

Evaluation of the Natural England Nature Recovery Network Seedcorn Projects February 2024



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 **Powellite Impact Ltd**

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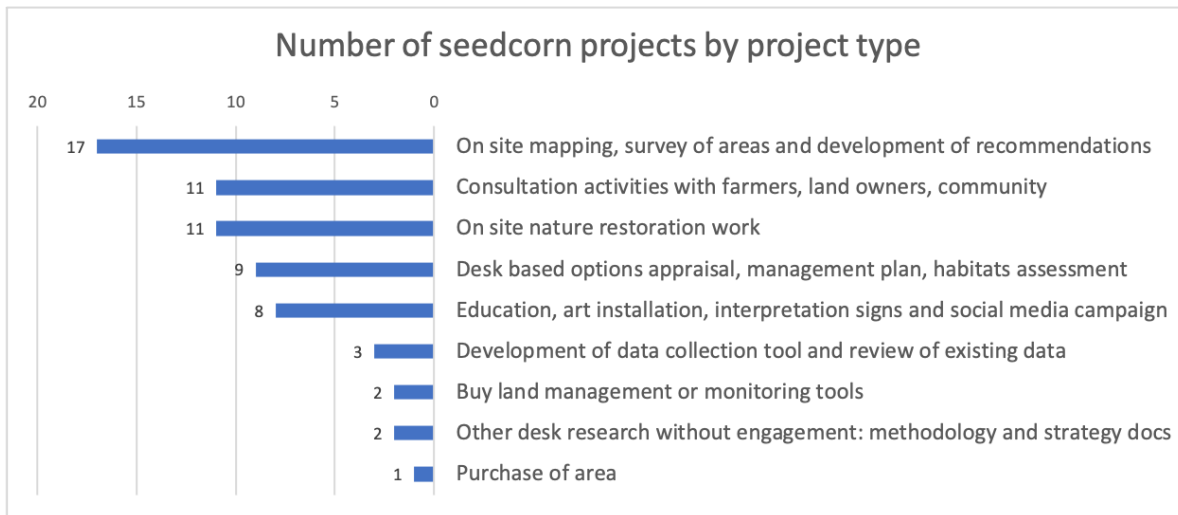
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1. Executive summary

From April 2020 to March 2023, 389 Seedcorn projects were delivered for just under £2.4 million in Seedcorn funding. The projects were supported by 12 Natural England Area Teams to deliver the aims of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN) as a commitment to the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan.

Analysis of a sample of 55 reporting documents highlighted the large variety of Seedcorn projects supported by the Seedcorn funding programme, with some projects completing activities in multiple categories.



The Seedcorn programme provided a relatively small amount of funding (up to £25k per project) to pump prime nature recovery projects. The size of the area impacted by the Seedcorn projects was reported to range from 0.2 ha to 13,500 ha and included 60 km of coastline and 1400 km of mapped watercourses.

Impressive results and high completion rates were reported, with 91% of the reporting documents containing evidence that the objectives described at the proposal stage had been achieved in full. The remaining reports highlighted issues which meant only partial delivery had been achieved.

96% of the 55 projects in the sample reported activities which directly addressed one or several of the seven Seedcorn principles. The reports showed 22% of projects directly contributed to the expansion, connection and improvement of nature (principle 1); 35% reported positive impact on people’s experience of nature (principle 2); 49% of projects described a direct impact on planning to ensure people are involved in setting the nature recovery agenda (principle 3); 45% of projects had unblocked blockages by completing mapping/collecting evidence (principle 4); 36% of projects plugged a strategic gap (identified in this evaluation as outcomes directly related to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (principle 5); 20% of projects had leveraged match funding or further project funding and all projects reported developing partnerships (principle 6); only a few projects reported activities across Area Team boundaries (principle 7).

Interviews with local project delivery leads at partner organisations highlighted that Seedcorn funding was considered as a highly valuable opportunity to pilot work, deliver the initial phase of nature restoration projects, collect data, deliver research and involve local communities.

Stakeholder engagement events at an early stage of nature improvement planning were described as essential to address concerns from landowners and land managers relating to the designation of sites and to secure buy-in to take forward recommendations and plans for nature improvement.

Area Teams commented that the funding had enabled them to discover and reach out to new partners and strengthen ongoing partnerships, and to be invited to the table for strategic meetings. The Seedcorn funding was described as a valuable tool to further the NRN agenda.

Around a fifth of projects reported they had been able to use the Seedcorn funding as a springboard to leverage match funding or further funding to continue the work. The project delivery leads reported securing significant amounts of funding including a £100k Green recovery Challenge Fund grant, £270k National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, £289k Species Recovery grant and a £500k DEFRA Landscape Recovery Fund grant. Other projects reported that the Seedcorn project was a springboard to grow engagement and partnerships for the delivery of further work.

It was evident in the feedback from partners and Area Teams that most of the projects would not have been able to go ahead without the Seedcorn funding.

Local project partners reported several challenges relating to the Seedcorn programme. The main issue was the very short timeframe for delivery, often only 3-6 months. They described reduced engagement activities and surveying work done at a suboptimal time in the winter resulting in incomplete data collection and a significant risk of disturbance to, for example, fish spawning habitats. Other issues reported were: very short application deadlines, lack of eligibility guidance, lack of transparency about the application and selection process, long delays between applying and response, procurement delays, issues relating to loan arrangement of equipment bought with the funding.

Area Teams reported significant challenges related to the change from revenue to capital funding, as this impacted the type of projects which could be delivered. This change impacted Area Teams' ability to support practical nature restoration work and engagement activities. In addition, Area Teams raised issues about the: lack of guidance documents relating to CDEL and eligibility criteria; late notification of the type of funding CDEL/RDEL; issues with procurement, loan agreements, tender requirements; lack of guidance on ownership of data and intellectual property agreements; and time pressures preventing monitoring and evaluation. The feedback collected in this evaluation covered projects delivered in the three financial years up to March 2023.

In the 2023-2024 financial year, timely information about the type of funding and additional guidance about the CDEL criteria has been made available to the Area Teams, allowing for discussions about possible projects to start earlier in the financial year, thereby addressing several of the issues raised in this evaluation.

The current funding cycle will continue to offer CDEL funding for use within one financial year. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on providing examples and further guidance on how Area Teams can effectively use this funding to work with local project partners to support Nature Recovery projects. The outcomes of the Seedcorn project could be used to evidence the need for practical nature restoration work and/or stakeholder engagement activities.

Providing local project partners with a list of possible funders to approach to leverage further funding, could help towards strengthening the springboard potential of the Seedcorn funding.

Evaluation of the delivery of the programme showed large variations in the processes used for allocating Seedcorn funding, which resulted in different/more/less opportunities for partner organisations dependent on their location. It also demonstrated limited availability of reporting documents. It will be helpful to streamline processes and develop a 'Seedcorn toolkit' which could include: application template, application guidance, assessment guidance, examples of CDEL-funded projects, procurement and loan guidance; intellectual property guidance and a reporting survey. The availability of this toolkit will help to reduce time commitment, improve consistency and support future monitoring and evaluation.

