF funding leave and how should Defra and partners continue to monitor the impact beyond the end of the programme?
- Has value for money been demonstrated in terms of the delivery of environmental, engagement and economic objectives during the second round of funding and for the programme overall? This includes:
  - How does the cost-effectiveness of the GRCF compare to that of other similar programmes?
  - Which sectors and occupations have benefitted from the implementation of the programme?
  - What is the geographical distribution of the benefits of the GRCF?

## 1.2 Methodology

For this interim report, the evaluation team have undertaken the following fieldwork:

- Scoping workshops with key stakeholders (n=5).
- A review of the GRCF Round 2 monitoring information to date.
- The Wave 1 Survey was distributed to all projects to provide eNGOs with an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences of GRCF Round 2 to date.<sup>13</sup> This explored project aims, experiences of the application process, and progress in project delivery. Across the 90 projects, 75 completed the survey, providing a very healthy response rate of 83 per cent.

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<sup>12</sup> Sixty-nine projects were funded in Round 1 and 90 projects were funded in Round 2.

<sup>13</sup> Projects were able to undertake the survey themselves or via the telephone with a researcher.

Where 'monitoring information' is referenced in this report, this data has been obtained from several sources. This includes:

- **GRCF Round 2 project award and application data** – this data summarises information gathered from projects' original application bids for GRCF Round 2. This includes a description of the anticipated project delivery, the type of organisation bidding, the location of project head offices, the grant total requested and received, and the anticipated visitor numbers and roles supported through the project.
- **Arm's-length body (ALB) support provision** – this includes the allocation of ALB application support provided to projects with successful EOIs for grants of over £250,000.
- **Confirmed GRCF Round 2 cost and income data** – this includes information on all project-associated costs, e.g. recruitment, training and event costs and the total match funding for each project and the source of the match funding.
- Data collected by projects through the monitoring app:
  - **Site data** – this includes all project sites and their location.
  - **Job data** – this includes all roles supported through GRCF Round 2, the roles' FTE, whether the role is an apprenticeship, their employer, the support offered, equality data, the level of qualification provided (if relevant), the site on which the role is based, and its location.
  - **Conservation data** – this data documents whether any conservation activity includes the restoration or creation of habitats, tree planting, the species of trees planted, the condition of habitats, whether the area includes any designated or protected sites, the direct and indirect amount of land (in kilometres, hectares or acres) benefitting from this activity, and the location of this conservation activity.
  - **Engagement data** – this includes the type of engagement activity delivered, the number of events held within this, the total number of people engaged in said events, whether or not this involves any social prescribing activity, whether this engagement targets a specific target audience, the project sites on which events have been held, and the location of the sites.
  - **Infrastructure data** – this documents the type of infrastructure activity that has taken place, the length of works if linear (in kilometres), the project sites on which these works took place, and the location of the sites.

It is important to note that all data collected through the monitoring app was collected by project staff. This may result in some projects submitting data in different ways or with different levels of detail. Support from the Heritage Fund Investment Managers should limit this risk; however, it has also been considered in the wider monitoring data analysis. Similarly, staff who completed the Wave 1 Survey may not have been involved in the initial development of the application bid and, therefore, may have limited knowledge of this process. Prior to the dissemination of surveys, projects were advised on the survey topics and the key members of staff who should engage with the survey.

This first interim report explores the literature and policies with regard to the GRCF, the profile of projects included in the second round, project experiences of the application process, and delivery progress to date.



## 2 Literature review

### Section Summary:

- The 25-Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) sets out ‘the government’s action to help the natural world regain and retain good health’.
- The Environment Act underpins the 25 YEP and provides the domestic legal framework for environmental governance.
- There are five Environmental Principles in the Act: integration, prevention, rectification at source, polluter pays, and precautionary. Ministers are required to consider each of these when making policy.
- The Nature Recovery Network was formed as a result of the government’s 25 YEP. It is a partnership between Defra, Natural England, and other stakeholders.
- The network seeks to integrate longer-term goals for nature with funding streams, policy, and statutory duties that incentivise the restoration and creation of habitats. The GRCF is a key governmental funding opportunity within this.

Nature recovery and climate change are key priorities within the political agenda. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic and social challenges have provided an opportunity to put nature at the heart of the wider economic recovery.

The **Prime Minister’s Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution**<sup>14</sup> sets out the government’s plan to invest in clean technologies and green industries, creating new green jobs and ‘*protecting future generations from climate change and the remorseless destruction of habitats*’. Point nine of the plan, i.e. Protecting our Natural Environment, draws attention to the need to safeguard the natural landscape, and cites the additional £40m investment in the second round of the GRCF, stating:

‘This fund will help create and retain thousands of jobs to work on nature conservation and restoration projects across England helping to improve biodiversity and tackle climate change.’

The wider policy context is outlined below and provides details on where the GRCF fits in the wider policy landscape. It highlights the key policy drivers of the GRCF and how it contributes towards a number of key governmental targets and priorities.

### 2.1 A Green Future: Our 25-Year Plan to Improve the Environment

The **25-Year Environment Plan**<sup>15</sup> (25 YEP) was published in January 2018 and sets out ‘*the government’s action to help the natural world regain and retain good health*’. Within the plan, the government sets out its approach to agriculture, forestry, land use, and fishing that prioritises the environment. The 10 goals that the government hopes to achieve are detailed below:

1. Clean air.
2. Clean and plentiful water.
3. Thriving plants and wildlife.
4. A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought.

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<sup>14</sup> HM Government (2020) The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution Building back better, supporting green jobs, and accelerating our path to net zero.

<sup>15</sup> HM Government (2018) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment.

5. Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently.
6. Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment.
7. Mitigating and adapting to climate change.
8. Minimising waste.
9. Managing exposure to chemicals.
10. Enhancing biosecurity.

Defra is responsible for overseeing, coordinating and driving forward action across departments to implement the plan which highlights six key areas on which action will be focused:

- Using and managing land sustainably.
- Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes.
- Connecting people with the environment to improve health and well-being.
- Increasing resource efficiency and reducing pollution and waste.
- Securing clean, productive and biologically diverse seas and oceans.
- Protecting and improving the global environment.

The latest progress report which covers the period from April 2020 to March 2021 provides commentary on the progress that is being made against each goal, as well as the framework used to assess progress. The GRCF is referenced within the report as one of the key actions taken to improve the natural environment.

However, there are calls for the plan to go further. A 2021 report by the House of Commons Environment Audit Committee was critical of the plan, stating that the government was not on target to achieving its objective of improving the environment within a generation and that the 25-Year Environment Plan did not provide sufficient direction to change this.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act,<sup>17</sup> which gained Royal Assent in November 2021, underpins the 25 YEP. It provides the domestic legal framework for environmental governance and requires the government to bring in measures for improvement of the environment in relation to waste, resource efficiency, air quality, water nature, and biodiversity and conservation.

The first part of the Act puts duties on the government in relation to environmental governance. These include requiring the government to:

- Put in place measures to allow the government to set and meet long-term targets related to the natural environment and people's enjoyment of the environment.
- Set at least one long-term target each related to the priority areas of air, water, biodiversity, resource efficiency, and waste by October 2022.
- Set and meet an air quality target for fine particulate matter.
- Set and meet a target related to the abundance of species.
- Review environmental targets periodically to consider if meeting them would significantly improve the natural environment in England.
- Put in place the processes for setting and amending long-term targets.
- Have an Environmental Improvement Plan containing steps that it intends to take to improve the natural environment. The plan must be for at least 15 years. 'A Green

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<sup>16</sup> House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (2021) Biodiversity in the UK: Bloom or Bust.

<sup>17</sup> Environment Act 2021. See: [The Environment Act](#)

Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' (published by the government in 2018) can be treated as such a plan; and

- collect and publish data related to measuring progress for improving the natural environment and meeting targets.

The 25 YEP has become the first statutory Environmental Improvement Plan under the Act. There are five Environmental Principles in the Act (integration, prevention, rectification at source, polluter pays, and precautionary), and ministers are required to consider each of these when making policy. The government is currently consulting on the following proposed targets for biodiversity, water quality, resource efficiency, and waste reduction and air quality:

- Halt the decline in species by 2030 and then bend the curve to increase the abundance of species by 10 per cent by 2042. We will create or restore in excess of 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites by 2042, compared to 2022 levels.
- Reduce residual waste (excluding major mineral waste) kg per capita by 50 per cent by 2042. It is proposed that this will be measured as a reduction from 2019 levels, which are estimated to be approximately 560kg per capita.
- A maximum annual mean concentration of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) of 10µg/m<sup>3</sup> across England by 2040, and a 35 per cent reduction in population exposure to PM2.5 by 2040 (compared to a base year of 2018).
- Reduce nutrient pollution in water by reducing phosphorus loading from treated wastewater by 80 per cent by 2037 and reducing nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment from agriculture into the water environment by 40 per cent by 2037.
- Improve our marine environment, with 70 per cent of designated features in the MPA network to be in a favourable condition by 2042, with the remainder in a recovering condition, and additional reporting on changes in individual feature conditions; and
- Increase tree canopy and woodland cover from 14.5 per cent to 17.5 per cent of the total land area in England by 2050.

The GRCF and, in particular, those projects that seek to achieve outcomes against the 'nature conservation and habitat' and 'nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation' themes align well with these proposed targets and have the potential to contribute to many of them.

Under the Environment Act, a new body has been set up to hold the government to account on environmental legislation and its Environmental Improvement Plan. The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) must act objectively and impartially to meet its principal objective: 'to contribute to environmental protection and improvement of the natural environment.'

## 2.3 Nature Recovery Network

The Nature Recovery Network<sup>18</sup> is a partnership between Defra, Natural England, and other stakeholders and is one of the commitments within the government's 25 YEP. The Nature Recovery Network's work will be focused on addressing the challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change, and well-being by expanding, improving and connecting wildlife-rich places.

The Nature Recovery Network has the following objectives to achieve by 2042:

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<sup>18</sup> See: [Nature Recovery Network](#)

- Restore 75 per cent of protected sites on land (including freshwaters) to a favourable condition so that nature can thrive.
- Create or restore 500,000 hectares of additional wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites.
- Recover threatened and iconic animal and plant species by providing more, diverse and better-connected habitats.
- Support work to increase woodland cover; and
- Achieve a range of environmental, economic and social benefits such as carbon capture, flood management, clean water, pollination, and recreation.

One area of focus for the network will be the integration of longer-term goals for nature with funding streams, policy, and statutory duties that incentivise the restoration and creation of habitats. The GRCF is one of these governmental funding opportunities alongside others such as the **Countryside Stewardship** and the **Nature for Climate Fund**. The **Nature Recovery Network** provides the mechanism with which to coordinate these funds and their objectives to ensure that they are well aligned with and contribute to the overall UK environmental goals.

## 2.4 Nature Recovery Green Paper

The government has consulted on its Nature Recovery Green Paper<sup>19</sup> on protected sites and species and expects to publish this in due course. The Green Paper will set out proposals for:

- A new system of protection for sites and species – making decisions based on scientific judgement to ensure a more tailored approach to protecting Britain’s most vulnerable sites and species;
- Calls for proposals on how the private sector can play its part – building on the success of the UK Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code, ideas are sought on how to accelerate investment in nature;
- Scaling up private investment in nature – exploring measures with which to scale up and de-risk a pipeline of investible nature projects through the £10m Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund;
- A roadmap to achieving 30by30 – the government’s intended path to achieving the Prime Minister’s commitment to protecting 30 per cent of our land and sea by 2030, as part of the global Leader’s Pledge for Nature; and
- An assessment of Defra’s delivery landscape – the Green Paper will explore what institutional and delivery arrangements would best support the government’s objectives for nature recovery.

This policy will fundamentally change the way in which nature and conservation projects are delivered and how sites and species are protected. It will be a key policy in outlining how the government plans to deliver its targets on nature recovery and the various commitments detailed in the 25-Year Environment Plan. The GRCF provides the opportunity to learn lessons on how further funding opportunities can be administered in the future and to provide insight into the types of initiatives that are likely to contribute most to the UK’s environmental targets.

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<sup>19</sup> Defra (2022) Nature Recovery Green Paper: Protected Sites and Species.

## 2.5 The United Kingdom's departure from the European Union

The BEST programme<sup>20</sup> (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service in Territories) and the LIFE<sup>21</sup> programme (L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement) are the two key European Union (EU) programmes that fund action on the environment and climate change.

Running since 1992, LIFE has co-financed more than 5,500 projects across the EU and over €5bn of funding has been committed to the 2021–2027 programme. During its duration, LIFE previously provided £280.1m to 241 projects based in the UK. The most recent evaluation publication is the mid-term evaluation of the 2014–2020 programme (which was published in 2017). Whilst this is now slightly dated, it does provide some useful insight into the key features of the programme that were having a positive impact on delivery. These are summarised as follows:

- the programme is flexible and able to rapidly respond to emerging needs and priorities;
- it has a wide range of stakeholders who appreciate the programme for the relevance and quality of its actions that concretely address local needs; and
- the mix of actions is particularly effective. It is a combination of activities based on the lessons learnt from 25 years of experience — such as traditional projects — with new actions — such as integrated, capacity-building and technical assistance projects and financial instruments — which are expected to increase its effectiveness.

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<sup>20</sup> See: [The BEST programme](#)

<sup>21</sup> See: [Life is 30 EU](#)

## 3 Round 2 project portfolio

### Section Summary:

- In Round 2, the cost per project equates to £544,095, and 82 per cent of project costs are covered by GRCF funding.
- Most GRCF Round 2 projects are led by charities, and two thirds of successful bids were for medium-sized projects (£50,000 to £250,000).
- Almost half (47 per cent; 42/90) of all projects received funding from charitable trusts or charitable donation sources, whilst a further 44 per cent received funding from private company investment.<sup>22</sup>
- There is a good geographical spread of funded projects within GRCF Round 2, with considerable coverage in the South West, North West and East of England.
- Almost all projects awarded in GRCF Round 2 suggested that they would support jobs, apprenticeships and/or traineeships (82/90; 91 per cent), whilst 35 projects specifically described how their project would support 'green jobs and skills' (35/90; 39 per cent).

This section provides an overview of the projects funded through the second round of the GRCF and includes their geographical coverage, their funding sources, and the overarching project focus.

### 3.1 Project profile

#### Overview

In its second round, the GRCF funded 90 projects across England to support nature recovery, conservation, and wider sector resilience. Table 3.1 below illustrates that across this round, projects received a total of £37.8m directly from the GRCF and £11.1m of match funding, with projects costing a total of £49m.<sup>23</sup>

Table 3.1: Project funding summary

Funding	Total (£)
Grant funding	£37,830,800.00
Match funding	£11,124,853.00
<b>Total project cost</b>	<b>£48,968,543.00</b>

Base: GRCF Round 2 confirmed cost and income monitoring information. Please note that match funding here includes all additional income utilised by projects.

As illustrated by Table 3.2 overleaf, two thirds of successful bids were for medium-sized projects (£50,000 to £250,000),<sup>24</sup> with there being a similar proportion of medium-sized awards in Round 1 (47/69; 68 per cent), suggesting that there is a continued need for this level of funding and that decision making has remained consistent across both rounds.

<sup>22</sup> This does not illustrate how much funding was received from charitable trusts and private company investment, but rather the proportion of projects that received funding from these sources. The codes under which funding sources have been grouped are not definitive and should only be considered approximate proportions.

<sup>23</sup> In the narrative, costs have been rounded to the nearest decimal place.

<sup>24</sup> GRCF Round 2 guidance highlights that funding was available at two grant levels: £50,000 to £250,000, and £250,001 to £2m.

Table 3.2: Project grant size and total cost

Size of grant	Number of projects	Proportion of projects (%)	Total (£)
£50k–£250k <sup>25</sup>	63	70%	£12,331,600.00
£250k–£2m	27	30%	£25,499,200.00

Base: GRCF Round 2 confirmed cost and income monitoring information.

As illustrated in Table 3.3, most GRCF Round 2 projects are led by charities, and application data indicates that a similar number of projects have also been delivered in partnership across both funding rounds (with 33 partnerships in Round 1 and 31 partnerships in Round 2).<sup>26</sup>

Table 3.3: Project characteristics

Organisation type	Number of projects	Proportion of projects (%)
Registered company or community interest company (CIC)	3	3%
Local authority	5	6%
Registered charity	82	91%

Base: GRCF Round 2 confirmed cost and income monitoring information. Please note that match funding here includes all additional income utilised by projects. Partnership data has been derived from GRCF2 application and award data.

However, as explored in [section 5.5](#), over three quarters of surveyed projects stated that they are delivering their projects in partnership (77 per cent; 56/73), whilst a further 11 projects stated that they are informally collaborating with other organisations on their project delivery. This may suggest that a considerable number of partnerships have formed since the development of project bids. However, it is also possible that projects only documented 'formalised' partnerships at the funding bid stage. Future evaluation fieldwork will explore in greater depth the levels of partnership working within projects and their development throughout projects' lifetime.

## Match funding

Overall, 77 per cent of project costs are covered by GRCF funding. As illustrated by Table 3.4, over two fifths of projects receiving a GRCF grant of over £250k have a match-funding contribution greater than 20 per cent (44 per cent; 12/27). As will be explored further in [section 3](#), GRCF Round 2 projects in receipt of a grant of over £250k were required to have a match-funding contribution of at least five per cent. Monitoring information indicates that only two large projects secured this minimum requirement (five per cent), with most projects securing a considerably higher level of match funding.

This confirms that securing a higher level of match funding was achievable for most large projects. In comparison, around one fifth of projects with smaller grants (from £50k–£250k) have either no match funding (19 per cent; 12/63) or a match-funding contribution greater than 30 per cent (21 per cent; 13/63). Levels of match funding vary considerably for smaller projects, suggesting that no clear trends can be established based on the size of the grant received by projects.