No reporting documents were provided for 36% of the sampled projects in this evaluation. The reasons for this included: issues with locating reports, staff turnover and the absence of reporting requirements. We recommend the future use of an online reporting survey and the development of a central repository for reports, other summary documents, leaflets and photos. These documents could be provided by external contractors, local project partners or Natural England Area Team members to allow for effective monitoring and to inform future evaluation activities.

Partners valued the partnership with Natural England, praised the support and time commitment of the Area Team members and valued the knowledge of Senior Advisors relating to nature recovery, local challenges and local priorities. Partners discussed that the flexibility of the programme allowed them to make the most of the small amount of funding. The Seedcorn programme had supported them to take a more strategic approach and produce assets vital for the future.

The Seedcorn projects represent high value for money, with projects on relatively small budgets delivering impact on the quality of nature, improving people's experience of nature, availability of baseline data, mapping of sites and biodiversity, plugging gaps and leveraging significant amounts of further funding.

2. Background

Natural England is responsible for ensuring that England’s natural environment can recover, adapt and thrive into the future. In their Environmental Improvement Plan, the Government set out a delivery plan to create a better environment within a generation. Vital to achieving this ambition is the Nature Recovery Network (NRN), which seeks to increase, improve and connect a growing national network of wildlife-rich sites that address biodiversity loss and climate change, and provide benefits to people by enhancing health and wellbeing through improved access to nature and restored ecosystem function that provides us with clean air, water and healthy soil in both an urban and rural context. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a new system of spatial strategies for nature established by the Environment Act 2021. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has appointed 48 responsible authorities to lead on preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their area. These cover the whole of England, with no gaps or overlaps. Each Local Nature Recovery Strategy will propose action for nature recovery in locations that, when implemented, will contribute to expanding and growing the Nature Recovery Network. These include expanding or connecting existing areas of importance for nature. Each strategy will provide a spatial planning framework to inform nature recovery and target action and investment, aligning different delivery levers and funding sources.

Natural England has 12 Area Teams, each with a NRN Senior Advisor tasked with developing local partnerships and projects to progress the NRN locally. Each Area Team’s priorities are set out in their Local Nature Recovery Plan (LNRP). The idea of Seedcorn funding for projects emerged from a belief that relatively small amounts of funding (less than £25,000 per project) could prepare the ground for larger, sustainable nature recovery projects. This could be by, for example, funding research studies addressing knowledge gaps, ‘pump priming’ activity or supporting the development of new partnerships or reinvigoration of existing ones. Part of the NRN Senior Advisors’ role is to encourage project ideas and applications for Seedcorn funding that could contribute to building foundations for delivery of their LNRPs.

Natural England drew up a list of ‘guiding principles’ against which project applications can be reviewed. The first seven principles were used for Seedcorn projects between 2020-2022. The last two principles were added at a later stage. Projects are required to address one or more of these guiding principles, depending on local needs and priorities in terms of nature recovery (see table below).

Table 2.1 Seedcorn projects guiding principles

1.	Strategically support the expansion, connectivity, amount and quality of nature outside protected sites but linking with protected sites. This will include priority habitats, linking up with green spaces, species recovery etc.
2.	Strategically support people's experience of nature e.g. reducing barriers to accessing wild places
3.	Support planning for the above: this may include connecting People with Nature – to ensure people are involved in setting the nature recovery agenda, that they feel a sense of ownership of nature recovery
4.	Unblock blockages / help move contribution to NRN forward significantly e.g. evidence collation, map development
5.	To plug strategically important gaps e.g. funding may help link projects / act as leverage to expand a project to fill a gap / link across boundaries

6.	Will bring in significant leverage in funding / kind / breadth of partnership to strategically important projects e.g. bio net gain, other investment
7.	The above may be in Area Team and/or across Area Team boundaries
8.	Link to species recovery
9.	Link to improvement in site condition

The first Seedcorn projects were commissioned in 2019/2020, when eight ‘frontrunner’ projects were funded with a view to testing the Seedcorn concept. The initiative has grown since then, with 90 projects supported in the first full year (2020/2021). This rose to over 120 in 2022-2023. Seedcorn funding continues in 2023-2024 and beyond, with similar numbers of projects supported.

Natural England’s Evidence & Evaluation Strategy (2020-25) sets out how they plan to become an evidence-led rather than evidence-based organisation. Evaluating the impact of activities such as Seedcorn project funding is a key part of this. Natural England therefore commissioned Powellite Impact to help evaluate the effectiveness of their Seedcorn projects and to develop a methodology for in-house monitoring and evaluation of future Seedcorn projects.

The purpose of the evaluation was threefold:

1. to help Natural England better understand whether small amounts of money (under £25,000) could help as a springboard for more substantial and sustainable nature recovery projects;
2. to provide them with a better understanding of how projects deliver against the guiding principles and whether these principles need to be reviewed; and
3. to provide recommendations around future annual internal monitoring and evaluation of Seedcorn projects.

This evaluation covers Seedcorn projects commissioned during the financial years 2020/2021, 2021/2022 and 2022/2023.

3. Research approach

3.1 Overview of data collection

The evaluation of Natural England’s NRN Seedcorn projects took place between August 2023 and January 2024. The evaluation approach was finalised after three scoping interviews with Natural England staff involved in the delivery of the NRN Seedcorn programme. The data collection by area is shown in table 1.

Table 3.1. Data collection on Seedcorn projects (2020-2022) conducted as part of the evaluation

Area	Total number of Seedcorn projects	Number of reports requested	Number of reports received + analysed	Area Team interviews	External local project delivery leads interviews
Cheshire and Lancashire	28	8	5	1	2
Cumbria	51	8	5	0	1 [^]
Devon, Cornwall, Scilly	38	12	4	1	0
East Midlands	25	9	7	1	2
Norfolk and Suffolk	31	6	4	1	1
Northumbria	12	4	1	1	0
Sussex and Kent	27	8	5	1	0
Thames Solent	53	6	6	2	3
Wessex	42	12	9	1	1
West Anglia	17	4	0	1	0
West Midlands	18	5	4	1	1
Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire	46	12	10	2	3
Total	388*	94	60	13	14

**One project was not related to a specific Area Team*

[^]One local project delivery interview was completed by an NE Area Team member closely involved in the delivery of the project as the local project delivery lead was unavailable, comments marked in this report as ‘NE local delivery lead’

3.2 Desk Research of Seedcorn projects

A total of 389 Seedcorn projects were funded in 2020, 2021 or 2022 for a value of 2.38 million. High level analysis was completed for all 389 projects. Out of the 389 project, 385 projects were for an amount between £500 to £25,000 and four projects were for an amount above £25,000. The projects over £25,000 were exceptions to the programme and were suggested to be represented multiple projects combined into one budget line, therefore these projects were excluded from the desk research and interviews.

A random sample of 94 projects was taken to represent all areas, the range of Seedcorn principles and budgets. Area Teams were asked to share reports for these projects. In response to this request 60 documents (64%) were received from 11 Area Teams. Some Area Teams responded that not every project had been asked to provide a report, other Area Teams said only some projects had provided a report or shared other types of feedback after a request for a report and other Area Teams described that staff turnover impacted on their ability to locate the relevant documents.

The 60 reporting documents shared with Powellite for analysis included:

- 21 End of project reports in the Natural England template format
- 19 Other project reports by local project leads or external contractors, PowerPoint presentations, emails
- 15 Reports by external contractors on site mapping, site management, habitat assessments, options appraisals, landholder engagement and methodology
- 5 Documents not applicable for outcome analysis: proposal scoring, request for quotation, stakeholder leaflets, map of area and photo page without information

The 55 relevant reporting documents were analysed in detail. These documents covered the full range of budgets. In this report we refer to the budget as ‘very small’; ‘small’, ‘medium’ and ‘large’ as follows:

- 24% (13 out of 55) reporting documents on projects on a very small budget (up to 5k)
- 36% (20 out of 55) reporting documents on projects on a small budget (5-9.9k)
- 27% (15 out of 55) reporting documents on projects on a medium budget (10-19k)
- 13% (7 out of 55) reporting documents on projects on a large budget (20-25k)

Quotes are verbatim from reporting documents and are marked as ‘- Report’.

3.2 Research involving Senior Advisors and other members of Area Teams

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 Senior Advisors and other Area Team members from 11 different Area Teams. Quotes are verbatim and are marked as ‘- NE Area Team’ in this report.

3.3 Research involving local project delivery leads

Each Area Team was invited to recommend two or three projects for detailed feedback. Area Teams were asked to select projects which had significant achievements and select projects which faced significant barriers. The Area teams identified 25 projects and invited the local project delivery leads for interview. 14 semi-structured interviews with local project delivery leads were completed. Quotes in the report are verbatim and marked as ‘- Local project delivery lead’. The interviews informed the case studies presented in this report.

3.4 Seedcorn project principles

The Seedcorn spend was guided by 9 principles (Table 2.1). The Area Teams recorded the 2020-2022 projects in a project spreadsheet against the first 7 principles. Principles 8 and 9 were added at a later stage.

For the purpose of this evaluation, we made a distinction between direct and indirect impact using the following definitions:

- **Direct:** The activities and outcomes of the project have a direct and measurable impact on the objective described in the principle.
- **Indirect:** The activities and outcomes of the project are expected to contribute towards the objective of the principle in the immediate or long-term future.

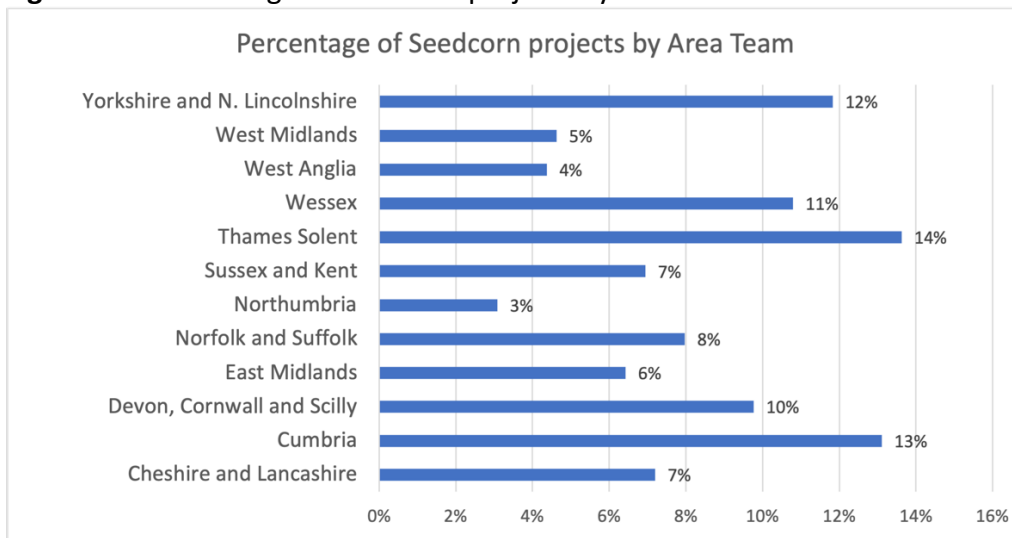
We collected quantitative data on the ‘direct impact’ and used a qualitative approach to review the ‘indirect impact’.

4. Overview of Seedcorn projects

4.1 Funding provided to 389 Seedcorn projects between 2020 and 2022

A total of 389 Seedcorn projects were funded in 2020, 2021 and 2022. One Seedcorn project was not allocated to an Area Team, the other 388 projects were funded by the 12 Area Teams. The distribution of the number of Seedcorn projects by area shows that Thames Solent (14%), Cumbria (13%) and Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire (12%) funded the largest percentage of Seedcorn projects (Figure 4.1). Interviews with the Area Teams provided insight into the reasons behind these differences: not all Area Teams had a dedicated Senior Advisor in place, issues around recruitment and a lack of administrative resources and restrictions in the eligibility criteria were mentioned as limitations to the number of Seedcorn projects which could be funded and supported by Area Teams.

Figure 4.1. Percentage of Seedcorn projects by Area Team



Each Area Team decided locally on the maximum amount of Seedcorn funding each applicant could apply for, up to the programme maximum of £25,000. The maximum amount of Seedcorn project funding awarded for an individual project was £13,200 for West Anglia; £15,000 for Devon, Cornwall and Scilly; £20,000 for Cumbria and £25,000 for all other areas. A few Area Teams discussed that they were keen to make more awards and focus on awarding smaller amounts to provide more 'springboard' opportunities to local projects.

Local project delivery leads provided positive feedback about the amount of funding offered through the Seedcorn programme and described the smaller amount of up to £25,000 was ideally suited to test new approaches, do mapping work and start new partnerships with landowners. The Seedcorn funding was recognised by both Area Teams, partners and local project delivery leads as a springboard to pilot new approaches, pump prime projects and get NRN off the ground.

A nature restoration project on a medium size budget described the **opportunity** as a pilot:

'The results of this work supported the proposal of a move towards a policy of tree enrichment planting. The £10k grant from NE allowed us to pilot that process, to get some trees in the ground as a tester for more ambitious planting programmes through the CS system.' - Report

Local project leads and Area Teams discussed how the funding had helped to strengthen and develop new partnerships and enabled them to be invited to the table where decisions are made.