<sup>25</sup> Please note that £50k–£250k includes all projects that received funding up to and including £250,000.

<sup>26</sup> Please note that where figures from GRCF Round 1 have been used, these are derived from the GRCF Round 1 interim report.

Table 3.4: Proportion of match funding per project, by size of GRCF grant

Proportion of match funding	Number of projects with £50k–£250k grants	Number of projects with £250k–£2m grants	Proportion of projects with £50k–£250k grants (%)	Proportion of projects with £250k–£2m grants (%)
0% <sup>27</sup>	12	0	19%	0%
1–4%	4	0	6%	0%
5–9%	10	4	16%	15%
10–15%	11	5	17%	19%
16–20%	7	6	11%	22%
21–30%	6	7	10%	26%
31–40%	7	3	11%	11%
41–50%	5	1	8%	4%
51% or more	1	1	2%	4%

Base: GRCF Round 2 confirmed cost and income monitoring information. Total number of projects receiving GRCF funds of between £50k–£250k (n=63) and total number of projects receiving GRCF funds between £250k–£2m (n=27).

Most commonly, projects secured match funding from two sources (28 per cent; 23/81), whilst 27 per cent of projects (22/81) received match funding from one source, 12 per cent of projects (10/81) received match funding from three sources, and almost one third (32 per cent; 26/81) received match funding from four sources or more.<sup>28</sup> This again reiterates the high variability of match funding across GRCF Round 2 projects.

Projects with GRCF grants of over £250k provided additional details on their match-funding sources. As illustrated by Table 3.5, said projects most commonly received match funding from local authorities (52 per cent; 14), through their own reserves (52 per cent; 14) or through a private donation from trusts, charities or foundations (52 per cent; 14). Table 3.5 also shows that central government and other public sector funding provided the highest amount of additional match funding for GRCF Round 2 projects (£1.5m and £1.3m respectively).

Table 3.5: Match-funding sources for projects over £250,000<sup>29</sup>

Match-funding source	Number of projects	Proportion of projects (%)	Total match funding (£)
Local authority	14	52%	£130,250
Own reserves	14	52%	£453,233
Private donation – trusts/charities/foundations	14	52%	£68,000
Central government	12	44%	£1,531,079
Other public sector	10	37%	£1,260,300
Other fundraising	9	33%	£191,443

Base: GRCF Round 2 confirmed cost and income monitoring information. Total number of projects receiving GRCF funds between £250k–£2m (n=27).

Additional analysis will be undertaken in subsequent reporting to further understand the impact of varied income sources, e.g. using job creation schemes. In future evaluation fieldwork, the

<sup>27</sup> Please note that this includes three projects that received match funding of less than £100.

<sup>28</sup> Please note that the highest number of sources was nine and this was only reported by one project.

<sup>29</sup> Match-funding sources have only been detailed for projects in receipt of GRCF grants of over £250k.



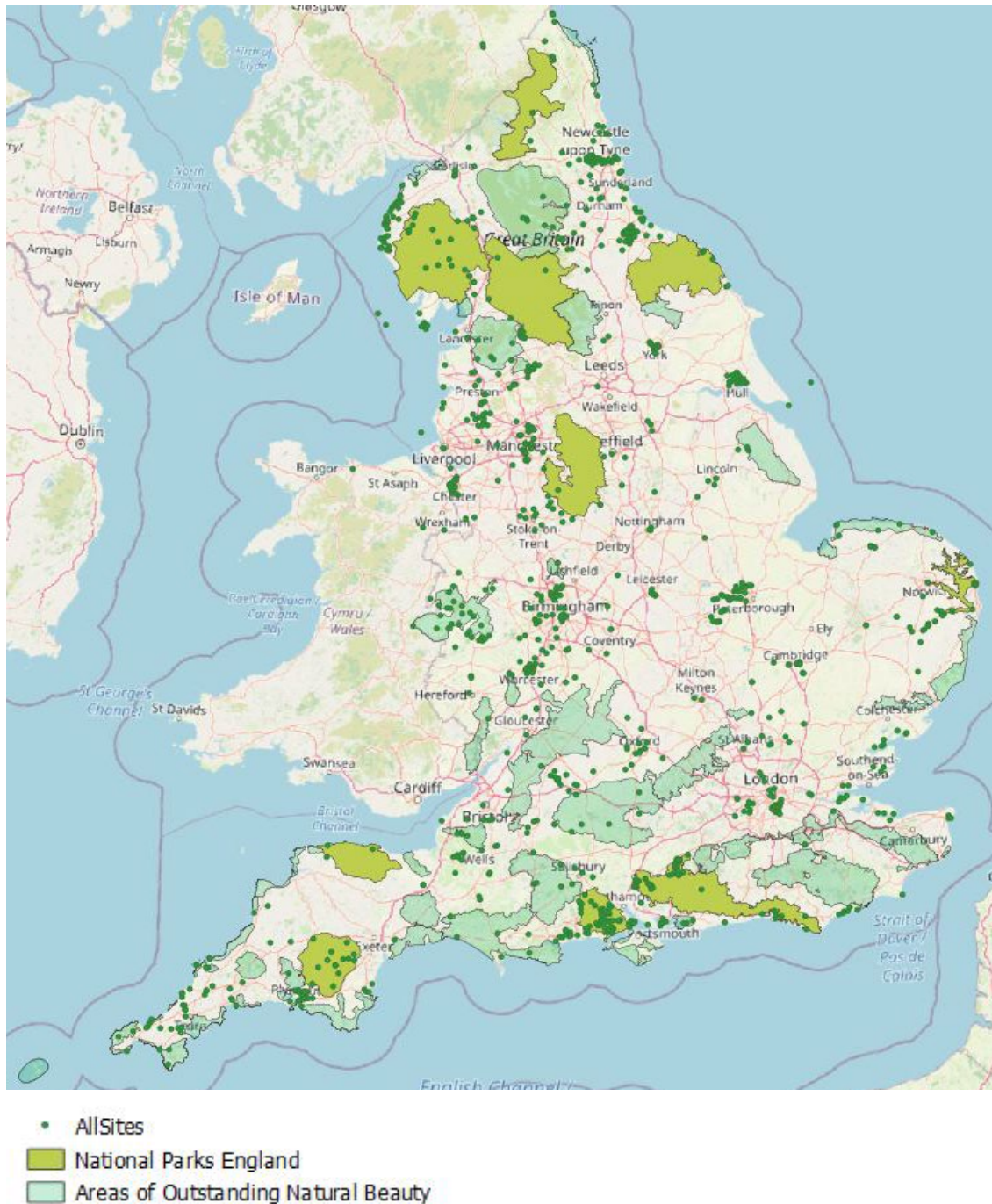
use of other schemes will also be explored, along with the outcomes that projects had through such schemes.

## 3.2 Project geography

The GRCF Round 2 application decision-making process considered the environmental needs outlined in bids and the geographical coverage offered by project sites. The majority of projects are taking place across more than one site. The total number of project sites for GRCF Round 2 is 1,128 (with a minimum number of two sites per project and a maximum of 91).

Figure 3.1 below illustrates the overall geographical spread of project sites. Please note that all analysis undertaken in this section includes all project locations as provided through the GRCF Round 2 data collection app. Where maps are presented throughout this report, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are also displayed. This is intended to contextualise project reach and impact and illustrate project site placement alongside key areas of environmental importance across England.

Figure 3.1: Map of Round 2 project sites with AONBs and National Parks



Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=1,128 sites)

Across all projects, 11 per cent of sites (128/1,128) were located within National Parks and eight per cent (85/1,128) were located within AONBs.

There is a good geographical spread of funded projects within GRCF Round 2, with considerable coverage in the South West, North West and East of England (see Table 3.6). Furthermore, over one fifth (22/90) of grantees have reported working across multiple landscapes, e.g. local wildlife parks and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Table 3.6: Geographical spread of funded projects according to application data

English region	Number of Round 2 projects	Proportion of total Round 2 projects (%)	Value of Round 2 funding	Proportion of total Round 2 funding (%)	Proportion of total Round 1 funding (%)
East Midlands	9	10.0%	£2,738,500	7%	7%
East of England	12	13.3%	£4,619,100	12%	8%
London	4	4.4%	£2,039,900	5%	11%
North East	9	10.0%	£4,209,000	11%	8%
North West	15	16.7%	£6,625,400	18%	22%
South East	6	6.7%	£1,926,100	5%	12%
South West	21	23.3%	£10,457,000	28%	17%
West Midlands	10	11.1%	£4,364,400	12%	10%
Yorkshire and The Humber	4	4.4%	£851,400	2%	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>£37,830,800</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Base: GRCF Round 2 confirmed cost and income monitoring information.

An analysis of project site locations from the monitoring data shows the continued geographical spread of projects. However, this is still weighted towards the North West, South East and South West, as shown in Table 3.7 below. This will be analysed further in future reports to gain a deeper understanding of the broader geographical spread that projects are covering and its impact.<sup>30,31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> It is also anticipated that 'unknown' site locations will be amended by projects with continued usage of the monitoring information systems.

<sup>31</sup> There are four project sites operating outside of England. However, all are part of projects based in England. Therefore, it is likely that locations outside of England are those of offices in which grantees already have locations outside of this fund. This is evident in that site monitoring data is the only data in which such locations are reported, whereas no jobs or conservation sites have been listed outside of England.

Table 3.7: Region of project sites reported through monitoring data

<b>Region</b>	<b>Proportion of project sites (%)</b>
<b>North West</b>	19%
<b>South East</b>	15%
<b>South West</b>	15%
<b>West Midlands</b>	13%
<b>North East</b>	12%
<b>East of England</b>	10%
<b>Yorkshire and The Humber</b>	8%
<b>London</b>	4%
<b>East Midlands</b>	3%
<b>Scotland</b>	0.4%
<b>Wales</b>	0.4%

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information on sites (n=1,113).

### 3.3 Project focus

To establish the balance of projects and their delivery related to the GRCF themes, Round 2 project descriptions have been qualitatively coded for comparison with the Round 1 cohort. This has involved a review of the project description text to undertake thematic analysis using an analytical framework that draws on the key GRCF themes. Overall, 42 GRCF Round 2 projects have project descriptions that include references to activities covered by the three themes.

Table 3.8 indicates that there is a slightly greater emphasis on nature conservation and restoration in Round 2, with fewer projects looking specifically at nature-based solutions. Moreover, there is a slight increase in projects addressing people's connection with nature. The increased focus on this theme is demonstrative of its perceived value.

In workshops, stakeholders suggested that GRCF Round 1 learning to date shows that engaging people with nature and, therefore, connecting them with nature have constituted an important aspect of project success.<sup>32</sup> This evaluation will seek to explore in greater detail what impact people's connection with nature has had on project delivery and how this may impact the sustainability of project delivery post-funding, particularly investigating if any increased connection with nature demonstrated by project participants might influence ongoing project delivery post-funding. It could be hypothesised that a greater connection with nature may encourage participants to remain engaged with project delivery for longer.

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<sup>32</sup> This learning is informed by GRCF Round 1 interim evaluation reporting.

Table 3.8: Project themes (qualitatively coded), by funding round

<b>Project size</b>	<b>Nature-based solutions R1</b>	<b>Nature-based solutions R2</b>	<b>Nature conservation and restoration R1</b>	<b>Nature conservation and restoration R2</b>	<b>Connecting people with nature R1</b>	<b>Connecting people with nature R2</b>
<b>Large (£250k+)</b>	20	20	16	26	20	25
<b>Medium (£50k–£250k)</b>	44	28	20	54	40	60
<b>All projects</b>	64	48	36	80	60	85

Base: GRCF Round 2 application and award data and GRCF Round 1 interim evaluation report.

Almost all projects awarded in GRCF Round 2 suggested that they would support jobs, apprenticeships and/or traineeships (82/90; 91 per cent), whilst 35 projects specifically described how their project would support ‘green jobs and skills’ (35/90; 39 per cent).

An analysis of award data at the point of application indicated a higher proportion of anticipated jobs and apprenticeships/traineeships in areas which have a greater number of projects, i.e. the South West and North West. This is reflected in progress to date, wherein the largest proportion of roles supported are in the South West, followed by the North West (41 per cent and 35 per cent respectively). Project progress with recruitment will be explored in [section 5.4](#).

## 4 Application process

### Section Summary:

- Almost half of all surveyed projects' main driver for applying to the GRCF was to address environmental concerns that they identified in their local areas.
- Around one third of projects perceived their application to the GRCF to be an opportunity to reach new audiences, fill employment vacancies and/or train existing staff.
- Most projects perceived key changes made to the GRCF requirements in Round 2 as having little to no impact on their application. Projects were more critical of the limit put on the number of project applications per organisation (15 per cent; 8/53). They suggested that the limit was challenging because their eNGOs had several projects ready to implement.
- The majority of surveyed projects felt that the GRCF had effectively responded to the needs of the sector stemming from COVID-19. Over one third of projects (38 per cent; 26/69) stated that GRCF Round 2 had helped them to safeguard jobs which were in precarious positions due to the pandemic.
- The majority of projects reported that the limited length of the GRCF Round 2 funded period did not limit their ability to respond to sectoral needs (77 per cent; 53/69), whilst 23 per cent of projects felt that it did have a negative impact (16/69).
- Where it was provided, projects suggested that ALBs had provided useful pre-application advice which had resulted in projects feeling confident about taking forward their delivery without further assistance from ALBs.
- Projects were positive about the overall application process, and challenges were only reported by a minority of eNGOs. This suggests that the application process is working well and that changes made to the process for Round 2 have been beneficial.

This section of the report assesses project perceptions of the application process for the GRCF. Stakeholders made several minor changes to the Round 2 application process. These included:

- Reducing the highest amount for which projects could bid from £5m to £2m to ensure that funding could be distributed more widely,
- Additional detailed guidance on job creation for projects to ensure that guidance reflects the needs of the sector and encourages the use of traineeship and apprenticeship schemes such as Kickstart,
- Additional support from the ALBs for eNGOs applying for large grants to ensure that applicants are offered technical advice, outcomes are optimised where possible, and mutually beneficial connectivity between partners and projects is realised,
- Introduction of a requirement for match funding (five per cent minimum) for large projects,
- Maximum of one application per organisation per grant level.

This section will explore the changes made to the process, eNGOs' aims and aspirations for their projects, the effectiveness of the support provided pre-application, and broader reflections on the process overall.

## 4.1 Application motivations and priorities

Almost half of all surveyed projects' main driver for applying to the GRCF was to address environmental concerns that they identified in their local areas (see Table 4.1).<sup>33</sup> Projects described the availability of GRCF Round 2 as directly responding to an existing need and, in 20 per cent of cases (14/70), also suggested that their project was ready to implement but required capital investment. One project interviewee stated:

'[Project location] is one of the UK landscapes where change most needs to happen, but funding is needed to make the transition to a climate-adapted, resilient wetland landscape. The partners here have been working together for decades to this end and know what is needed. The GRCF fund offered a real opportunity to make a difference for both habitats and people.' **(Wave 1 Survey Response)**

Much fewer projects than anticipated described themselves as ready but requiring capital investment, given the Wildlife and Countryside Link's May 2020 finding that 330 projects across England were 'shovel-ready'.<sup>34</sup> Although 69 projects were funded in Round 1 and others may have been funded through other means, 14 projects would only account for five per cent of the 261 'shovel-ready' projects. This may suggest that projects were not as prepared as initially thought in May 2020 to launch into delivery.

As the majority of projects previously applied to the GRCF in Round 1 (64 per cent; 58/90), projects' perceptions of the value of GRCF Round 2 and their ambitions to engage with the GRCF appear to have sustained.

Table 4.1: Thinking back, what was the main driver for your application to the GRCF?

Main driver for application	Proportion of projects (%)
Address environmental issues	46%
Engage new audiences	34%
Hire and train staff	34%
Benefits to finances/capacity	30%
Suitable project lined up	20%
Good strategic fit	19%
Would fund business as usual	6%

Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=70).

Around one third of projects perceived their application to the GRCF to be an opportunity to reach new audiences, fill employment vacancies and/or train existing staff (34 per cent; 24/70 respectively). Where projects identified more than one driver, projects were typically seeking to address environmental issues, engage new audiences and/or hire and train staff. Projects aiming to engage new audiences typically also wanted new audiences to be more diverse.

Meanwhile, intentions to secure new staff and upskill current staff were commonly described as providing a needed 'economic boost' to local areas. A lack of paid positions and/or low-

<sup>33</sup> Please note that local areas are understood to vary from small hyper-local areas to wider regions.

<sup>34</sup> Wildlife and Countryside Link, Shovel-ready green recovery projects, May 2020. Accessible here: [Wildlife and Countryside Link, Shovel-ready Green Recovery projects](#)

paid positions is a key barrier for individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds and individuals identifying as Black, Asian and/or minority ethnic seeking to work within the environment sector.<sup>35</sup> Visitors and audiences to environmental and/or heritage sites are also commonly white and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds due to better proximity to green spaces and commonly fewer financial constraints on accessing said sites.<sup>36,37,38</sup> Through GRCF Round 2, it is understood that projects can provide additional remuneration to staff that they may otherwise not be able to fund, and can utilise this resource to engage with audiences in new and innovative ways.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, considerable value can be identified in the use of the GRCF as a means by which to encourage inclusivity within the sector.

Most projects perceived key changes made to the GRCF requirements in Round 2 as having little to no impact on their application (see Figure 4.1). A limit on the number of applications and the amount of funding provided was commonly seen to be beneficial, as it has allowed eNGOs to focus on key areas of project development and ensure that projects are not overstretched. One fifth of projects (21 per cent; 11/53) also suggested that the limit on applications and the maximum amount of funding made no difference to them because their eNGOs were small and would not be applying for more than one project or for over £250k (regardless of the limit). Projects also suggested that it would be 'difficult to spend more than £2m within the allocated timeframe'.