Partnerships were strengthened and initiated through Seedcorn funding:

'It's always easier to reach out to people whether they're new partners or people you've lost touch with if you have something clear to offer and the Seedcorn funding is a clear offer. I think in many cases it's encouraged outreach into new areas or it's allowed projects to expand.' – NE Area Team

Seedcorn funding was described as key for the nature recovery network:

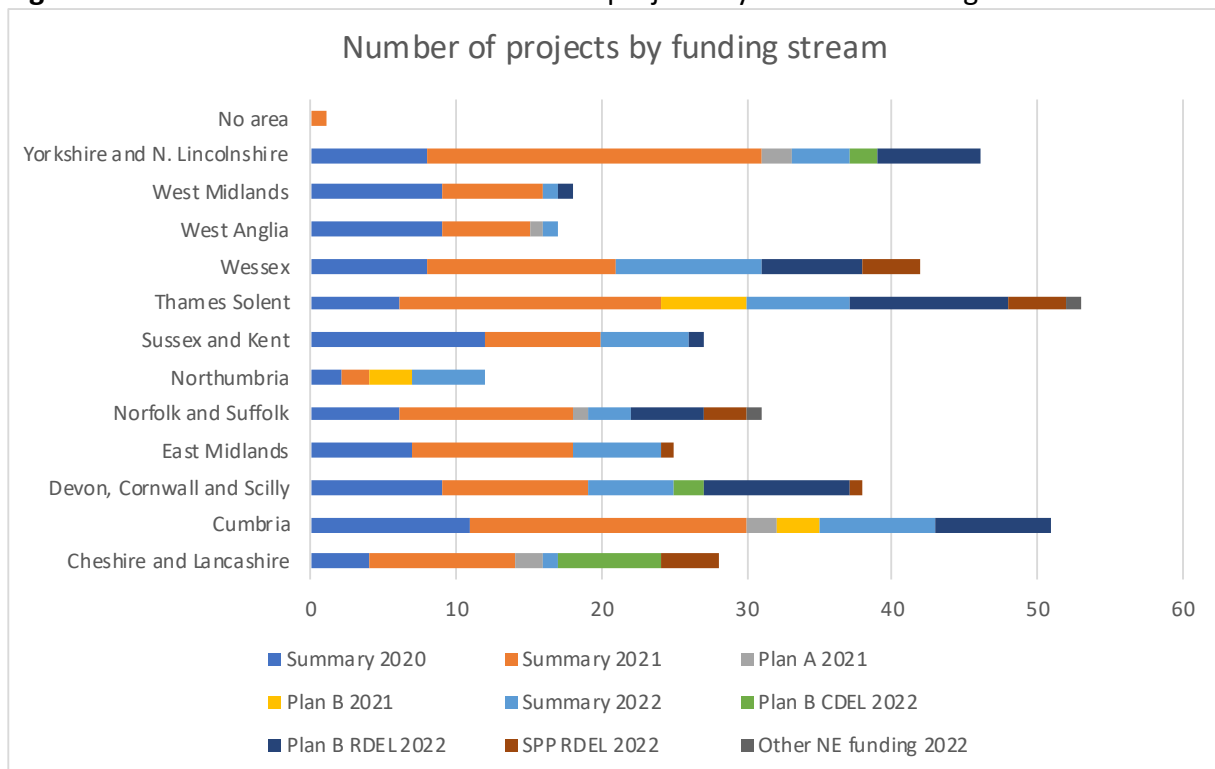
'Seedcorn is a really important way of getting the NRN off the ground because it allows projects to get going in spaces that they otherwise wouldn't have been able to get going in.' – NE Area Team

It was clear from the responses of Area Teams and local project delivery leads that most of the projects would not have been able to go ahead without Seedcorn funding, demonstrating the Seedcorn funding programme is meeting a need for small amounts of funding to get projects off the ground.

4.2 Type of Seedcorn funding

The Seedcorn projects were funded through different funding streams (Figure 4.2). In 2020 funding was available for both revenue (RDEL) and capital projects (CDEL), but in 2021 and 2022 the main funding stream was restricted to projects requiring capital funding. Underspent in other areas within Natural England was identified and used to support a small number of additional revenue projects in 2021 and 2022.

Figure 4.2 Breakdown of number of Seedcorn projects by area and funding stream

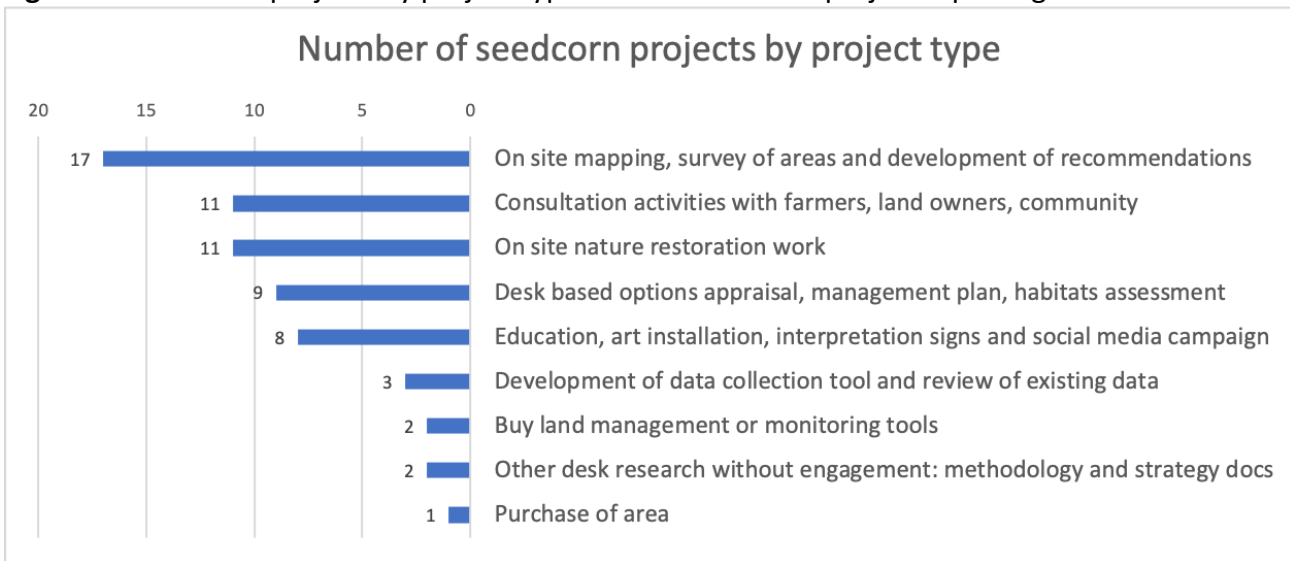


4.3 Project types

Analysis of a random sample of 55 Seedcorn project reporting documents demonstrated the wide range of different projects funded by the programme. Several projects included activities in multiple categories and are counted in all relevant categories (Figure 4.3).

The most reported activity was on site mapping, which included inventory of ponds, rivers, blow wells, salt marsh, peat land, walking paths and biodiversity assessments as described in 31% (17 out of 55) of the Seedcorn project reports. 20% (11 out of 55) of the reported projects focused on consultation events with farmers, landowners and communities to engage them in the Nature Recovery agenda, with 20% of the projects delivering on site nature restoration work.