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<sup>35</sup> Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Involving Young People Collective, HUDL Youth Development Agency, Addressing the Lack of Diversity in the Environment Sector, April 2021. Accessible here: [Addressing the lack of diversity in the environment sector](#)

<sup>36</sup> Groundwork, Out of Bounds: Equity in Access to Urban Nature, May 2021. Accessible here: [Out of Bounds Equity in Access to Urban Nature Report](#)

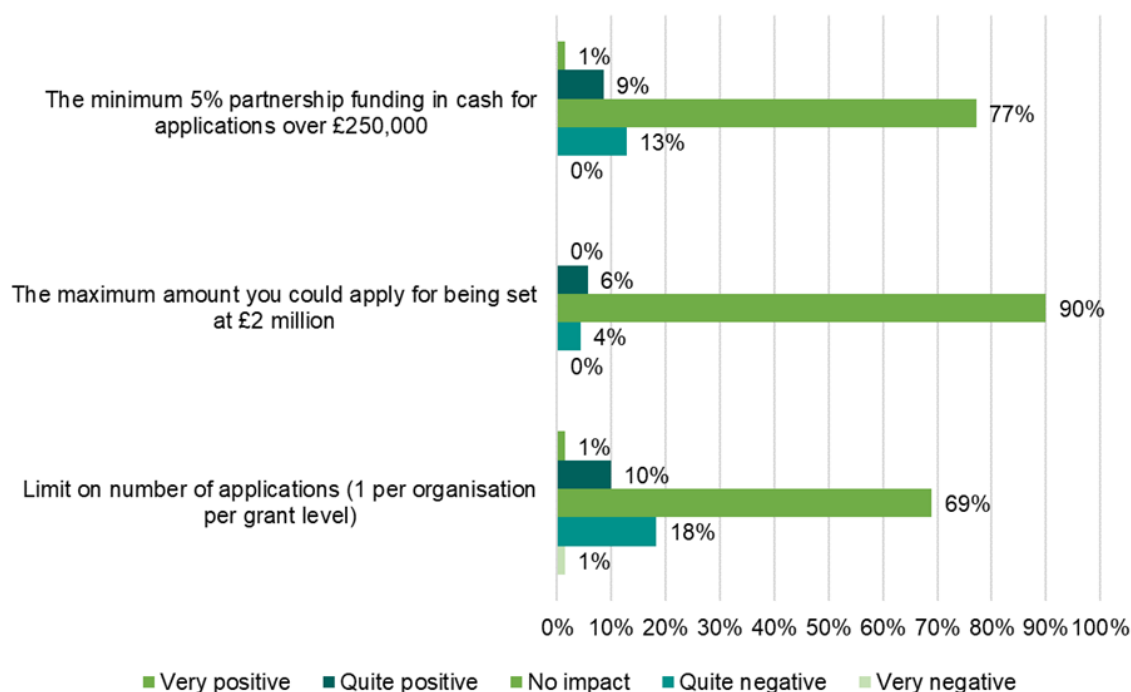
<sup>37</sup> Natural England, Visits to the Natural Environment, October 2017. Accessible here: [NE Visits to the Natural Environment](#)

<sup>38</sup> Arts Council England, Equality, Diversity and the Creative Case: A data report 2021. Accessible here: [ACE Equality and Diversity Report 2019-2020](#)

<sup>39</sup> Where staff do not have the capacity and/or resources with which to focus on audience engagement, this role is typically taken on by volunteers. This is commonly ad hoc and variable.



Figure 4.1: What kind of impact did the following requirements have on your application to Round 2 of the GRCF?



Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=71).

Table 4.2: What kind of impact did the following requirements have on your application to Round 2 of the GRCF?

Impact	The minimum five per cent partnership funding in cash for applications over £250,000	The maximum amount you could apply for being set at £2m	Limit on number of applications (one per organisation per grant level)
<b>Very positive</b>	1%	0%	1%
<b>Quite positive</b>	9%	6%	10%
<b>No impact</b>	77%	90%	69%
<b>Quite negative</b>	13%	4%	18%
<b>Very negative</b>	0%	0%	1%

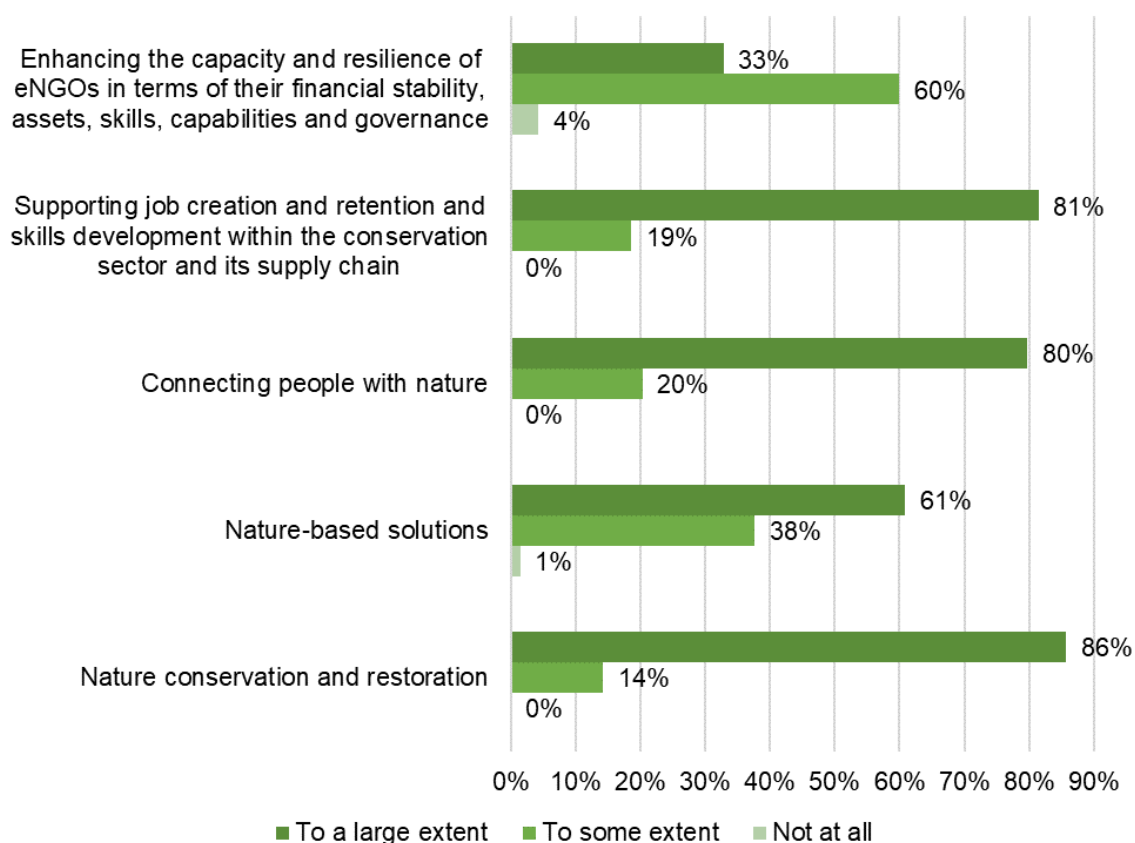
Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=71).

Where projects were more critical of the limit put on project applications (15 per cent; 8/53) they typically suggested that the limit was challenging because their eNGOs had several projects ready to implement that would align with the themes of the GRCF. This critique was commonly highlighted by eNGOs that covered multiple sites across England, as it was perceived that one application limited their ability to spread the impact of their projects geographically. However, said projects also commonly acknowledged that the application limit resulted in their strategically appraising their project ideas:

‘Ideally we would have submitted more applications; however, this did allow us to focus our efforts and ensure the prioritisation of our projects for this funding.’  
**(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Nature conservation and restoration are perceived to be the main GRCF priorities by Round 2 projects (see Figure 4.2).<sup>40</sup> The majority of projects also perceived supporting job creation, retention and skills and connecting people with nature to be key. This suggests that project perceptions of GRCF Round 2's main priorities commonly align with their own project aims and ambitions.

Figure 4.2: To what extent do you see the following as the main priority for the second round of the GRCF?



Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=70).

Table 4.3: To what extent do you see the following as the main priority for the second round of the GRCF?

Extent of priority	Enhancing the capacity and resilience of eNGOs	Supporting job creation and retention and skill development	Connecting people with nature	Nature-based solutions	Nature conservation and restoration
<b>To a large extent</b>	33%	81%	80%	61%	86%
<b>To some extent</b>	60%	19%	20%	38%	14%
<b>Not at all</b>	4%	0%	0%	1%	0%

Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=70).

<sup>40</sup> The options for this question were derived from project key themes.

Whilst 61 per cent of projects (57/70) stated that nature-based solutions were 'to a large extent' main priorities for the GRCF, this is noticeably lower than the theme of nature conservation and restoration. This may be due to projects' perception of nature-based solutions as a means of achieving nature conservation, i.e. appearing to be a secondary aim. Similarly, much fewer projects identified 'enhancing the capacity and resilience of eNGOs' as a key priority for GRCF Round 2. Project drivers suggest that this is because eNGO sustainability and resilience are perceived to be longer-term aims which will occur as a result of nature conservation and restoration, connecting people with nature, and job creation, retention, and skill development.

The majority of surveyed projects felt that GRCF Round 2 has effectively responded to the needs of the sector stemming from COVID-19 (38 per cent (26/69) stated 'very effective' and 54 per cent (37/59) stated 'quite effective'). Over one third of projects (38 per cent; 26/69) stated that GRCF Round 2 has helped them to safeguard jobs which were in precarious positions due to the pandemic. Whilst a wide range of economic models are used within the environment sector, some eNGOs rely on hybrid models in which hospitality is key.<sup>41</sup> During the pandemic and government-mandated lockdowns, eNGOs were not able to secure revenue through their hospitality sector income streams. In these cases, projects suggested that the GRCF provided individuals with job certainty and enabled eNGOs to build capacity with which to strengthen their economic position. One project interviewee stated:

'The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant gap in income for environmental charities, particularly those that rely on catering, retail and events as a source of income. The GRCF funding has safeguarded positions and provided new opportunities for those entering the sector whilst allowing eNGOs to recover from the financial effects of the pandemic.' **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

The majority of projects reported that the limited length of the GRCF Round 2 funded period did not limit their ability to respond to sectoral needs (77 per cent; 53/69). Where projects felt that it did limit their ability to respond to sectoral needs, they described GRCF Round 2 as being 'too short' to respond to entrenched negative impacts of COVID-19 and/or make longer-term impacts. Whilst projects did commonly highlight the positive value and significance of being provided funding through the GRCF, they also reported that it was challenging to fully implement and establish long-lasting activities in less than 2 years.

## 4.2 Support provided

Almost three quarters of surveyed projects (72 per cent; 51/71) received a grant of £50,000–£250,000 from the GRCF, whilst 28 per cent (20/71) were awarded a grant of between £250,000–£2m. Where projects applied for a large grant (£250,000 or more), they were provided with additional support from an ALB. The findings in this section will address projects that received small and medium-sized grants and large grants in turn.

### Grants up to £250,000

All surveyed small and medium-sized projects, bar one, accessed the Heritage Fund's online guidance and resources when making their application for grant funding. Most projects also accessed the Heritage Fund webinars (59 per cent; 30/51), and nine eNGOs described receiving another form of support. Other forms of support included telephone or email correspondence with Heritage Fund staff to clarify points in the application guidance (five

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<sup>41</sup> Hybrid models in the sector typically include a range of hospitality work (e.g. events), educational engagement (e.g. school visits), revenue from site visitors, charitable donations, and funded delivery.

eNGOs), as well as advice from successful Round 1 projects (three eNGOs), and one project stated that their feedback from their unsuccessful Round 1 bid helped them in their Round 2 application. Table 4.4 shows that all projects found the support on offer with regard to their application to be helpful. Projects commonly suggested that the guidance provided them with clarity regarding what was required, what was expected of them, and how to go about it (69 per cent; 29/42). In these cases, projects commonly highlighted that the Heritage Fund webinars were beneficial because they allowed eNGOs to interact with other bidding eNGOs and access a wide range of information to which they may not otherwise have access:

‘It was useful to have the seminars to listen to the information, take on board the recommendations and hear other people’s queries and have the opportunity to connect with others.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Table 4.4: To what extent do you think that this form of support benefitted your £50,000–£250,000 bid for grant funding?

Extent to which support benefitted bid	Heritage Fund online guidance and resources	Heritage Fund webinars	Other support
To a great extent	69%	57%	57%
To some extent	31%	43%	43%
Not at all	0%	0%	0%
Don’t know	0%	0%	0%

Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees who received a £50k–£250k grant and accessed Heritage Fund online guidance and resources (n=48) and Heritage Fund webinars (n=30). Other support rankings have been excluded due to low numbers.

## Grants over £250,000

All surveyed projects that received a grant of between £250k–£2m accessed the Heritage Fund’s online guidance and resources when making their application. The majority of projects with successful EOIs also received support from an ALB (15/19)<sup>42</sup> and engaged with the Heritage Fund webinars (15/19). Four projects received ‘other’ support, which in most cases was advice and guidance from delivery partner organisations.<sup>43</sup>

Similar to smaller projects, projects with large GRCF grants found the support on offer with regard to their application to be helpful (see Table 4.5 overleaf). Projects with large grants also found that the resources provided by the Heritage Fund provided clarity regarding the aims and objectives of GRCF Round 2. This helped eNGOs to see how their project could fit into GRCF Round 2, and was ‘essential’ in developing an understanding of the bid criteria. Overall, survey responses suggest that the webinar support provided was particularly useful for projects with grants of up to £250k, whilst larger projects found the combination of webinars and ALB support to be helpful ‘to some extent’.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Please note that all projects that received a grant of £250,000 or more were provided support from an ALB. In the four cases in which staff stated that they did not receive that support, it is assumed that the member of staff answering the survey was not aware that this support was provided.

<sup>43</sup> Delivery partner organisations here refer to other partner organisations excluding ALBs.

<sup>44</sup> It is important to note, however, that there were fewer projects with large grants to answer the survey. This means that proportional findings from this sample should not be seen as definitive.

Table 4.5: To what extent do you think that this form of support benefitted your £250,000–£2m bid for grant funding?<sup>45</sup>

<b>Extent to which support benefitted bid</b>	<b>Heritage Fund online guidance and resources</b>	<b>Heritage Fund webinars</b>	<b>Arm’s-length body advice</b>	<b>Other support</b>
<b>To a great extent</b>	63%	27%	27%	67%
<b>To some extent</b>	37%	73%	73%	33%
<b>Not at all</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%

Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees who received a grant of over £250k–£2m and accessed Heritage Fund online guidance and resources (n=19), Heritage Fund webinars (n=15) and ALB advice (n=15). Other support rankings have been excluded due to low numbers.

Webinars were also praised by projects because they provided them with ‘additional insights’ into GRCF Round 2. Insights included lessons learnt from Round 1 of the GRCF as well as strategic areas of importance for the funders.

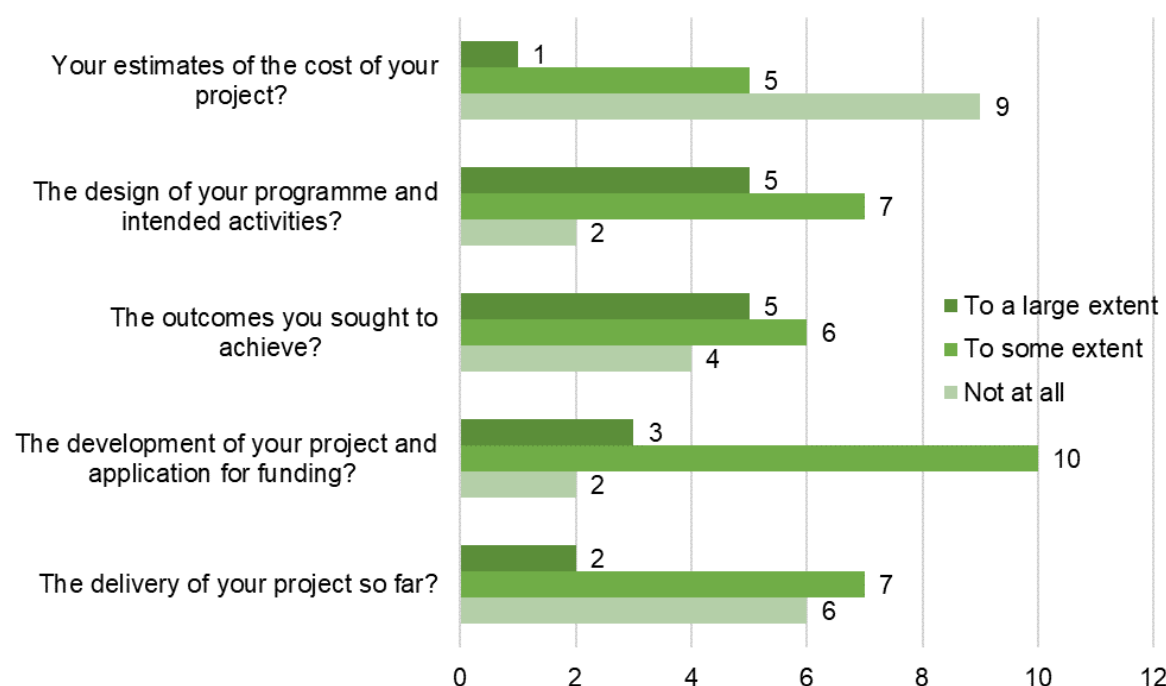
### 4.3 Arm’s-length body support

Figure 4.3 illustrates that support from ALBs helped most large grant projects to develop (13/15) and design (12/15) their project and activities and have an improved understanding of the outcomes (11/15) that they could achieve. Please note that in some cases, project feedback may not differentiate from the ALB support received through the GRCF Round 2 application process and the additional support that they have accessed from ALBs within project delivery. Where possible, this has been assessed to ensure that feedback is relevant to the application process.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Please note that percentages have been retained in this chart for comparability with Figure 4.2. Readers should acknowledge, however, that there were much fewer responses to this question.

<sup>46</sup> For more details on this limitation, please refer to [section 1.2](#).

Figure 4.3: To what extent did the arm’s-length body support have an impact on:



Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees who received a £250k–£2m grant (n=15). Please note that the total may be lower than 15 for some questions where projects did not answer the question or selected ‘don’t know’.

Table 4.6: To what extent did the arm’s-length body support have an impact on:

Extent to which ALB had an impact on:	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
<b>Your estimates of the cost of your project?</b>	1	5	9
<b>The design of your programme and intended activities?</b>	5	7	2
<b>The outcomes you sought to achieve?</b>	5	6	4
<b>The development of your project and application for funding?</b>	3	10	2
<b>The delivery of your project so far?</b>	2	7	6

Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees who received a £250k–£2m grant (n=15). Please note that the total may be lower than 15 for some questions where projects did not answer the question or selected ‘don’t know’.

When reflecting on the benefits of ALB support, most projects (10/13<sup>47</sup>) perceived ALB assistance to be useful, but also indicated that it did not make a substantive difference to their project design. Where projects found the advice to be useful, they suggested that advice from ALBs helped them to refine their existing bids and enhance their activities. In these cases, ALB support acted as an effective ‘sounding board’ for projects, allowing them to ‘sense-check’ their proposals before moving forward. In all 10 cases, however, projects reported that whilst this was helpful and enhanced their bids, the advice did not fundamentally alter the parameters set out by project eNGOs, e.g. project costs, activities and aims.

<sup>47</sup> Please note that only 13 projects out of 15 provided qualitative feedback on ALB support benefits in the survey, which is only a small subsection of the 27 .

The three remaining projects also have partnerships in place with their respective ALB and/or have engaged with their ALB more extensively because of their requirement for permits and/or consent. This has resulted in said projects having more extensive advice and support from their respective ALB. In these cases, ALBs are described as 'instrumental' because they have been involved in a wide range of activities through inception, design and delivery. One project stated:

'We conducted consultation with the Environment Agency, carrying out a field visit to one of our nature reserves. The visit and associated feedback helped shape our activities, having provided us with a clearer sense of the EA's priorities in the area.' **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

When asked which elements of the advice received from ALBs were useful to them, projects most commonly identified:

- The general advice and information provided, e.g. signposting to useful resources and/or information on specific ecosystems (9/15),
- Advice and support to amend and/or optimise project outcomes or delivery costs (8/15), and
- Technical advice, e.g. on the technical mechanisms used in conservation or nature-based solutions project delivery (7/15).

Overall, projects that received support from ALBs were broadly positive about the experience, suggesting that this amendment to the GRCF process has been a success. However, whilst feedback from projects is broadly positive, the additional value of ALB support remains unclear. Although projects cited improved confidence because of this support, a substantive impact is not yet apparent. This aspect of support will be explored further in subsequent evaluation research, e.g. thematic project workshops, to ascertain whether ALB support has provided additional value beyond the development of project bids, i.e. in the delivery of GRCF Round 2 projects.

Suggestions to improve the ALB support were most commonly centred on the timescales for support (7/11). Timescales were perceived to be too short between receiving support from ALBs and the bid submission date. Projects reported that by the time they engaged with ALB representatives, their applications were 'well underway', resulting in a limited capacity with which to make substantive amendments to delivery plans.

Three projects also suggested that engaging with ALB advisors earlier in the process would have allowed them to obtain more specific advice related to their project from the appropriate representatives within their ALB. In two of three cases, projects suggested that ALB representatives did not have an in-depth understanding of GRCF Round 2 and that future provision should consider offering ALBs additional training to ensure that they are clear as to their role and remit. It is important to acknowledge that all ALB representatives were trained through webinars and written materials to ensure that there was a good level of understanding of GRCF Round 2 prior to projects being supported with their application. If ALB support were to be utilised again in future provision, consideration should be given to whether and where additional ALB training support may be required.

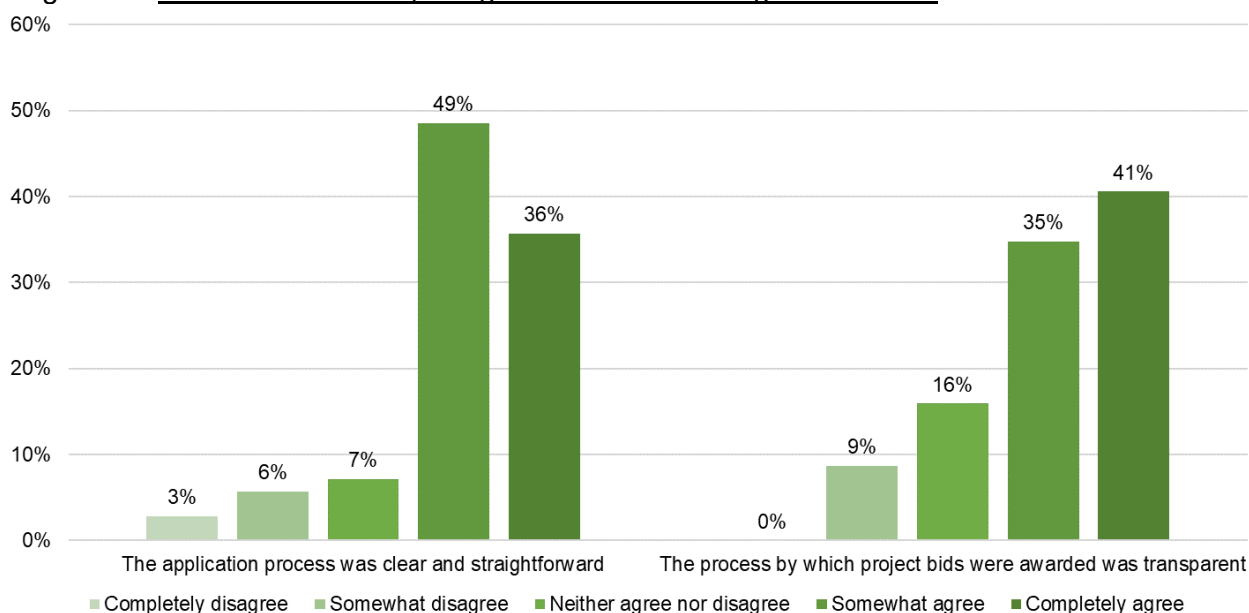
It is important to consider that where projects were particularly praising of ALB support, ALBs typically held a more substantive role within those projects; for instance, they were partners on the project or had engaged with projects with regard to consent and permission to access land. Where projects felt that they would have benefitted from more support (over a longer timeframe), they were typically only receiving ALB support for their GRCF bid. This suggests that whilst projects have benefitted from ALB support during the application process, the impact of this has been limited.

Projects commonly feel that there is increased pressure on the sector as a result of COVID-19 and the ongoing resource implications due to the UK’s departure from the European Union as well as wider global political stressors, e.g. global supply chain disruptions. A longer period of time for ALB support and/or additional ALB training to ensure that the role and remit are understood may reduce the pressures felt by bidding eNGOs. This may also ensure that the value of ALB advice is maximised, as eNGOs will have good strategic input through the development of their bid, post-EOI submission, and have the opportunity to engage with the relevant ALB representatives.

## 4.4 Reflections

The majority of projects perceived the Round 2 application process to be clear, straightforward and transparent (see Figure 4.4 below).

Figure 4.4: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees (n=70).

Table 4.7: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Agreement with statement	The application process was clear and straightforward	The process by which project bids were awarded was transparent
<b>Completely agree</b>	36%	41%
<b>Somewhat agree</b>	49%	35%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	7%	16%
<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	6%	9%
<b>Completely disagree</b>	3%	0%

Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees (n=70).

A minority of projects (seven) suggested that the application itself was long, which put an undue burden on bidding eNGOs. These eNGOs highlighted, however, that they were new to applying for funding through the Heritage Fund. Where eNGOs had submitted bids to the



Heritage Fund previously, they acknowledged that the application could be difficult but were typically more confident:

'We are familiar with the Lottery application process, which really helped. Otherwise it was a complex process which could have been quite daunting.'  
**(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Four eNGOs reported that the complexity of the application was made more difficult by the short timescales for the application. A minority of projects also highlighted facing technical challenges in using the portal, e.g. being unable to save progress with their application. However, it is important to acknowledge that two projects described challenges due to the application portal crashing. This occurred in the GRCF Round 1 application process, not Round 2. This suggests that some projects may be conflating their experiences of applying to GRCF Rounds 1 and 2 when providing feedback.

Whilst six projects suggested that they would have liked greater details on how project funding was decided upon, projects were broadly in agreement that the decision process felt transparent and fair. Where projects would have liked additional details on the criteria, this was typically for their own learning and development.

Overall, projects were positive about the application process, and any challenges were reported by a minority of eNGOs. This suggests that the application process is working well and that changes that were made to the process for Round 2 have been beneficial and well received. eNGOs that found the process to be more challenging were also commonly new to the Heritage Fund application process; therefore, the process can be perceived to be a learning opportunity.

## Suggested improvements

Longer timescales for the application were the most commonly suggested improvement for the GRCF application process (45 per cent; 30/66). Projects reported that it was challenging to provide the range of supporting documents required across partners within the allocated time. This improvement was suggested by a range of projects, including eNGOs that applied for large grants which stated that more time was needed due to the amount of funding that they were requesting, and small eNGOs that indicated that securing adequate resources to pull together their bids was difficult. However, projects also commonly acknowledged that short timescales were to be expected:

'Timescales were tight, but that's the nature of such a time-limited, responsive challenge fund.'  
**(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

At the point of GRCF Round 2 applications, the Heritage Fund was transitioning between two grant management systems. To meet the requirements of GRCF Round 2, a tailored SharePoint site was developed for projects requesting over £250k. Of those projects, around one third (35 per cent; 11/20) reported that this site was challenging to use. Projects described the new portal as being 'clunky' and 'difficult to use' due to it crashing and because of bidders' inability to save their application progress so that other partners could access the application separately. It is acknowledged that the GRCF management team suggested to applicants that they fill out applications 'offline' and then upload them to the system once completed. Furthermore, this system was devised as an interim solution and will not be used in future funding.

Projects also reported that due to the swapping of portals between EOIs and full applications, word counts were altered slightly in the new system, leading to additional pressures on bidding

eNGOs. It is acknowledged, however, that the GRCF management team were faced with considerable technological challenges due to the organisational transition between portals at the time of GRCF Round 2 applications. Moreover, processes were undertaken in this way to ensure that eNGOs were provided with funds as soon as possible, considering the general economic pressures faced by organisations at this time. Future provision should, where possible, ensure that systems used for the application remain consistent until the final submission.

## 5 Project delivery

### Section Summary:

#### Monitoring data findings (to May 2022):

- GRCF Round 2 projects have environmentally benefitted 99,752 hectares and 121 kilometres of land across England.
- Sixty-four projects have reported undertaking activity in relation to conservation and restoration within their project delivery (71 per cent of all projects).
- 88,243 trees have been planted to date through 29 projects.
- There have been a total of 45,055 attendees at 691 events across GRCF Round 2 projects. Events have been held by 68 of the 90 projects.
- Up to May 2022, monitoring data indicates that 580 roles have been supported to date, equating to 421.5 FTE roles.<sup>48</sup>

#### GRCF Round 2 project survey findings:

- Most projects have set up their projects as expected and almost half of all surveyed projects described being 'on track' with their project plan and to meet their project targets (48 per cent; 31/65).
- Where projects have faced challenges in delivery, this has commonly been the result of delays in projects receiving the appropriate consent, permits and permission for access to sites (18 per cent; 12/65), delays in recruitment (18 per cent; 12/65), issues surrounding partner organisations (nine per cent; 6/65), and issues regarding the approval of project delivery in winter, resulting in challenging conditions (nine per cent; 6/65).
- Most surveyed eNGOs successfully recruited or safeguarded staff. More projects reported facing difficulty in filling their Kickstart placements (29 per cent<sup>49</sup>; 10/35) than other types of vacancies.
- Recruitment challenges for projects most commonly stemmed from a lack of applicants and a lack of applicants with the appropriate skills.
- The decision to work with partners was frequently driven by the need for specialist skillsets and experience in specific areas, and to introduce wider expertise to a project team (40 per cent; 21/53).
- Projects anticipated that the biggest challenge going forward would be cost increases (69 per cent; 37/54).

This section of the report outlines project delivery to date, exploring the extent to which projects are being delivered as anticipated and the impacts thus far. This section will draw on the Wave 1 Survey to explore projects' view of project delivery and on monitoring data which evidences project delivery progress to date. This will predominantly be based on monitoring information analysis, including progress on intended jobs, conservation, engagement, and infrastructure outcomes per project where applicable.

### 5.1 Implementation

As illustrated in Table 5.1 overleaf, most projects have set up their projects as expected since the approval of their application bid. Only one project has not been able to set up their project as anticipated 'at all' and this was due to a key delivery partner dropping out early in the project. This resulted in the remaining partners having to alter outputs and project costs. Since

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<sup>48</sup> Predictions as per application form data against monitoring data to date.

<sup>49</sup> Please note that this is a rounded combination of 17.1 per cent for 'Not successful at all' and 11.4 per cent for 'Not very successful'.

your project bid was approved, to what extent have you been able to set up your project as anticipated?

Extent	Proportion of projects (%)
To a large extent	74%
To some extent	25%
Not at all	1%

Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees (n=73).

Almost half of all surveyed projects described being ‘on track’ with their project plan and to meet their project targets (48 per cent; 31/65). Enabling factors commonly included good working relationships with partners, clear aims and delivery plans, and the skills of the staff involved. Projects also suggested that the level of funding provided has helped them to deliver to a high quality:

‘The funding for this project has enabled the project to be adequately staffed and has enabled great progress to be made. Current progress against all targets is on track and this is largely due to staffing levels and resources. The partnership with the National Trust is also a major strength of the project, and one of the legacies of the project will be the continuation of this working relationship at a local and strategic level.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Where projects have faced challenges in delivery, this has commonly been the result of delays in projects receiving the appropriate consent and permission for access to sites (18 per cent; 12/65), delays in recruitment (18 per cent; 12/65), issues surrounding partner organisations (nine per cent; 6/65), and issues regarding the approval of project delivery in winter, resulting in challenging conditions, particularly for woodland-based projects (nine per cent; 6/65). Key strengths and challenges of project delivery are explored in detail in sections [5.6](#) and [5.7](#) respectively.

Table 5.2 overleaf demonstrates that to date, projects believe that they are delivering against GRCF themes in line with their priorities. As explored in [section 4.1](#), nature-based solutions and enhancing the capacity and resilience of eNGOs were commonly seen to be lesser priorities by projects, as they were felt to be secondary or longer-term aims which would occur as a result of nature conservation and restoration, connecting people with nature, and job creation, retention, and skill development. Challenges due to recruitment, land access, and consent have likely resulted in some projects addressing themes such as nature conservation and restoration and supporting job creation to a lesser extent than anticipated to date. It is important to highlight that limited progression towards these themes may also be due to seasonal constraints; in other words, projects commenced delivery in autumn and were interviewed in the following spring. Delivery against these themes may progress as projects develop.

Table 5.2: To what extent does your project address the following Green Recovery Challenge Fund themes? Comparison of projects' self-identified main priorities and the extent of delivery against themes to date

<b>GRCF theme</b>	<b>Project priority – to some extent</b>	<b>Project priority – to a large extent</b>	<b>Addressed in delivery – to some extent</b>	<b>Addressed in delivery – to a large extent</b>
<b>Nature conservation and restoration</b>	14%	86%	15%	83%
<b>Nature-based solutions</b>	38%	61%	33%	56%
<b>Connecting people with nature</b>	20%	80%	13%	86%
<b>Supporting job creation and retention and skill development within the conservation sector and its supply chain</b>	19%	81%	25%	75%
<b>Enhancing the capacity and resilience of eNGOs in terms of their financial stability, assets, skills, capabilities, and governance</b>	60%	33%	57%	37%

Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees (n=73).

## 5.2 Nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions

To date, GRCF Round 2 projects have environmentally benefitted 99,752 hectares and 121 kilometres of land across England. This indicates that project delivery to date has positively impacted large geographical areas. Please note that projects were asked to report how much land had environmentally benefitted from their activity in hectares, or kilometres if habitats or features were linear, e.g. rivers and hedgerows.

Table 5.3 below illustrates the breakdown of direct and indirect benefits to land that have occurred so far.