Figure 4.3 Seedcorn projects by project type after review of 55 project reporting documents



4.4 Size of project area

The 55 project reports demonstrated a wide variety in the size of the area which was surveyed or improved by the Seedcorn project. 31% (17 out of the 55) reports quantified the size of the area addressed in the project, which varied from 0.2 ha to 13,500 ha and included 1400 km of mapped watercourses and 60 km of coastline.

The **size of the area** positively impacted by the Seedcorn funding is not restricted by the size of the funding, shown by this project on a very small budget:

'The Keep the Forest Buzzing project delivered more than 15,100m² of pollinator corridor, including across an area of more than 6,000m² at Chestnut Wood and additional 100m of hedgerow improvements, connecting pollinator pathways near to an existing B-line, as well as increasing habitat, supporting pollinator species including bees, dragonfly, damsel fly, bats.' - Report

5. Outcomes of the projects

5.1 Project outcomes in relation to proposal

The Natural England Seedcorn project spreadsheet included a list of objectives which were agreed at the start of each project. The outcomes reported in the 55 project reports were compared to the initial objectives of the projects.

91% (50 out of 55) project reports contained evidence of all the project objectives being achieved. The reports highlighted success stories of community engagement, surveying of sites and nature restoration projects. Several projects delivered over their initial targets.

A project (small budget) which **over delivered**, initially aimed to survey 10 ponds:

'An inventory of all circa 60 ponds was undertaken by Freshwater Habitats Trust. Initially desk based to identify ponds from map aerial photos, followed by ground truthing and rapid survey of characteristics including water quality. For ponds considered most significant a more detailed survey looking at both aquatic plants and invertebrates was undertaken. Management recommendations were suggested. Management so far has been undertaken by NNR team - including vegetation clearance around a number of key heathland ponds on historic heathland sites.' - Report

9% (5 out of 55) project reports showed that the project had only delivered part of their objectives. These projects reported lower engagement numbers and less/different activities than initially planned. Some projects reported reduced activities due to Covid restrictions and other projects came across unexpected barriers to delivery.

Unexpected **barriers to delivery** resulted in different outcomes than the objectives initially proposed. For example, this Seedcorn project (large budget) had the following objective in the **proposal**:

'co-creation workshops with people with a range of disabilities both mental and physical, and unpaid carers and co-create improvement plans for the park'.

In the **report**:

'We initially thought that the CLPAA would have more of a focus on the technical requirements for public space when it comes to accessibility. It quickly became clear that there isn't the appetite for that level of training and that the focus was very much on the experience of being in parks.'

The 13 disabled people and unpaid carers who participated in the workshops reported increased *'confidence in involved disabled people in the work with Your Park Bristol & Bath'* and increased *'understanding of Disability Equality.'* - Report

In response to the request for project reports to the Senior Advisors for the Area Teams, documentation for 64% (60 out of 94) of the projects was shared. When Area Teams were asked about the remaining 36% of projects and if these projects had achieved their planned outcomes, Area Teams responded that most projects had delivered as planned. Any issues reported in reports and interviews with Area Teams and project delivery leads are summarised in paragraph 5.3.

5.2 Project delivery against the Seedcorn principles

The Natural England Seedcorn projects spreadsheet with the 389 projects provided an overview of the projects and which Seedcorn principles were selected for each project.

Interviews with Area Team members showed that Area Teams used different approaches to select Seedcorn principles for recording in the spreadsheet: some Area Teams selected all relevant principles; some Area Teams only selected the most relevant principles; and in other areas the applicants were asked to select the relevant Seedcorn principles at application stage and provide an answer why their project met the objectives described in the principle.

Interviews with Area Teams and local project delivery leads demonstrated some confusion about the principles and if they should record 'yes'. No distinction had been made about direct (immediate) and indirect (possible future) impact on the objectives described in the principles.

The confusion of selecting relevant principles is especially evident in mapping and surveying projects which collect data and make recommendations for improvements. These projects directly link to principle 4 'Unblock blockages / help move contribution to NRN forward significantly e.g. evidence collation, map development.' Most of these projects also indirectly link to the other Seedcorn principles as the overall strategic aim of most of these projects is to use the information to make recommendations for future work and thereby improve the quality of nature, reduce barriers to access nature, improve engagement in setting the nature recovery agenda, increase biodiversity and fill a gap in data and knowledge about a site.

Many mapping projects recorded 'yes' against all or nearly all principles at the proposal stage, suggesting the projects were recorded against both direct and indirect links with the principles in the project spreadsheet.

An example of a mapping project (very small budget) which recorded **'yes' against all principles at the proposal stage:**

'Carry out a peat survey of Wigglesworth Hall Moss: survey the peat on this lowland site for extent, depth, condition, hydrology and vegetation, which will be used to feed into planned rewetting and river work planned for 2023.' - Report

An example of a visitor survey project (very small budget) **recorded 'yes' against all principles:**

'Visitor survey re distance travelled, reasons for visiting, likes and dislikes about current recreation provision, awareness of site sensitivities. Seeks to 'join up' in terms of informal recreation space and wildlife refuges across the wider Severn Vale, thus linking emerging nature recovery ambitions at a cross border, landscape scale.' - Report

The next paragraphs provided an overview of the analysis of the direct and indirect impact of the Seedcorn projects on the objectives described in the principles.

5.2.1 Principle 1 - Strategically support the expansion, connectivity, amount, quality of nature

The reports and interviews with Area Teams and local project leads showed that supporting the expansion, connectivity and quality of nature is a key aim of the work conducted in the Seedcorn programme. Area Teams used this principle to guide their decisions and this principle was reflected as one of the long term aims of the majority of projects.

73% (40 out of 55) of the Seedcorn projects were recorded at the proposal stage against principle 1.

22% (12 out of 55) projects reported a direct contribution to the expansion, connection and improvement of nature. With 11 projects completing nature restoration works, tree planting, wildflower meadow development, reduction of vegetation to reduce choking of blow wells and one project focused on education which developed a school garden.

Direct impact of practical nature restoration project (medium budget) which **supported expansion, increased biodiversity and connected habitats:**

'The project has enabled the completion of the missing 10ha link in a continuous 100ha plain of wildflower grasslands, the entirety of which has been created from arable land in the last 15 years (the 'plain' straddles the land of 5 farms). This Seedcorn project has thus contributed towards this and the area continues to grow year by year. The plain supports a range of new colonists including small blue, rare moth species such as sussex emerald, bright wave, scarce bumble bee species such as brown banded carder bee and a diverse range of farmland birds, barn owl, kestrel, brown hare.' - Report

The importance of involving and training local volunteers and planning volunteer work parties is emphasised in several projects.