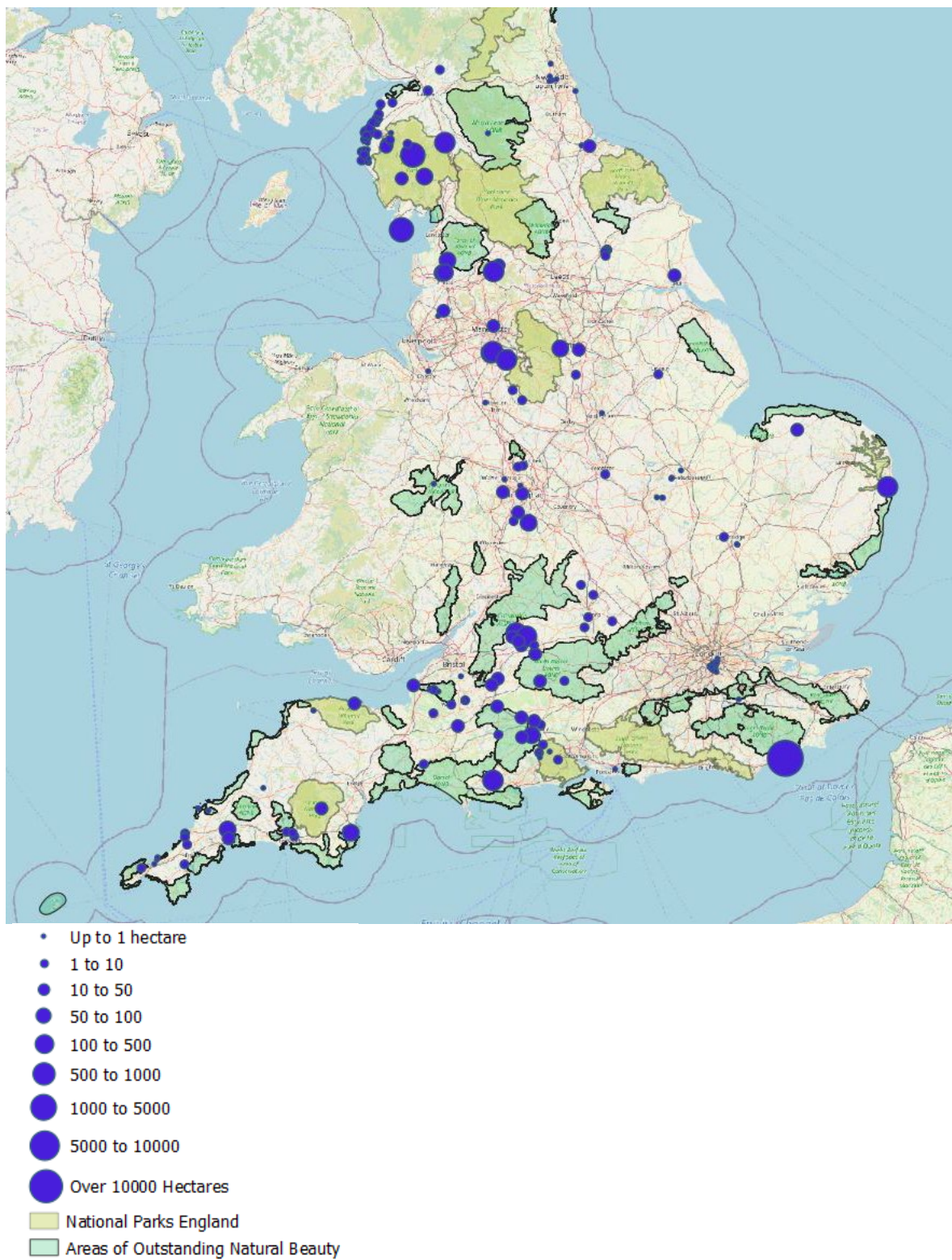
Table 5.3: Area covered by grantee projects

<b>Type of benefit to land</b>	<b>Hectares</b>	<b>Kilometres</b>
<b>Direct</b>	68,794	69
<b>Indirect</b>	30,958	52

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information.

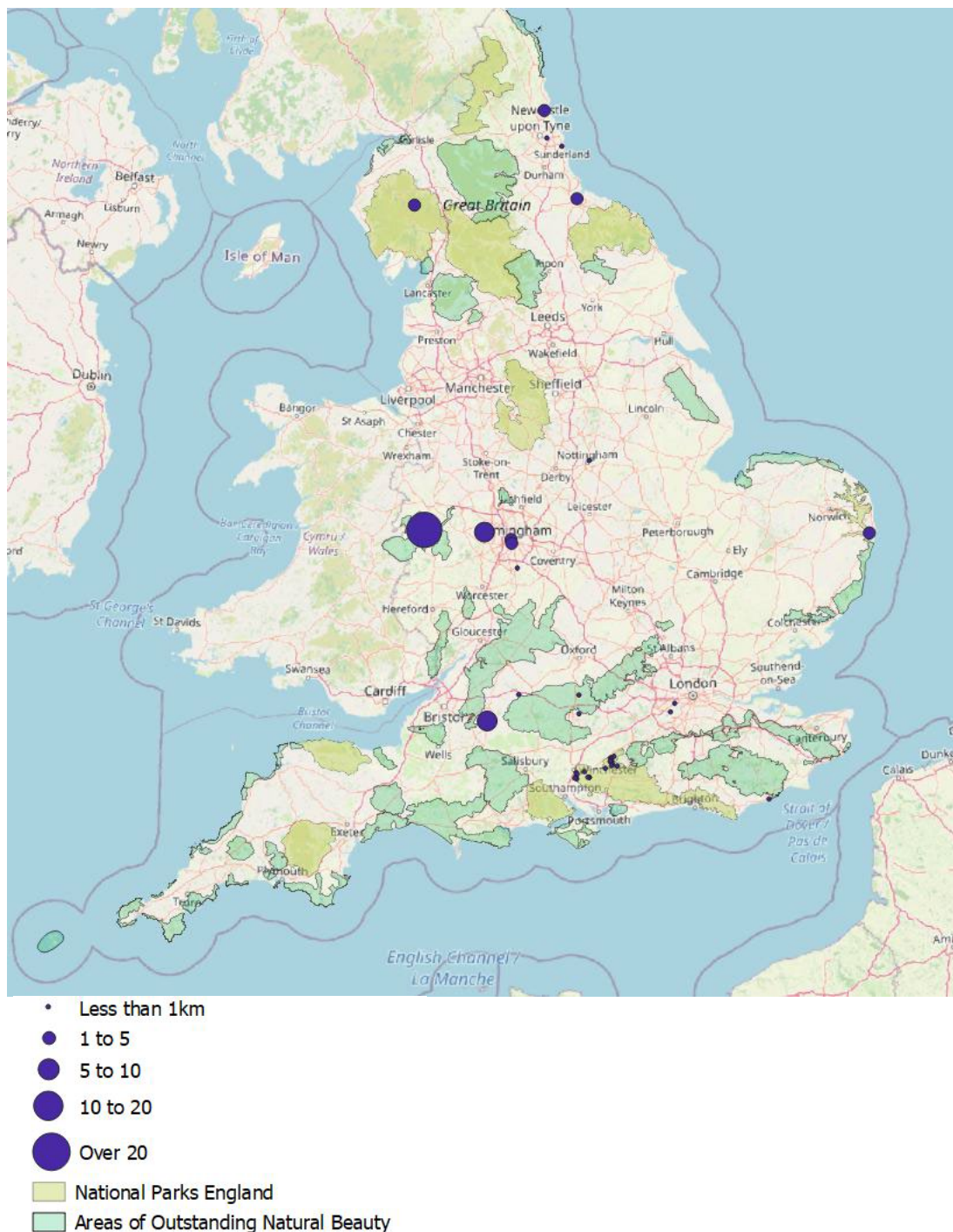
The geographical coverage of land improved in hectares is also depicted in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.1: Hectares of land improved mapped on to National Park and AONB location



Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information.

Figure 5.2: Kilometres of land improved mapped on to National Park and AONB location



Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information.

To date, projects have improved 339 hectares and 21 kilometres of land within AONBs as well as 1,468 hectares and 13 kilometres of land within National Parks. This confirms that GRCF Round 2 projects are positively contributing to the conservation and enhancement of protected natural landscapes and National Parks. Project efforts here align with wider UK Government calls for 'more action [...] to make these special places bigger, better and more joined up

spaces for nature'.<sup>50</sup> Land benefitting within AONBs and National Parks is illustrated in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 below.

Table 5.4: Land improved within AONBs<sup>51</sup>

<b>AONB</b>	<b>Hectares</b>	<b>Kilometres</b>
<b>Mendip Hills</b>	2	0
<b>Solway Coast</b>	27	0
<b>Kent Downs</b>	0	0
<b>North Pennines</b>	0	0
<b>Cranborne Chase &amp; West Wiltshire Downs</b>	133	0
<b>Shropshire Hills</b>	1	21
<b>Cornwall</b>	9	0
<b>Forest of Bowland</b>	100	0
<b>Dorset</b>	9	0
<b>North Wessex Downs</b>	58	0

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=79 sites). Please note that this table only includes AONBs in which the area of land impacted was documented by projects.

Table 5.5: Land improved within National Parks

<b>National Park</b>	<b>Hectares</b>	<b>Kilometres</b>
<b>Exmoor</b>	30	0
<b>Dartmoor</b>	32	0
<b>New Forest</b>	8	0
<b>Lake District</b>	1027	5
<b>The Broads</b>	370	2
<b>South Downs</b>	0	6

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=128 sites). Please note that this table only includes National Parks in which the area of land impacted was documented by projects.

To date, 64 projects have reported undertaking activity in relation to conservation and restoration within their project delivery (71 per cent of all projects). In total, 428 activities have taken place. Of the 64 projects:

- 42 per cent delivered habitat restoration activities (27/64),
- 23 per cent delivered habitat creation activities (15/64), and
- 16 per cent delivered both habitat creation and restoration activities (10/64).

Of all projects, 38 per cent named no designation for the sites on which they were working (28/90). Of projects working on designated or protected sites, over one third are undertaking project activity on local wildlife sites (34 per cent; 21/62) and 29 per cent (18/62) are undertaking conservation activity on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). As demonstrated in Table 5.6, projects are working on a diverse range of designated or protected sites in GRCF Round 2. Future evaluation fieldwork will explore the environmental impact of this in greater detail.

<sup>50</sup> Defra, Landscapes review (National Parks and AONBs): Government response, January 2022. Accessible here: [Landscapes review \(National Parks and AONBs\): Government response](#)

<sup>51</sup> Please note that figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



Table 5.6: Proportion of projects working on designated or protected sites

Site	Proportion of projects (%)
Local Wildlife Sites	34%
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)	29%
Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)	21%
Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)	15%
Special Protection Areas (SPAs)	10%
Protected by an Act of Parliament	5%
National Nature Reserves (NNRs)	5%
Marine Conservation Zone	3%
Ramsar	2%

Base: GRCF monitoring information of site information per project (n=62).

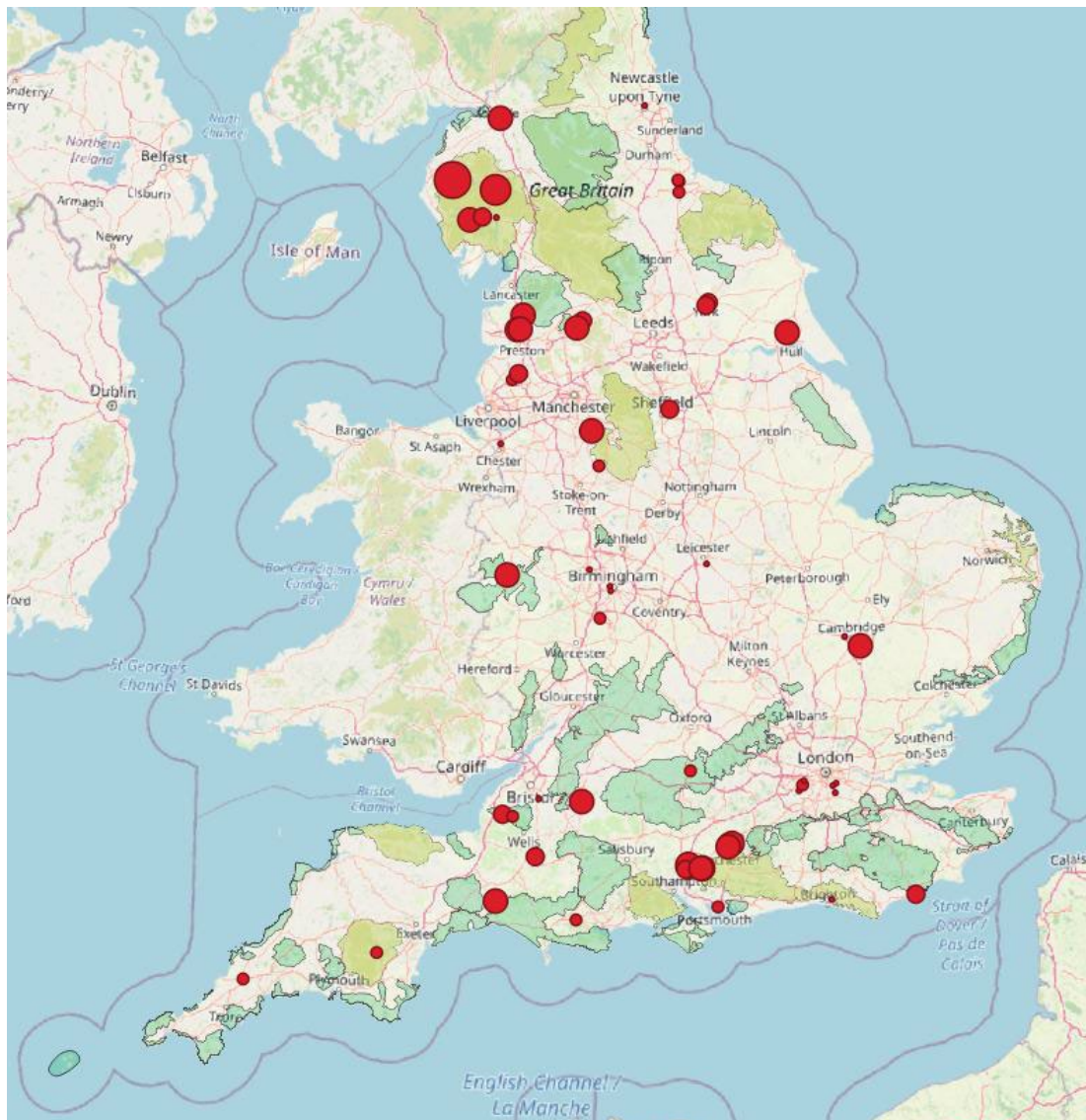
A total of 57 projects described the condition of the sites on which they were working, with 26 of those projects reporting conservation information for more than one area. Of those, around one quarter (26 per cent; 15/57) described one or more of their project areas as favourable, whilst 15 per cent (10/57) described them as unfavourable with no change, with a further 16 per cent (9/57) describing one or more of their project areas as being unfavourable and recovering. This broadly reflects the declining and precarious state of nature in the UK (as outlined in [section 2.7](#)) and aligns with project motivations to address the environmental concerns identified in local areas as documented in [section 4.1](#).

As a direct result of GRCF Round 2 funding, 29 projects have planted 88,243 trees across England. Within these:

- Eight projects planted fewer than 250 trees (nine per cent).
- Four projects planted between 250 and 500 trees (four per cent).
- Three projects planted between 501 and 1,000 trees (three per cent).
- One project planted between 1,001 and 1,050 trees (one per cent).
- Five projects planted between 1,051 and 2,000 trees (six per cent), and
- Eight projects planted more than 2,000 trees (nine per cent).

The geographical coverage of the tree planting is demonstrated in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3: Geographical spread of number of trees planted mapped on to National Park and AONB location



- Sites where trees were planted
- 1 - 100
  - 100 - 500
  - 500 - 1000
  - 1000 - 5000
  - 5000 - 10000
  - Over 10,000
  - National Parks England
  - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information.

As depicted in Figure 5.3, 9,270 trees have been planted in AONBs and 45,075 trees have been planted in National Parks across England within GRCF Round 2. Breakdowns by AONB and National Park can be found below.

Table 5.7: Trees planted in AONBs

<b>AONB</b>	<b>Number of trees</b>
<b>Mendip Hills</b>	1,020
<b>Shropshire Hills</b>	3,705
<b>Forest of Bowland</b>	1,530
<b>Dorset</b>	2,560
<b>North Wessex Downs</b>	455

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=79 sites). Please note that this table only includes AONBs in which the number of trees planted was documented by projects.

Table 5.8: Trees planted in National Parks

<b>National Park</b>	<b>Number of trees</b>
<b>Dartmoor</b>	280
<b>Lake District</b>	28,351
<b>South Downs</b>	16,444

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information (n=128 sites). Please note that this table only includes National Parks in which the area of land impacted was documented by projects.

Almost one third of all trees that have been planted to date through GRCF Round 2 have been planted in the North West (31 per cent; 22/70). This is not surprising when considering that this region has the highest proportion of project sites across the project. The environmental impact of this will be explored in greater detail in subsequent reporting.<sup>52</sup>

Table 5.9: Regional spread of trees planted

<b>Region of trees planted</b>	<b>Proportion of trees planted per region (%)</b>
<b>North West</b>	31%
<b>West Midlands</b>	16%
<b>South West</b>	16%
<b>North East</b>	13%
<b>London</b>	10%
<b>South East</b>	7%
<b>East of England</b>	3%
<b>East Midlands</b>	3%
<b>Yorkshire and The Humber</b>	1%

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information, conservation activities (n=70).

Based on project monitoring information, projects have delivered well against GRCF Round 2 environmental themes — nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions — to date. Subsequent interim reports will address the impact of nature conservation and restoration and nature-based solutions in further detail.

<sup>52</sup> Please note that projects did not identify a region for nine out of 79 of the tree-planting activities.

## 5.3 Connecting people with nature

A key aspect of the GRCF is to connect people with nature. Connection with nature can be understood through the inclusion of the public with projects and/or infrastructure works which physically support individuals' engagement with the environment. Both aspects of connecting people with nature are explored below.