Direct impact of training and volunteer work parties in project (large budget) on the **improvement of nature quality, biodiversity and connect habitats:**

'Over 200 hours of volunteer time from 43 trained volunteers participating in our Water Quality Monitoring and 400m of chalk stream improved through volunteer work parties, in partnership with Chiltern Rangers, by managing vegetation to bring in sunlight and a natural revetment structure.' - Report

Outputs reported in other Seedcorn projects, such as the development of management plans and options appraisals, suggest an indirect impact on nature is to be expected if the recommendations are implemented.

Indirect impact of a review of nature restoration options project (small budget) are expected to improve nature quality, and biodiversity in the future:

'Potential impacts of the preferred option include improving waterflows to wetland habitats; improving fish habitats; increasing riverside vegetation; encouraging otters.' - Report

5.2.2 Principle 2 - Strategically support people's experience of nature

A wide variety of Seedcorn projects are aiming to improve access so people can experience the unique habitats and biodiversity in their area.

71% (39 of 55) Seedcorn projects were recorded at the proposal stage against principle 2.

35% (19 out of 55) Seedcorn project reporting documents included information about activities delivered with a direct impact on the objectives of principle 2. Activities included practical work to improve site access and paths, purchase of an area, educational activities, the development of walking maps, volunteer placements and community orchards.

Direct impact of a Seedcorn project (medium budget) with hands-on activities to support **people's experience of nature** reporting positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing:

'It was great to see some of our SEN children blossom, when doing some hand-on activities. We used the pond for pond-dipping, whilst our Infants have some tadpoles in their classroom. We have re-discovered the impact of outdoor learning! it really impacts positively on mental health, well-being and community cohesion. A big thumbs up from the children so far!' - Report

The importance of learning and sharing nature experiences is highlighted in all the projects directly linking to principle 2 and is a key element in school projects, volunteer events, volunteer training and community gardens.

A community garden (small budget) had **direct impact on people's ability to experience nature**:

'A large part of the Feel Good Gardens site is used as a community garden for practising social and therapeutic horticulture by growing flowers, fruit, herbs and vegetables. The benefits offered by a general exposure to nature cannot be overstated, people get a real buzz out of observing the seasons, birds, bees, butterflies and flowers. Everyone who visits feels better mentally while they're there and afterwards.' - Report

One project (large budget) described training more than 140 **volunteers to increase skills and access nature**:

'Increased local knowledge and understanding of [water] flow monitoring. And then we have got about 7 new sites which are now regularly monitored.' – Local project delivery lead

Other projects are expected to have a future impact on people's experience of accessing nature. These projects with an indirect impact include visitor surveys and projects mapping walking paths.

The collection of **data on recreational pressures** is expected to have a future **'indirect' impact on people's ability to access nature** as discussed in this project (small budget):

'Key recommendations include improvement of site interpretation and management of existing pathways, including signage upgrades and promotion of alternative mountain biking locations. Improvement of parking sites, including resurfacing car parks.' - Report

5.2.3 Principle 3 – Support planning to ensure people are involved in setting the nature recovery agenda

Principle 3 is focused on connecting people with nature to ensure they are involved in identifying priorities and their views directly inform the planning and delivery of nature recovery projects. Consulting the public is recognised as a key element to ensure success of the LNRs, understanding how people value open spaces is a key part of local nature strategy.

73% (40 out of 55) Seedcorn projects were recorded at the proposal stage against principle 3.

The review of reports suggested 49% (27 out of 55) projects had delivered activities which directly resulted in involving people in setting the agenda. These activities included consultation events and community workshops.

The **direct impact** and importance of **involving volunteers and planners in setting the agenda** is shown in this project (small budget):

'As a working group we very much realise the need for people to be the ones on the ground helping to set the agenda for nature recovery which is why we set-up the volunteer monitoring of blow wells. They are an essential and extremely rare habitat that support the connectivity of wetland habitats. The information will be made available for all the councils in Great Lincolnshire so that planners in particular will be aware of the valuable habitats this county has and put greater consideration on them should there be a development local to a blow well.' - Report

The NRN toolkit and community engagement standards were highlighted as 'vital tools for the creation and running of the workshops'. Consultation events provide an opportunity to discuss barriers and challenges and develop a shared approach to nature recovery.

Involving landowners and farmers will have a **direct impact** on the development of the local **Biodiversity Net Gain scheme** is shown in this project (medium budget):

'16 interviews with Oxfordshire Landowners/farmers and 3 workshops for 39 farmers to assess their understanding of Biodiversity Net Gain and their receptiveness to delivering BNG projects on their land. The interviews and workshops explored what farmers would need from a local BNG scheme to participate.' - Report

Other projects aimed to involve people through raising awareness which might result in indirect impact and future involvement in setting the nature recovery agenda.

Indirect impact of an art installation (small budget) might result in **future engagement of the public in setting the nature recovery agenda**:

'Installation attracted many positive comments and audience often asked questions and engaged in discussion about conservation, art and technology.' - Report

5.2.4 Principle 4 - Unblock blockages / help move contribution to NRN forward significantly

This principle recognises the important role of evidence collation and map development towards achieving the aims of the Nature Recovery Network.

65% (36 out of 55) Seedcorn projects were recorded at the proposal stage against principle 4.

Direct impact of activities on principle 4, was recorded in 45% (25 out of 55) of the Seedcorn projects analysed. These projects reported they had completed mapping activities, collected new data or reviewed existing evidence to develop new maps and baselines.

Other projects reported they 'unblocked blockages' by organising consultation events and involving volunteers in nature restoration work. However, for evaluation purposes and to achieve a quantitative measure of data collection contributing to the NRN aims, they were not counted as having a direct impact on the objectives described in principle 4.

The reported activities included baseline mapping, GIS analysis, buying and using of monitoring equipment, ground truthing and inventory of path quality.

Direct impact of baseline mapping (small budget) used to support planning of **environmental improvements**:

'A Baseline map showing the current standing of each holding and recording the existing habitat types was created by the coordinator (arable fields, water ways, hedging, woodlands, grassland etc). We formed a network of local farmers. In meetings a Land Management Plan map was created detailing areas where land is available for environmental improvements such as increased field margins, land change of use, woodland or meadow planting, hedgerow planting, pond creation etc.'
- Report

Project reports emphasise the importance of baseline data and the availability of monitoring tools and software to monitor progress. Projects describe using software such as LandApp to record a baseline and document future environmental gain.

Several of the projects surveyed large areas and collect highly detailed data to make very specific and practical recommendations for prioritising future work.

Direct impact of a project (large budget) reporting highly detailed **data collection** and stakeholder engagement to develop a **priority list of nature improvement projects**:

'1400 km of mapped watercourses. This study has demonstrated an abundance of river restoration opportunities throughout the catchment. The final shortlist of six sites was derived from a combination of multi-criteria analysis and input from stakeholder engagement events where the key target areas were defined.' - Report

5.2.5 Principle 5 - To plug strategically important gaps

Principle 5 is ensuring funded Seedcorn projects align with strategic priorities. Without any further detail provided in the description of this principle it was not clear to most local project delivery leads if their project plugged a strategically important gap. 'Act as leverage to expand a project to fill a gap' was also covered in principle 6 which focused on leverage and 'Link across boundaries' was also covered by principle 7. Area Teams responded to this principle by saying that most projects were about plugging gaps: gaps in data, gaps in planning, gaps in bringing people together.