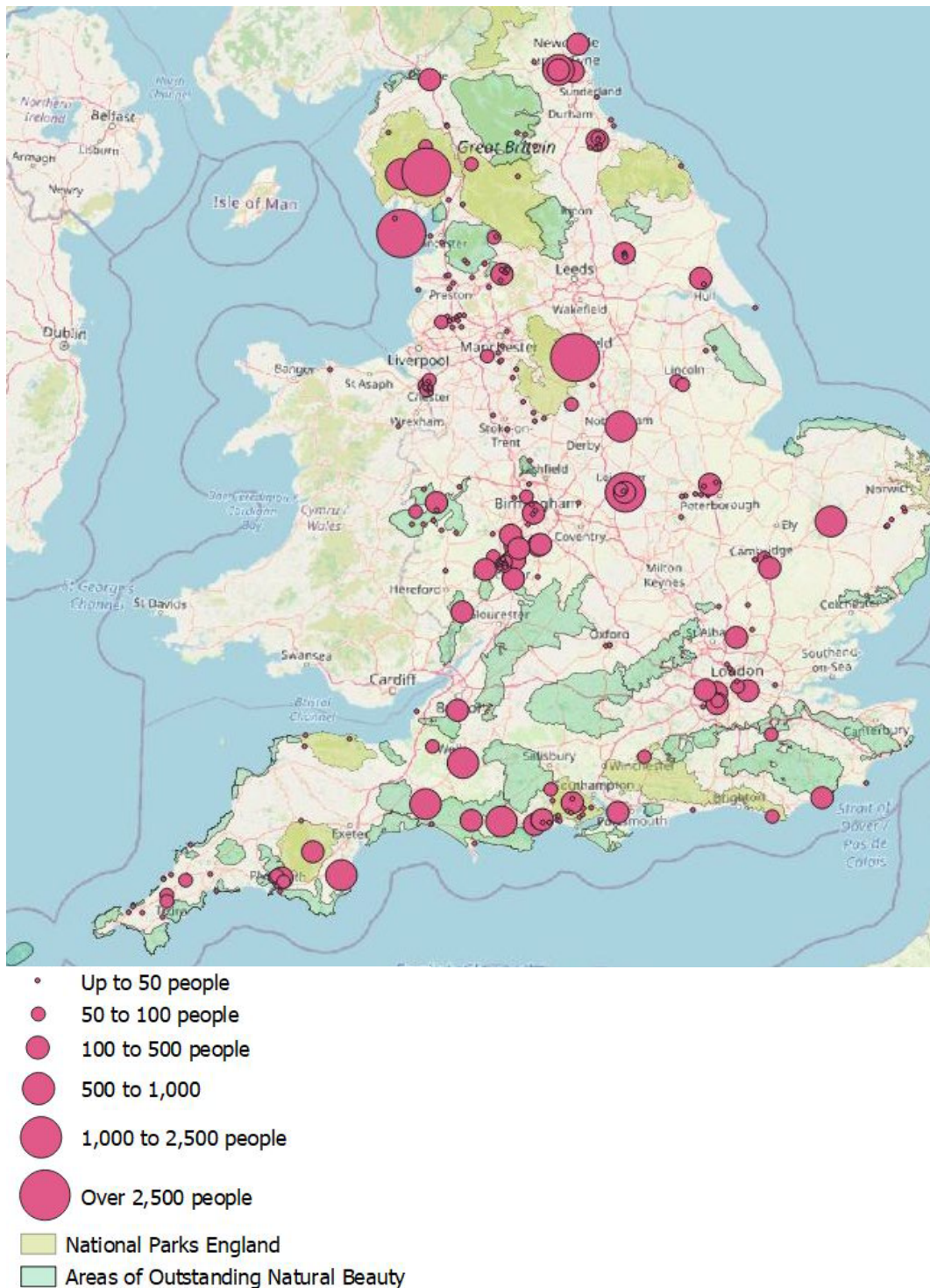
### **Engagement**

To date, there have been a total of 45,055 people engaged in GRCF Round 2 projects across England.<sup>53</sup> The geographical spread of people engaged is illustrated below.

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<sup>53</sup> This total is based on engagement monitoring data self-reported by projects through the monitoring data app.

Figure 5.4: Number of people engaged in GRCF Round 2 projects shown by location and mapped on to National Park and AONB location



Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information.

Over one third of the recorded people engaged in GRCF Round 2 projects are based in the North West (38 per cent; 17,126/44,928). This is unsurprising because the North West also has the highest number of projects and project sites across GRCF Round 2.

Table 5.10: Number of people engaged, by region<sup>54</sup>

Region	Number of people engaged	Number of people engaged (%)
<b>North West</b>	17,126	38%
<b>Yorkshire and The Humber</b>	10,247	23%
<b>South West</b>	5,359	12%
<b>West Midlands</b>	3,138	7%
<b>East Midlands</b>	2,412	5%
<b>North East</b>	2,410	5%
<b>East of England</b>	1,509	3%
<b>South East</b>	1,316	3%
<b>London</b>	1,268	3%

GRCF Round 2 monitoring engagement data, total number of people engaged with reported regions (n=44,928).

Over half of all projects (54 per cent; 49/90) indicated that they were targeting specific groups through their engagement activities. Within these:

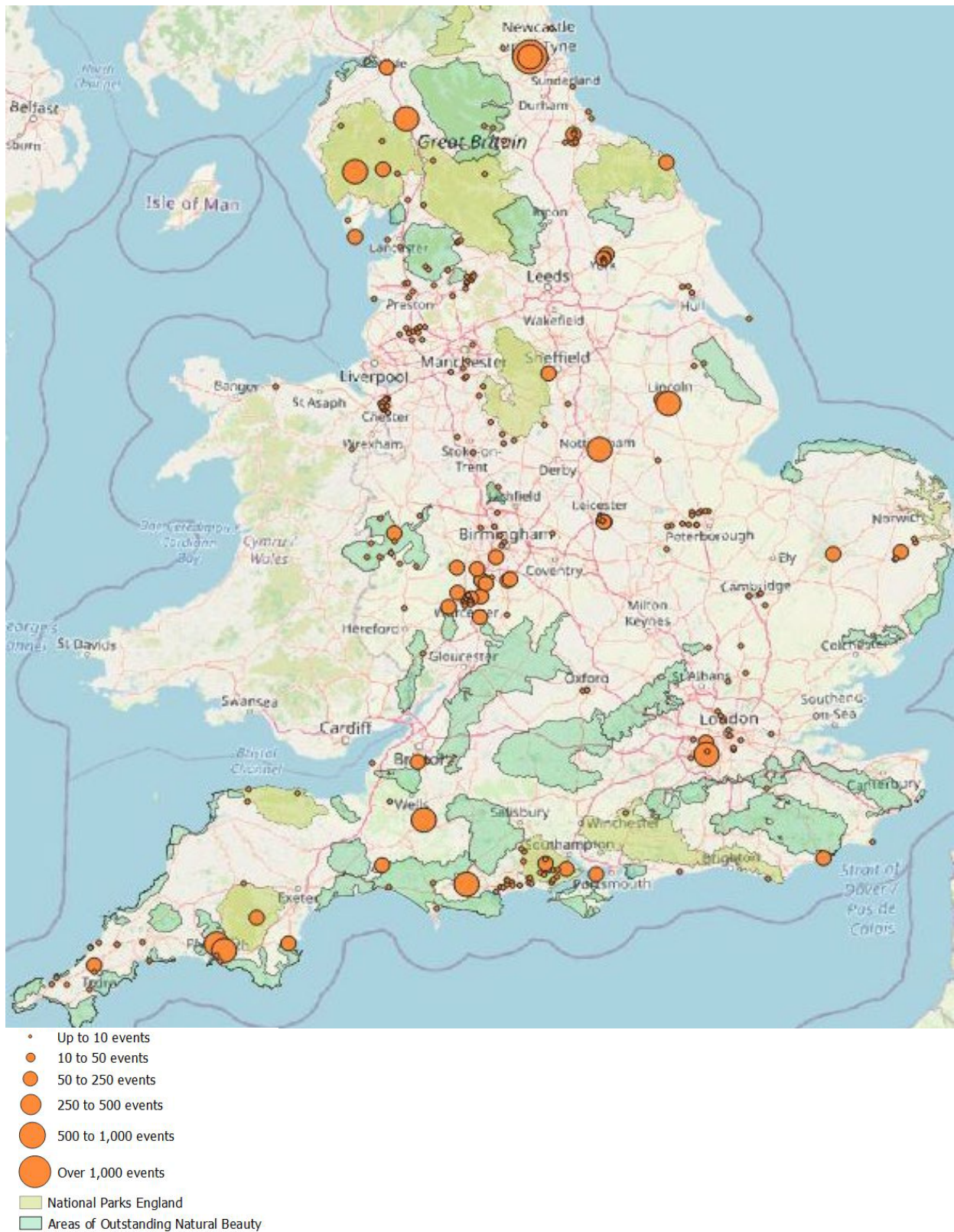
- Around two thirds of projects (65 per cent; 32/49) are targeting children and young people, whilst 47 per cent of projects (23/49) are specifically targeting young people and teachers in schools (23/49). These projects have reached 6,293 people in total.<sup>55</sup>
- Almost two thirds of projects (63 per cent; 31/49) are targeting local communities and residents, reaching 6,574 people.
- Around one third of projects (31 per cent; 15/49) are specifically targeting disadvantaged groups and communities. Within these, projects cited commonly working with individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds or areas of high deprivation. Overall, these projects have reached 2,385 people.

Events to date have been held by 68 of the 90 projects (76 per cent), with 2,999 events having taken place overall. The geographical spread of events held as part of GRCF Round 2 projects is illustrated below.

<sup>54</sup> Please note that this total excludes any people engaged outside of England. As previously stated, a insubstantial proportion of activity has been identified in Scotland and Wales.

<sup>55</sup> Please note that the total number of people engaged is based on projects' own self-reporting.

Figure 5.5: Number of project events held shown by location and mapped on to National Park and AONB location



Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information.

Table 5.11 below shows that one fifth of all GRCF Round 2 project events have taken place in the South West (21 per cent; 632/2,992), whilst 19 per cent of all events have been held in the North West (554/2,992). Considering the much higher proportion of people engaged in the North West than in the South West, this indicates that a wide range of large- and small-scale events have been held across England.

Table 5.11: Number of events held, by region

Region	Number of events	Number of events (%)
South West	632	21%
North East	556	19%
North West	554	19%
East Midlands	415	14%
West Midlands	254	8%
London	183	6%
East of England	167	6%
South East	115	4%
Yorkshire and The Humber	82	3%

Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring engagement data, total number of events with reported regions (n=2,992).

As illustrated by Figure 5.12 below, one quarter (17/68) of projects have held 21 to 50 events, with a further 22 per cent (15/68) carrying out more than 50. This reiterates that there are a range of regular and semi-regular events also taking place. Regular and semi-regular events commonly involve routine volunteer group meetings and local school events.

Table 5.12: Number of events delivered per project

Number of events	Proportion of projects (%)
1	9%
2 to 5	15%
6 to 10	21%
11 to 20	9%
21 to 50	25%
Over 50	22%

Base: engagement data (n=691) and individual grantee projects reporting events (n=68).

## Infrastructure impact

A total of 27 projects (30 per cent) reported installing or improving infrastructure as part of their project so far. Across the projects, 78 infrastructure-based outcomes were identified. Most commonly, activities included installing or improving footpaths through the GRCF.

As illustrated in Table 5.13, over half (56 per cent; 15/27) of the projects' infrastructure-based activities included the creation or improvement of footpaths. In many cases, projects suggested that footpaths were a key accessibility issue; therefore, the creation of new footpaths or the removal of dangerous aspects of existing footpaths has allowed the public to have an improved connection with nature. 'Other' infrastructure activities included dry wall restoration and the restoration or installation of access gates.



Table 5.13: What type of infrastructure have you installed or improved? (per project)

Type of infrastructure	Proportion of projects (%)
<b>Footpaths</b>	56%
<b>Fences</b>	37%
<b>Signage or interpretation</b>	33%
<b>Bridge(s)</b>	19%
<b>Amenities</b>	15%
<b>Accessibility changes</b>	15%
<b>Shelter or hide</b>	4%
<b>Other</b>	19%

Base: infrastructure data (n=78) and individual grantee infrastructure data (n=27).

To date, a total of 15 projects have reported installing or improving more than one type of infrastructure. Where all reported infrastructure is linear, half of all reported was less than 500 metres in length. With this considered, it is likely that the total area per grantee is larger, given that many have contributed to multiple activities.

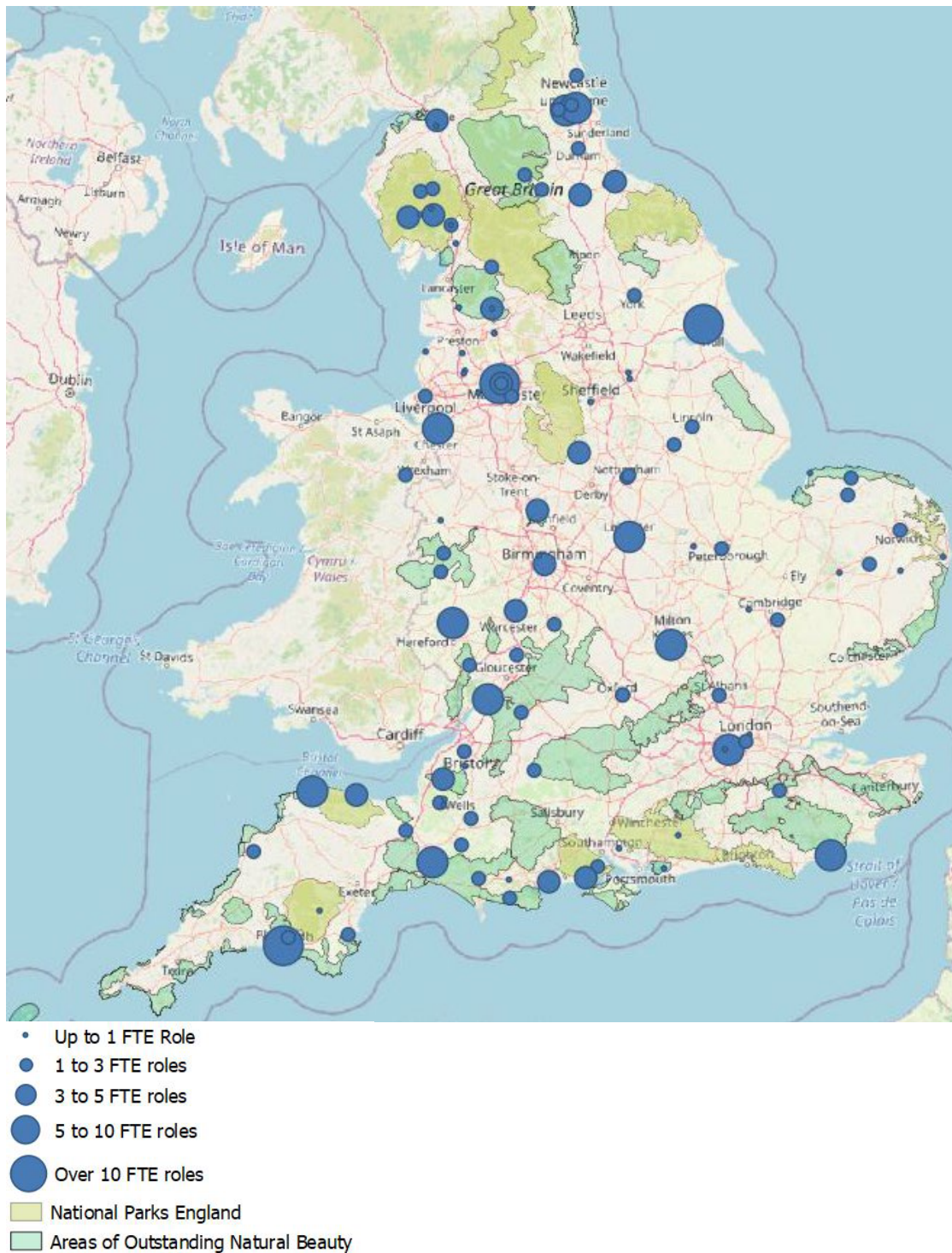
Project monitoring information indicates that projects have successfully engaged people in their projects, improved access to nature, and hosted a wide range of events to encourage participation with and in nature. Future evaluation fieldwork will explore the extent to which engagement with project delivery and nature has led to sustainable connections with nature.

## 5.4 Resilience and employment

Monitoring data indicates that 580 roles have been supported to date in GRCF Round 2, equating to 421.5 FTE roles. Over half of all projects have also supported a greater number of roles than originally forecast in their application bid (51 per cent; 42/82<sup>56</sup>). This suggests that recruitment for Round 2 of the GRCF is going well. The geographical coverage of FTE posts supported is illustrated overleaf.

<sup>56</sup> Please note that 82 out of the 90 projects provided an anticipated number of roles and current role numbers.

Figure 5.6: Number of FTE posts supported shown by location and mapped on to National Park and AONB location



Base: GRCF Round 2 monitoring information.

To date, 70 per cent of roles have been created directly for GRCF Round 2, with a further 19 per cent being existing roles protected from redundancy, indicating a positive contribution to job sustainability as well as job creation.

Table 5.14: Working patterns of roles reported against role type

<b>Working pattern</b>	<b>Role created for GRCF</b>	<b>Existing role protected from redundancy</b>	<b>Partial support – full cost recovery</b>
<b>Less than 1 day per week</b>	12%	64%	24%
<b>1 day per week</b>	18%	48%	34%
<b>2 days per week</b>	48%	32%	20%
<b>3 to 4 days per week</b>	87%	8%	4%
<b>Full-time</b>	81%	11%	7%
<b>Multiple roles</b>	100%	0%	0%

Base: monitoring information job data (n=580).