56% (31 out of 55) Seedcorn projects were recorded at the proposal stage against principle 5.

Key strategic priorities are captured in Area Team's LNRPs and the Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The NE Area Teams explained how their local priorities aligned to both the Seedcorn principles and NRN priorities. Each Area Team discussed facing specific local challenges relating to the type of habitats (for example coastal areas, peatland, heathland, wetlands, chalk grassland, urban), the ratio of urban to rural land, visitor pressures and levels of deprivation and inequalities which impacted on their local strategic priorities and selection of projects for Seedcorn funding.

To quantify outcomes directly aligned to principle 5, we counted the number of projects which referred to the LNRS in their report. Analysis showed 36% (20 out of 55) of Seedcorn projects related outcomes and impact to the LNRS. None referred to the LNRP. The activities reported included consultation events, seminars, data collection and the development of strategies.

Direct impact of a project (very small budget) on plugging strategic gaps in relation to the LNRS:

'Primary activity was the business and nature recovery seminar. Get farmers and local businesses involved in LNRS. Businesses post-seminar actively enquiring about actions they can take revealed a willingness to act and provided a route forward. We are also continuing to see rapid progress in the development of the farmer cluster coverage across Oxfordshire, including the hugely successful NE Cotswolds Farmer Cluster, who secured a major landscape recovery grant.' - Report

Other projects described how data collection facilitated further discussions on strategic priorities.

Direct impact of a project (medium budget) on plugging strategic gaps in relation to the LNRS:

'Whilst confined to two 10k national grid squares, this project enabled the collation of ecological data for those areas, the initiation and facilitation of discussions about desired modelling and identifying data gaps, and the link between LNRS and the NRN. This project would not have happened without this Seedcorn funding!' - Report

Seedcorn projects also resulted in influencing strategic priorities within organisations.

Impact of a project (medium budget) on organisational shifts at the National Trust:

'The funding has raised the profile of wood pasture across the National Trust team in Ullswater and changed their focus from 'wait and see what the agri-environment scheme deliver' to one of jumping in and adding value. It is difficult to put a value on that organisational shift but it makes a huge difference.' - Report

5.2.6 Principle 6 - Bring in significant leverage in funding / kind / breadth of partnership

The first objective described in principle 6 is the ability of Seedcorn projects to leverage further funding to ensure continuation or expansion of the project after the initial project (principle 6a). The second objective captured in this principle is the ability of projects to significantly increase the kind and breadth of partnerships (principle 6b).

60% (33 out of 55) Seedcorn projects were recorded at the proposal stage against principle 6.

When looking at principle **6a 'leverage of funding'**, 20% (11 out of 55) reported the Seedcorn project had either helped to leverage match funding or further project funding. Six of these projects reported the amount of funding which ranged from £1,000 to just over £17,000.

Direct impact of a capital project (medium budget) which focused on buying equipment on **leveraging further funding** to continue and expand the work:

'A suite of peatland monitoring equipment was purchased by Natural England. The National Trust managed to secure underspend from the Environment Agency to purchase an identical second set of monitoring equipment. Plus the team has been successful in securing a Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme (NfCPGS) grant award for restoration works and monitoring with a Monitoring Officer from University of Manchester to refine, collate and analyse the data.' - Report

Other projects described how the high profile of the project within the community resulted in further funding.

A nature restoration project on a very small budget used **community engagement** to successfully **leverage further funding** for the work, an example of **direct impact**:

'The Keep the Forest Buzzing project attracted £500 of additional funding in the form of financial donations from local County Councillors' Divisional Funds and local District Councillors Ward Allowances, alongside £3,000 of grant funding from the Sherwood Landscape Partnership's Sherwood Habitat Improvement Scheme.' - Report

Other projects described how having the evidence in place or the first phase of the work completed helped to apply for grants. Many projects mentioned they were planning to apply for further funding, including applications to the Environment Agency, Heritage Lottery Fund and Forestry Commission.

A scoping project on a small budget supported evidence collection to plan for funding bids which will have an **indirect impact** on the **leverage of further funding**:

'A scoping study and connectivity plan for habitat creation and restoration of sandy and heath habitat. It has enabled the prioritisation of stages of practical groundwork, connection with different partners and elevation of the status of the project amongst the local communities, and stakeholders. It has enabled planning for funding bids for different stages.' - Report

Feedback from Area Teams highlighted other projects which had leveraged further funding, for example the National Trust species action plan Seedcorn project which secured a £289,000 Species

Recovery Grant. Another project secured half a million from DEFRA Landscape Recovery Fund, taking an approach that was on a small block of land and applying it to a whole landscape. One of the local project delivery leads described during their interview that the project leveraged over £100,000 from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund and further grants for a more than £400,000. Another local project delivery lead described how it helped to leverage further funding of £110,000 to deliver habitat restoration works and another project secured £270,000 in National Lottery Heritage Funding for further work with landowners.

One project reported securing over £700,000 as described below.

An engagement project (small budget) successfully **leveraged further funding** and attributed this directly to the Seedcorn project:

'The findings of the Seedcorn project fed into the landscape recovery application. Worth around £650,000. Two-year development phase followed by 20-year delivery period. Also, around £80,000 from National Parks Partnership' – Local project delivery lead

When reviewing the reports in relation to principle **6b 'significantly increase the kind and breadth of partnerships'**, it was clear that partnerships are key to the success of Seedcorn projects. All projects reported a positive impact of the funding on partnerships. The projects had been an opportunity to reconnect with groups worked with on previous projects, strengthen relationships and develop new partnerships.

An example of **direct impact** of a project (small budget) on **partnerships** was reported as follows:

'Relationships built with Natural England, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Veolia and Peel. This collaborative way of working clearly demonstrates how partners and industry can work together to achieve positive environmental outcomes and contribute to nature recovery' - Report

5.2.7 Principle 7 - In Area Team and/or across Area Team boundaries

The description of this principle was reported by both Area Teams and local project leads as unclear. It was questioned if this referred to projects delivered by multiple Area Teams and if this principle only included working across geographic boundaries or also boundaries between different stakeholders.

27% (15 out of 55) Seedcorn projects were recorded at the proposal stage against principle 7.

During the interviews with the Area Teams, one interviewee mentioned an example of successful working across boundaries between the East Midlands and Yorkshire Area Teams. For the Seedcorn project both Area Teams put money together, one Area Team did the procurement work and the liaison work and the other Area Team drafted the Memorandum of Agreement.

In the project reports reviewed, only one project reported delivering activities across team area boundaries. The other reports did not specifically mention working across area boundaries.