Roles have been calculated according to the number of days worked (namely, 0.2 is equivalent to 1 day per week and 1 is a full-time position). Some may have supported multiple roles (recorded as greater than 1); however, the number of roles supported above 1 is not clear through the monitoring data. The largest proportion of roles (40 per cent; 230/580) supported are recorded as full-time roles, followed by around one third (32 per cent; 183/580) working 3 to 4 days per week. Most commonly, projects have supported two to three FTE roles (27 per cent; 24/90), whilst one fifth have supported four to five FTE roles (see Table 5.15 below). This demonstrates that projects are creating multiple roles because of GRCF Round 2 funding. Further analysis may be of benefit moving forward in order to understand the extent to which these roles will be upheld upon completion of the project.

Table 5.15: Full-time equivalent roles supported per project

<b>Roles supported</b>	<b>Proportion of projects (%)</b>
<b>None</b>	7%
<b>Less than 1 FTE</b>	8%
<b>1 FTE</b>	14%
<b>2 to 3 FTE</b>	27%
<b>4 to 5 FTE</b>	20%
<b>6 to 10 FTE</b>	17%
<b>More than 10 FTE</b>	8%

Base: monitoring information job data (n=580).

Table 5.16: Working patterns of roles supported

<b>Working pattern</b>	<b>Proportion of roles (%)</b>
<b>Less than 1 day per week</b>	6%
<b>1 day per week</b>	8%
<b>2 days per week</b>	15%
<b>3 to 4 days per week</b>	32%
<b>Full-time</b>	40%
<b>Multiple roles</b>	1%

Base: monitoring information job data (n=580).

In line with the geographical location of projects and sites, the largest proportion (25 per cent) of jobs supported are in the South West, wherein there are a substantial number of projects. It should be noted that projects documented five jobs within Wales or Scotland that had been supported. As the GRCF requires all activity to occur in England, it is assumed that, as previously mentioned, said projects have head offices in Scotland or Wales but are delivering GRCF projects specifically in England.

Table 5.17: Geographical region of roles supported

<b>Region</b>	<b>Proportion of roles (%)</b>
<b>South West</b>	25%
<b>North West</b>	23%
<b>North East</b>	12%
<b>West Midlands</b>	12%
<b>South East</b>	11%
<b>East of England</b>	5%
<b>East Midlands</b>	5%
<b>Yorkshire and The Humber</b>	4%
<b>London</b>	2%
<b>Wales</b>	1%
<b>Scotland</b>	0.4%

Base: monitoring information job data (n=580)

One fifth of the roles supported to date are reported as apprenticeship/traineeship roles, with the largest proportion of these (68 per cent) being 3 to 4 days per week and a further 26 per cent being full-time. Whilst this is a small proportion of all roles supported, monitoring data to date indicates a total of 115 apprenticeship roles against an overall estimation at the application stage of 353.6 apprenticeship roles, equating to a 31 per cent success rate. This indicates that the rate of creation of training roles is significantly lower than that of other FTE roles, and further indicates that the majority of roles supported are not training or progression roles. It is important, however, to note that calculations regarding apprenticeships are made on a total role basis, not an FTE basis, based on the information provided.

Table 5.18 indicates that almost half (46 per cent) of projects forecasting apprenticeship roles have not supported any such roles to date. As will be explored in project reflections below, this suggests that projects have found it more challenging than others to create types of roles.

Table 5.18: Progress towards forecast apprenticeship roles

<b>% of forecast</b>	<b>Proportion of projects (%)</b>
<b>None</b>	46%
<b>1% to 25%</b>	8%
<b>26% to 50%</b>	18%
<b>51% to 75%</b>	15%
<b>76% to 100%</b>	10%
<b>Over forecast</b>	3%

Base: job data (n=115) against award data forecast (n=39).

Equality data was provided for 57 per cent of all roles supported through GRCF Round 2 (331/581). As illustrated by Table 5.19 below, projects most commonly reported recruiting individuals aged 25 or below (24 per cent; 137/581), whilst 17 people employed by projects identified as Black, Asian or minority ethnic (three per cent; 17/581). It should be noted that

individuals were able to select multiple characteristics. Future reporting will explore the intersectionality present within this data in an in-depth fashion. Overall, equality data was not recorded for 43 per cent of the roles reported (250/581). Some projects may face difficulties in collecting and reporting on this data, as some may not have the skill or capacity with which to accurately collect such information and subsequently report it in line with GDPR requirements.

Going forward, GRCF Round 2's management and delivery teams should stress to projects the importance of including this data within their monitoring information systems and explore whether there are any key challenges that projects face in completing this task. Where evidenced, considerable value can be identified in the use of GRCF Round 2 as a means by which to encourage inclusivity within the sector.

Table 5.19: Equality data provided for project roles supported

<b>Demographic characteristic</b>	<b>Number of people in roles</b>	<b>Proportion of people in roles (%)</b>
<b>Aged 25 years or below</b>	137	24%
<b>Socioeconomically disadvantaged</b>	35	6%
<b>Black, Asian or another ethnic minority</b>	17	3%
<b>A disability</b>	15	3%
<b>LGBT+</b>	11	2%
<b>Aged 60 years or above</b>	4	1%
<b>None of the above</b>	166	29%
<b>Not known / No data provided</b>	250	43%

Base: monitoring information job data (n=581). Please note that percentage totals exceed 100% as individuals were able to select multiple characteristics.

The largest proportion of roles supported were officer roles (26 per cent; 149/567), along with manager roles (15 per cent; 87/567) and ranger roles (14 per cent; 79/567). In line with the majority of roles being specific to the project, the roles recorded most commonly involved a project-specific focus, along with engagement. This may limit the legacy of certain projects, as project-specific roles may come to an end when the project is complete if succession funding is not secured. Looking forward, GRCF Round 2 funders should look to facilitate a learning exchange between projects to aid workforce development, succession planning, and legacies.

## Project reflections

Most surveyed eNGOs intended to recruit staff for their project and, in delivery, have done so successfully (see Table 5.20 below). However, more projects reported facing difficulty in filling their Kickstart placements (29 per cent<sup>57</sup>; 10/35) than other types of vacancies. This finding broadly aligns with the National Audit Office's conclusion that Kickstart vacancies take considerable time to fill due to administrative checks, advertisements, and applications.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Please note that this is a rounded combination of 17.1 per cent for 'Not successful at all' and 11.4 per cent for 'Not very successful'.

<sup>58</sup> The National Audit Office, Employment Support: The Kickstart Scheme, November 2021. Accessible here: [NAO employment support: the Kickstart Scheme](#)

Table 5.20: How successful has this recruitment been so far for lead applicants/partner organisations/Kickstart vacancies?

How successful	Lead applicant vacancies	Partner vacancies	Kickstart vacancies
Not successful at all	0%	0%	17%
Not very successful	3%	0%	11%
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	5%	0%	6%
Quite successful	26%	40%	23%
Very successful	66%	60%	43%

Base: Wave 1 Survey interviewees who recruited for vacancies within the lead organisation (n=61), interviewees who recruited for vacancies at a partner organisation (n=25), and interviewees who recruited through the Kickstart scheme (n=35).

Recruitment challenges for projects most commonly stemmed from a lack of applicants and a lack of applicants with the appropriate skills (7/11 respectively). Whilst this is a small sample size, these findings broadly align with the most recent Employer Skills Survey (ESS), which reported that the main cause of hard-to-fill vacancies was that of low applicant skills (39 per cent; 49,065/127,197), with low applicant numbers also being a key concern (18 per cent; 22,582/127,197).<sup>59</sup>

GRCF projects also commonly highlighted poor terms and conditions (e.g. pay) as well as attitudes (motivation or personality of applicants) as contributing to the challenges that they faced in recruitment (4/11 respectively). This suggests that difficulties faced in recruitment for roles within the GRCF projects are representative of broader challenges faced across the labour market in England.

However, 11 projects suggested that recruitment was particularly challenging because of difficulties in recruiting within the environment sector generally, and most GRCF roles were advertised at the same time. One project stated:

‘There is already a recruitment crisis in the environment sector. Flooding the sector with new job opportunities as a large number of GRCF roles came online simultaneously made it impossible for us to recruit. Internal candidates were not interested because the project was too short-term.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

In seven cases, projects also suggested that the processes involved in recruitment through the Kickstart scheme were challenging because roles had to be advertised through Jobcentre Plus. Projects suggested that there were delays between Jobcentre Plus advertising the roles and applications being shown to project eNGOs. Whilst projects commonly acknowledged that there was limited interest in some roles, process delays resulted in projects having to advertise the GRCF roles elsewhere, e.g. through social media, reassigning internal staff to the project and backfilling their post, and relying more on volunteer time than anticipated.

Overall, projects which supported jobs because of the GRCF have performed well to date; however, the longevity of said roles is yet to be determined. Future evaluation fieldwork will seek to establish a greater understanding of project succession planning as well as greater details on the roles established through the GRCF.

<sup>59</sup> Employer Skills Survey 2019: Summary Report, November 2020. Accessible here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/936488/ESS\\_2019\\_Summary\\_Report\\_Nov2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936488/ESS_2019_Summary_Report_Nov2020.pdf)

## 5.5 Partnership working

Whilst the analysis of project monitoring information suggests that around one third of eNGOs have official partners, the majority of eNGOs that completed the Wave 1 Survey stated that they are working in partnership as part of their project delivery. The graph below indicates that 77 per cent of projects (56/73) surveyed are working in partnership. This includes informal partnerships as well as partnerships based on access to delivery sites. Amongst the 23 per cent of projects (17/73) who reported not working in a formal partnership, a large proportion noted that they still have informal partnerships or collaborators as part of their delivery model.

The decision to work with partners was frequently driven by the need for specialist skillsets and experience in specific areas, and to introduce wider expertise to a project team (40 per cent; 21/53). One quarter of partnerships were based on delivery sites or other practical factors such as organisational size and capacity (25 per cent; 13/53). In this instance, wherein the project was delivered over multiple geographical sites or collaborating with landowners, partnership working was essential to delivery.

Many projects noted strategic reasons for working in partnership, such as building on pre-existing relationships (15 per cent; 8/53) or because the partnership was a good strategic fit (15 per cent; 8/53). Two projects noted that improving staff development and wider experience and training for recruits were additional reasons for seeking partner organisations. It was recognised that working collaboratively ensures a greater overall impact, whether this is across a wider geographical region, bringing additional capacity or funding to the project, or supporting public engagement with specific groups. One project stated:

‘The partner organisation was working on a similar [GRCF] bid within the same locality. Joining forces added value to both projects and [brought] the benefits of partnership working.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Engaging particular community groups was often the foundation of a working relationship which enabled projects to engage with groups that may have barriers to participating in environmental projects. For example, one project worked directly with a specialist organisation working with refugees and asylum seekers who, they noted, were underrepresented in their services and environmental eNGOs in general. This formal partnership enabled this engagement in a meaningful way.

Some noted that supporting smaller eNGOs with growth and development was part of their ethos as an organisation, not only to support their working relationships but also to support smaller eNGOs that may not have had the capacity with which to apply for the funding as an independent organisation. For example:

‘[Some of our existing] partners would not have been able to apply directly, as they didn’t have the staff capacity in place due to loss of income from COVID-19 and redundancies.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Table 5.21: Why did you decide to work with partners on your project?

Reason	Proportion of projects (%)
Specialist or wider skillset	40%
Delivery sites or other practical factors	25%
For greater impact	17%
Good strategic fit	15%
Pre-existing partnerships in place	15%
To support engagement with a particular community	13%
To support partner organisations	6%

Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=53).

Over half of the projects that did not work with partners, informal or otherwise, cited time constraints as a major factor which limited their ability to work in partnership (eight out of 17 projects). This included both the lead-in time to develop partnerships, establishing working processes, and additional time required for communication and collaboration on decision making. One project noted that their original partnership agreement had fallen through, whilst for two projects, working in partnership was neither necessary nor appropriate for their project brief. Considering the size and scope of the grant, one organisation commented:

‘This was an under-£250k grant, so the complexity of partnership working would not have been worth the time spent working up the grant.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Projects reported generally positive levels of collaboration between partners, with 85 per cent (45/54) stating that collaboration was good or very good. Examples given of these good relationships included positive communication and good overall working relationships, particularly eNGOs working with longstanding partners. Partnerships for these projects appeared to be resilient to project adaptations and changes. For example:

‘[Our partners were] superbly supportive and amazingly patient with the delays and understanding of cost overruns.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Projects that were positive about their levels of collaboration often cited the specific structures in place which supported their working relationship. These included partnership agreements which designated each partner’s role and remit, the involvement of a project officer or manager who worked across partners, or frequent project steering board meetings. One project stated:

‘The project delivery team meets regularly, has planned the project collaboratively, and is utilising the different skills and areas of expertise each brings to the project.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Issues reported by projects included practical reasons such as delays in delivery, or the timescales required to set up robust processes for collaborative working. A minority of projects felt as though meaningful collaboration was hindered by the move to fully remote communication as well as the capacity constraints on smaller partner organisations following the COVID-19 pandemic. For projects that stated that collaboration was poor, this was mostly due to communication factors or a breakdown of relationships such as agreements with landowners.



However, all projects reported that they have the combined resources with their partners with which to deliver against the project ambition. Within these:

- Over two thirds of projects (68 per cent; 38/56) strongly agreed that these resources were in place.
- Thirty-two per cent (18/56) stated that to some extent they have both the finances and the capacity with which to deliver against project outcomes.
- Twenty per cent of projects (nine projects in total) expressed concern surrounding staffing resources due to either delays in recruitment or the potential loss of project staff on fixed-term contracts seeking permanent employment elsewhere; and
- Sixteen per cent of projects (seven projects in total) noted hesitation regarding project finances, whether this was due to an overspend of project funds in the early phases of the project or increases in supplier costs.

Table 5.22: Looking forward, are there any challenges that you anticipate facing with your current project partnership arrangements?

Anticipated challenge	Proportion of projects (%)
Legacy/sustainability	13%
Timescales	9%
Financial pressures/cost increases	4%
Seasonal work	4%
Loss of staff	4%

Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=46).

Over half of projects (56 per cent; 26/46) were confident in their current partnership arrangement and did not foresee any challenges associated with delivery. The key challenges anticipated for project delivery were in relation to timescales (four projects), a loss of staff (two projects), and the complexities of seasonal work (two projects), as previously explored. Many projects noted that they would seek or require further funding to address these challenges. However, one project commented on the positive outcome for individuals who may use the project role as a stepping stone into the sector, which would produce the intended benefits for the wider environment sector if individuals recruited were to succeed in their careers progressing. Another project noted:

‘At the end of the project, the loss of key project staff may mean that the networks and connections built by the project may start to weaken. New funding that provides opportunities for project staff to develop (or exchange) within and between the eNGOs could help to strengthen the partnership.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Some eNGOs (six) commented that ensuring legacy and sustainability for their work was the greatest challenge faced. As a solution to this, many identified required continued funding. If this were not feasible, projects suggested that they would become reliant on volunteers to fulfil previously paid roles. For example:

‘Beyond the life of the project, the partners need to make a commitment to carry on working together to avoid any one of them cherry-picking successful elements of delivery and deploying them unilaterally. These can only be overcome through a trusting relationship, which we have engaged senior directors on all sides in an effort to foster.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

## 5.6 Strengths of project delivery

Projects identified many successes to date, including a range of practical works completed and project processes in place. Despite the challenges raised with regard to recruitment, many projects reported that once project staff were in place, the team were a key strength. Good teamwork subsequently increased the work led by volunteers and the wider eNGOs involved. For example, one project stated:

‘We have been able to recruit a new volunteer coordinator role. This has given us increased capacity to bring in new volunteers from our community and increase the amount of work done on our nature reserve. We have seen a significant increase in volunteer hours and have had excellent feedback about the benefits those individuals have experienced through volunteering.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

The quality of individuals recruited was highlighted by many projects, with staff in project officer roles and Kickstart roles being praised as competent and passionate:

‘We have been very fortunate to appoint some extremely talented and committed staff and contractors for this project, which has greatly facilitated delivery. We are also very happy with our relationship with our Lottery Manager, who is very supportive and responsive. This project has created a momentum to our work which will last well beyond the lifetime of this project.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Table 5.23: Reflecting on the setup of your project so far, what has worked well?

<b>Strength</b>	<b>Proportion of projects (%)</b>
<b>Strong individuals/team/recruitment</b>	59%
<b>Good partnerships</b>	28%
<b>Practical works carried out</b>	20%
<b>Engagement</b>	18%
<b>Funder positive engagement</b>	15%
<b>Generally positive</b>	8%
<b>Project structure</b>	7%
<b>Capacity/resource created</b>	3%

Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=71).

Within project delivery, 20 per cent of projects (14 projects) noted that practical works have been successfully carried out, with habitats improved over multiple sites or restoration works in progress. The focus on the recovery of species and habitats was considered to be a key strength of delivery so far, with tangible impacts already being noted in a few cases. Positive engagement with groups was cited by 13 projects, including high demand from target groups or positive feedback following on from engagement. One project was oversubscribed for participants and, therefore, was able to prioritise selection towards areas with low socioeconomic income, maximise geographical distribution, rural–urban variation, and other protected characteristics. They noted:

‘We have found a massive public demand for opportunities to connect with nature and help contribute to nature restoration. Our volunteer events are always oversubscribed and feedback from volunteers is always very positive.’

Our project is providing really valuable opportunities for people to have a positive impact on their local environment, and we see that this has big benefits for their health and well-being.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Good partnerships were cited by 28 per cent of projects (20 projects), including examples of dedicated working groups, as well as efficient progress of project activities. Project management and reporting processes ensured that relevant permission was granted quickly, and a good foundation was built for the ongoing success of project delivery.

Some projects were positive regarding the support received from the Heritage Fund team, with 11 projects referencing this in a free-text response. Comments included that the team were responsive and supportive and maintained good communication with project leads. Many projects commented that their relationship with the Heritage Fund’s grants officers had been a key strength and that they had been supportive of the project setup and any changes made. For example:

‘The [Heritage Fund] was very helpful in making changes to the project and supporting us. Their experience in managing grant funding was very evident and helpful.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

## 5.7 Challenges of project delivery

Projects anticipated a range of challenges concerning project delivery, the most common being cost increases, affecting 69 per cent of respondents (37/54). For many this concerned the cost of materials such as timber, whilst some noted an increase in labour costs for capital works and contractors. In conjunction with this, supply chain issues affected 35 per cent of projects (19/54), e.g. for vehicle hire and sourcing technical equipment.

Table 5.24: Has your project experienced any of the following challenges?

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Proportion of projects (%)</b>
<b>Cost increases</b>	69%
<b>Problems in securing landowner consent</b>	39%
<b>Supply chain issues</b>	35%
<b>Problems in securing statutory permission and consent from ALB</b>	28%
<b>Other</b>	33%

Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=54).

A considerable proportion of projects experienced problems in securing landowner consent (39 per cent; 21/54). In many of these cases, the issues have not yet been resolved, and projects either are in ongoing negotiations with landowners or have been forced to remove certain sites from their delivery plan. Over one quarter of surveyed projects (28 per cent; 15/54) also reported facing issues in securing statutory permission, which delayed the start of delivery. Where possible, Defra should support ALBs in prioritising the GRCF where possible in order to minimise delays which may impact the long-term success and legacy of the programme. A small number of projects (six) cited COVID-19 as a challenge which disproportionately affected projects centred on engagement with the public.

Projects reported a range of strategies with which to address these challenges and mitigate their impact on their delivery ambition. Forty-four per cent of projects (31) have adapted either outcomes or delivery methods in the face of challenges, whilst a further 17 per cent (12 projects) have had delivery delays or have shifted milestones. For a proportion of projects (15 per cent or 11 projects) the challenges are unresolved to date, with project teams generally hopeful that they will be resolved as the project develops. Ten projects noted relying on the contingency funding provided in the GRCF or were positive about the flexibility that this afforded, and an additional eight projects had sought alternative additional funding to address their challenges. For example:

‘We built in a small amount of slippage time and have extended the project to the end of the grant period (March). Robust planning has helped us to feel confident that whilst some of the larger groundworks will have to take place later in the year and towards the end of the project, we have confidence that this will be completed. Regular contact with our Heritage Fund Investment Manager has been helpful.’ **(Project Interview, Wave 1 Survey)**

Table 5.25: How have these challenges been addressed?

<b>How the challenge has been addressed</b>	<b>Proportion of projects (%)</b>
<b>Adapted project outcomes or delivery</b>	44%
<b>Use of contingency funding or programme flexibility</b>	30%
<b>Unresolved/ongoing</b>	15%
<b>Secured additional funding</b>	11%
<b>Other</b>	17%

Base: Wave 1 Survey (n=71).

## 6 Early conclusions and next steps

Across the cohort, 64 projects have undertaken activity in relation to conservation and restoration, 88,243 trees have been planted, 691 events have been held, 78 types of infrastructure have been built or improved, and 580 job roles have been supported (421.5 FTE). This evidences that, to date, projects funded in the second round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund have undertaken a wide range of positive actions in their setup and delivery.

This section of the report outlines key emerging findings from GRCF Round 2, learning and recommendations so far, and the evaluation's next steps. Please note that recommendations made are intended to be considered for future delivery within the GRCF and for future funding opportunities which incentivise the restoration and creation of habitats.

### 6.1 Application process

Projects generally perceived their aims and ambitions to be aligning with GRCF Round 2's key priorities. Almost half of all surveyed projects' main driver for applying to the GRCF was to address environmental concerns that they identified in their local areas, and almost one third of projects perceived their application to the GRCF to be an opportunity to reach new audiences, fill employment vacancies and/or train existing staff. Nature conservation and restoration were also perceived to be the main GRCF priorities, whilst most projects also perceived supporting job creation, retention and skills and connecting people with nature to be important.

Key changes were made to the Round 2 application process, including the reduction in the amount for which projects could bid, additional guidance provision in relation to job creation, and the provision of additional support from ALBs for eNGOs bidding for large grants. Most projects perceived key changes made to the GRCF requirements in Round 2 as having little to no impact on their application. Limiting the number of applications and the amount of funding provided was seen by projects to be beneficial, as it has allowed eNGOs to focus on key areas of project development and ensure that projects are not overstretched. Projects typically found the support on offer with regard to their application to be helpful. The guidance was described as providing projects with clarity as to what was required and how to go about it, whilst webinars provided an opportunity for eNGOs to interact with other bidding eNGOs and access a wide range of information to which they may not otherwise have access.

**Recommendation One:**

Changes made to the GRCF Round 2 application process ensured that applicants felt supported and clear as to the funding remit. Future funding opportunities should retain these changes to reduce the burden on applicants.

The majority of surveyed projects felt that GRCF Round 2 has effectively responded to the needs of the sector stemming from COVID-19. In particular, projects evidenced that the GRCF has allowed them to support jobs in precarious positions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, key suggestions to improve the application process were in relation to project timeframes. In some cases, projects suggested that GRCF Round 2 is 'too short' to adequately respond to deep-rooted negative impacts of COVID-19 and/or make longer-term impacts on nature and audiences. In others, projects suggested that short timescales for the application put too much pressure on bidding eNGOs due to the amount of supporting documentation needed for the application, the limited capacity of smaller eNGOs, and the pressures on capacity already felt across the sector. Projects also suggested that changing

the portal via which organisations submitted their application late in the day added to the pressures created by limited capacity and time with which to engage.

**Recommendation Two:**

Future funding opportunities should consider extending the timescales provided to bidding eNGOs to ensure that smaller eNGOs are not disproportionately impacted by their lack of capacity.

Projects in receipt of large grants praised the support received by ALBs and suggested that the support has helped them to refine their existing bids, enhance particular activities, and feel more confident about taking forward their delivery without assistance. Suggestions to improve the ALB support also focused on the timescales for support. Timescales were described as being limited between receiving support from ALBs and the bid submission date. Projects suggested that if ALBs were engaged earlier in the process, bidding eNGOs' delivery plans would be less substantive and, therefore, eNGOs would have more capacity with which to make bigger changes to their application. Whilst all ALB representatives were trained to ensure that there was a good level of understanding of GRCF Round 2, a minority of projects suggested that ALB representatives did not always have an in-depth understanding of its aims and requirements. This resulted in projects having to use part of their allotted ALB support time to provide details and clarity on GRCF Round 2.

Overall, whilst projects that received support from ALBs were broadly positive about the experience, the additional value of ALB support remains unclear. Although projects cited improved confidence as a result of this support, a substantive impact is not yet apparent. This evaluation will explore this aspect of support in further detail to ascertain whether ALB support has provided additional value beyond the development of project bids, i.e. in the delivery of GRCF Round 2 projects.

## 6.2 Project delivery

Most eNGOs have successfully set up and are delivering their projects, with almost half reporting that they are on track with their project plan and targets. Challenges to project setup and delivery have commonly stemmed from delays in the appropriate consent and permission being provided to projects to access sites, delays in recruitment, difficulties with partner organisations, and issues surrounding the delivery of the projects over winter.

GRCF Round 2's monitoring information evidences the success of project delivery to date. A wide range of activities have taken place and projects can identify and report on short-term outputs. Whilst most projects have provided sufficient details within reported evidence, in some cases, data is patchy or incomplete (e.g. equality and diversity data). Some projects may face difficulties in collecting and reporting on this data, as some may not have the skill or capacity with which to accurately collect such information and subsequently report it in line with GDPR requirements. This will be explored further in subsequent reporting. Going forward, GRCF Round 2's management and delivery teams should stress to projects the importance of including this data within their monitoring information systems and explore whether there are any key challenges that projects face in completing this task.

**Recommendation Three:**

GRCF Round 2's management and delivery teams should stress the importance of completing equality and diversity monitoring and explore whether there are any key challenges that projects face in completing this task.

Recruitment has generally been successful for projects; however, Kickstart placements have proven to be more challenging to fill. Projects suggested that this was typically because there was a delay between Jobcentre Plus advertising the roles and feeding back to eNGOs. This finding broadly aligns with the National Audit Office's finding that Kickstart vacancies take longer to fill due to administrative checks. Other challenges in filling posts commonly stemmed from a lack of applicants and a lack of applicants with the appropriate skills.

eNGOs praised the GRCF for enabling them to safeguard existing and create new roles. Through GRCF Round 2, a wide range of roles have been supported, most commonly officer, manager and ranger roles. The majority of roles, however, are described as being project-specific. Whilst this is to be expected at this stage of project delivery, projects should consider how roles could be diversified post-project if additional funding is not secured.

## 6.3 Next steps

This report documents the findings to date (June 2022) for Round 2 of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund with a specific focus on the policy background, the views of projects on the application process, and their progress with project delivery to date. The subsequent interim report (anticipated in November 2022) seeks to present project progress alongside the presentation of findings from more in-depth qualitative fieldwork. The next steps for evaluation fieldwork will include:

- In-depth case studies with 12 GRCF Round 2 projects.
- Thematic workshops with projects. The workshops will seek to gain a more in-depth understanding of project delivery against key GRCF themes (nature conservation and restoration, nature-based solutions, connecting people with nature, supporting job creation and retention, and enhancing the capacity and resilience of eNGOs).
- A continued review of the monitoring information to assess project delivery.

Please note that, based on the recommendations and findings outlined above, the subsequent interim report will also seek to establish a greater understanding of other employment schemes used by projects, project succession planning, and greater details on the roles established through the GRCF.

# Annexe One: Literature review – GRCF themes

## Green Recovery Challenge Fund environmental themes

To ensure that delivery supports the 25-Year Environment Plan, all GRCF projects are required to deliver against one or more of the following three environmental themes:

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

This section provides a brief overview of some of the current literature and evidence pertinent to each of these thematic areas. Whilst these are distinct areas in themselves, there is a large amount of crossover between the themes, and all are important in reversing nature's decline. This point is highlighted in reports such as the United Nations' Making Peace with Nature<sup>60</sup> report, which communicates the current status of the world's environmental issues and closes the gap between current actions and those needed to achieve a more sustainable future. It calls for a joined-up approach involving significant and mutually reinforcing changes in behaviour, culture, systems of management, and knowledge transmission.

## Nature conservation and restoration: habitats, species and ecosystems

Biodiversity is critical for human existence, economic prosperity, and a good quality of life. It plays a crucial role in providing the food, energy, water supply, and medicine on which we rely, as well as regulating the climate. Despite this, measures show that biodiversity is declining at a faster rate than at any time in human history.<sup>61</sup>

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is an independent body comprising more than 130 member governments. Their '*Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*'<sup>62</sup> provides a critical assessment of the status and trends of the natural world, the social implications of these trends, and the actions that can be taken to ensure a better future for all. This report outlined the implications of the current trajectory indicating that one million animals and plant species are threatened with extinction, many within decades, and that the majority of indicators of ecosystems and biodiversity show rapid declines.<sup>63</sup>

This situation domestically mirrors what can be observed globally and, according to '*The State of Nature Report*',<sup>64</sup> the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. The report shows that 40 per cent of species surveyed have declined and 15 per cent are said to be threatened with extinction.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> United Nations (2021) Making Peace with Nature.

<sup>61</sup> IPBES (2019) The Global Assessment Report of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> State of Nature Partnership (2019) State of Nature Report 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



Yet, there remains an opportunity to alter this current trajectory. The IPBES report concluded that the trend of decline can be reversed through urgent ‘transformative change’. The key messages from the report are summarised below:

- Nature and its vital contributions to people, which together embody biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are deteriorating worldwide
- Direct and indirect drivers of change have accelerated during the past 50 years
- The goals of conserving and sustainably using nature and achieving sustainability cannot be met by current trajectories, and the goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political and technological factors
- Nature can be conserved, restored and used sustainably while other global societal goals are simultaneously met through urgent and concerted efforts fostering transformative change.

In the UK, the State of Nature Report outlined the key drivers of biodiversity loss in the UK, which included: unsustainable forms of agricultural and woodland management; climate change; urbanisation; pollution; hydrological change; and invasive non-native species.<sup>66</sup> As such, projects or initiatives seeking to have positive impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems should seek to combat these drivers.

The body of evidence relating to the effectiveness of approaches in conservation is growing. For example, *What Works in Conservation*, now in its sixth volume, provides a comprehensive summary of the evidence regarding the effectiveness of approaches to conservation.<sup>67</sup> It provides an assessment of the effectiveness, the certainty of the evidence, and whether there are negative side effects on the groups of species or habitats of concern, and serves as an important resource for projects to utilise to understand the evidence base related to their conservation actions. The *Conservation Evidence Journal* publishes papers from across the world on the effectiveness of all aspects of species and habitat management, such as habitat creation, restoration, translocations, reintroductions, invasive species control, changing attitudes, and education.

## Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate mitigation and adaptation

Nature-based solutions are actions that seek to address challenges affecting society and provide positive outcomes for both humans and biodiversity. They are actions that involve:

‘the protection, restoration or management of natural and semi-natural ecosystems; the sustainable management of aquatic systems and working lands such as croplands or timberlands; or the creation of novel ecosystems in and around cities.’<sup>68</sup>

The benefits of nature-based solutions are based on their ability to impact multiple priorities. They can reduce the negative effects of climate change upon people, the economy and nature whilst simultaneously increasing the resilience of societies to climate change and improving human well-being. For example, developing green urban infrastructure such as green spaces, green roofs, living walls, and rain gardens can have multiple benefits for people, wildlife and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Sutherland J, Dicks L, Petrovan S, Smith R (2021) *What Works in Conservation*.

<sup>68</sup> See: [What are nature-based solutions](#)

the climate through absorbing carbon dioxide, increasing habitats, improving water quality and flow management, improving air quality, and providing safe and attractive amenities for people to enjoy.<sup>69</sup>

Nature-based solutions have the potential to play a significant role in the government's commitment to protecting 30 per cent of land and seas by 2030 and in the transition towards becoming carbon-neutral. A joint report by the RSPB, the WWF, and the Nature-based Solutions Initiative<sup>70</sup> raised the following key messages with regard to the potential for nature-based solutions as well as recommendations for policymakers:

1. NbS for climate change adaptation should be integrated with other policy areas to unlock synergies and avoid adverse impacts
2. Policy support should explicitly recognise the need for a landscape approach involving a diverse portfolio of NbS.
3. NbS should be carefully designed and implemented through a bottom-up and participatory approach involving multiple stakeholders.
4. NbS should be planned to deliver measurable benefits for biodiversity.
5. Adaptation policy should set well-defined time-bound objectives and build capacity to effectively monitor NbS outcomes over the long term.

## Connecting people with nature

There is a well-established and rapidly growing body of research that demonstrates the relationship between a strong connection with nature and improved mental and physical well-being and more positive environmental behaviour.<sup>71,72,73</sup> Nature connection is concerned with the human relationship with nature, how we think and feel about nature, and how we experience it. The closer the human connection with nature, the more inclined we are to take action to prevent the issues and decline described above.

Whilst conservation actions and nature-based solutions are vitally important, it is widely accepted that one of the most important shifts that will enable the scale of change required is the shift in our relationships with nature.<sup>74</sup> For example, one of the key messages in the UN's Environmental Programme Report entitled '*Making Peace with Nature*'<sup>75</sup> is the need to reverse the societal attitudes, mindsets and values that created the current human relationship with nature. The IPBES is currently undertaking an assessment of transformative change<sup>76</sup> which will help to understand the human factors that will be important to leverage to bring about transformative change in the protection and restoration of the natural environment.

Positively impacting on nature connectedness and empowering people to take responsibility for their actions towards the environment constitute, therefore, an important aspect of the overall vision. Despite this, The People and Nature Survey for England showed that between April 2020 and March 2021, roughly one third of people made no visits to green or natural spaces in the 14 days before the survey. Inequalities can also be observed between those

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<sup>69</sup> Forest Research (2010) Benefits of Green Infrastructure.

<sup>70</sup> Chausson A, Smith A, Seddon N, Coath M and Matheson S (2020) The Role of Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Adaptation in UK Policy. WWF-UK and RSPB.

<sup>71</sup> Pritchard A, Richardson M, Sheffield D, McEwan K (2020) The relationship between nature connectedness and eudaimonic well-being.

<sup>72</sup> Richardson M et al. (2015) Nature: A new paradigm for well-being and ergonomics.

<sup>73</sup> White M et al. (2021) Associations between green/blue spaces and mental health across 18 countries.

<sup>74</sup> IPBES (2019) The Global Assessment Report of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

<sup>75</sup> United Nations (2021) Making Peace with Nature.

<sup>76</sup> See: [The IPBES Transformative Change Assessment](#)

accessing nature, with those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with lower levels of household income, and living with a long-term illness all less likely to visit the outdoors.<sup>77</sup>

The University of Derby's Nature Connectedness Research Group has published various papers and resources on nature connectedness. For example, the Nature Connection Handbook, aimed at practitioners, policymakers, educators, urban planners, and other groups, is a helpful resource which outlines key considerations with regard to connecting with nature. In particular, the 'Five Pathways to Nature Connection' highlight how activating these pathways brings people closer to the natural world.

### **Pathways to Nature Connection**

**Senses:** Exploring and experiencing nature through all of the senses

**Beauty:** Seeking and appreciating the beauty of the natural world

**Emotion:** Noticing and welcoming the feelings that nature inspires

**Meaning:** Celebrating and sharing nature's events and stories

**Compassion:** Helping and caring for nature

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<sup>77</sup> Natural England (2021) The People and Nature Survey for England Year 1 Summary Infographic.

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