A project with **direct impact across multiple Area Teams** resulted in **closer working**:

'The project has started local conversations around nature recovery with farmers and landowners in 4 individual smaller dales within YDNPA (3 in Yorkshire, 1 in Cumbria) presenting information to them about the agricultural transition, and about the wildlife and habitats within their dale. Direct collaboration has resulted in closer working, more direct contact and better understanding between NE and YDNPA staff.' - Report

Due to the lack of information on this principle it has not been possible to quantify the direct impact on this principle. Other projects reported to anticipate impacting work in multiple areas in the future.

The project (medium budget) which supported the development of a **deep learning model** could have **indirect impact** on future mapping activities **across Area Team boundaries**:

'The project, to a large degree, will allow spatial targeting of hedgerow, woodland and scrub creation priorities to be defined at a landscape scale. The data can be used alongside carbon capture, flood risk management and other ecosystem service aims to develop multi-benefit projects at scale. The mapping tool will operate at an LNRN scale and has the potential to link across LNRNs.' - Report

5.2.8 Principle 8 Link to species recovery and Principle 9 Link to improvement in site condition

Local project leads were not clear on the difference between principles 8 and 9 compared to principle 1 as 'expansion and quality of nature' were also mentioned in principle 1. All projects delivering practical nature restoration activities reported improvements in site condition and a few specific examples of species recovery were reported.

A project (small budget) which completed Island creation with predator fencing reported the **direct impact of nature restoration work on improvements in site condition**, bird nesting and **species recovery**:

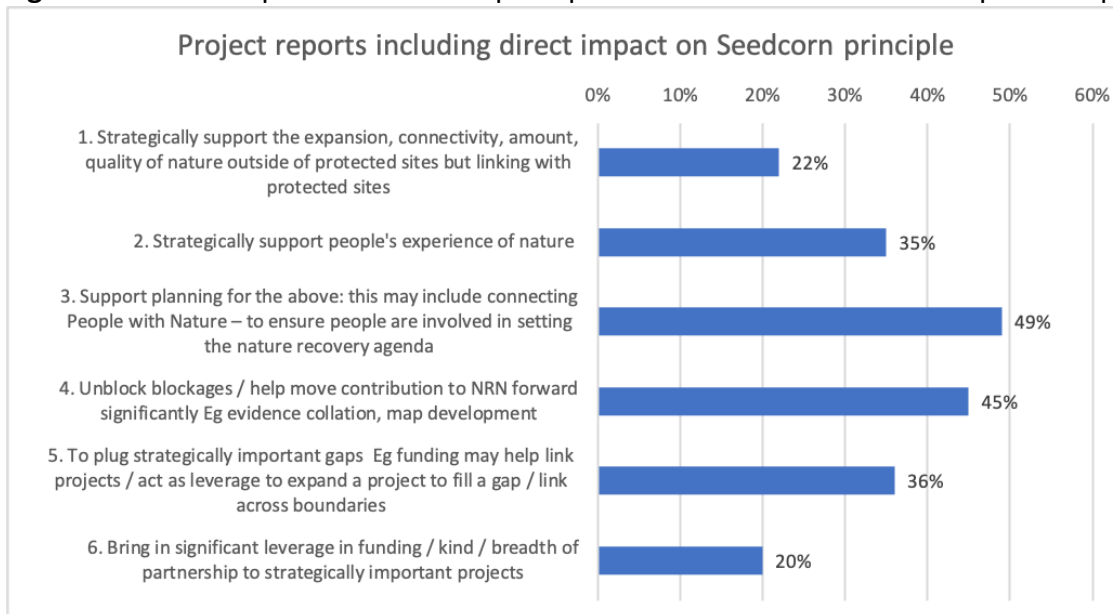
'Winter at Seaforth is a bird lover's dream; the lagoons and reedbed host good numbers of teal, pochard, tufted duck, goldeneye and the incredibly rare scaup. For the first time since the 1990s Ringer Plover, Little Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher have all successfully fledged chicks on the causeway inside the predator fencing. Large numbers of bar-tailed godwits are now also present which have not been seen before.' - Report

5.2.9 Overview of impact of seedcorn projects in relation to the principles

The review of project reports provided evidence that 96% (53 out of 55) directly impacted on one or more of the principles, with the distribution by principle shown in Figure 5.1. Principle 7 is not included in the graph due to a lack of data on the impact on this principle.

Only two project reports lacked the evidence of a direct impact on the objectives described in the Seedcorn principles, but they both described the anticipated future effect on the objectives of the Seedcorn principles. Most project reports provided evidence against multiple Seedcorn principles.

Figure 5.1 Direct impact on Seedcorn principles 1 to 6 described in the sample of 55 project reports



5.3 Challenges in project delivery

The project reports and the interviews with local project delivery leads and Area Teams highlighted several challenges relating to the project delivery. In this overview we focus on issues from the time the project started. Issues relating to the processes involved in the application, selection and award processes are covered in Chapter 7.

5.3.1 Short time for delivery and suboptimal timings of activities

Due to delays in the selection process and procurement issues, the timeframe for project delivery was very short. In several cases the project had to be delivered within a three-month period. This reduced the number of people who could be engaged in the project. In interviews with local project delivery leads 'lack of time' was highlighted as the main challenge to project delivery.

A project (medium budget) faced **challenges due to the short timescale:**

'From the biodiversity side of things, it more than met its aims. We managed to do more sites than we initially planned. I would say from a staff and patient engagement, it wasn't as successful as it could have been, due to the timescales, we didn't have much time.' - Local project delivery lead.

The short time for delivery meant surveying work was sometimes done at a time of the year which was suboptimal due to the potential for damage and disruption to species and habitats. For example, it prevented teams from entering the water for effective assessment of motility of gravel beds and taking water depths as the time for surveying coincided with spawning season for fish.

A mapping project (large budget) highlighted **challenges because of the timing of surveying:**

'Time constraints because of the time of year that we were delivering it, made it harder with the brown trout in particular because of their spawning season. We had to be very careful that we weren't in the water at a certain time of year. Or causing any disturbance to potentially spawning trout over the winter period.' - Local project delivery lead

A school project (medium budget) highlighted **challenges relating to the time of planting:**

'School staff leading the project are deeply invested but have other demands on their time. Easter seemed to be the deadline for project completion but as one school pointed out, planting is best done after Easter holidays so there are people around to take care of plants.'- Report

A youth engagement project (small budget) highlighted **challenges relating to the timing of events:**

'Main challenge was timing. Funding not awarded until December, so planned September launch was not possible and time to plan, deliver and evaluate the project was reduced from 6 to 3 months. This had a knock-on effect on recruitment and building relationships with organisations and participants. Longer-term funding would also be more likely to ensure continuity for the participants.'- Report

Projects which aimed to deliver public engagement activities in 2020 had issues due to Covid lockdown restrictions. Staff illnesses, absences and staff turnover also had a significant impact on projects because the short period for delivery did not allow for activities to be postponed.

5.3.2 Land ownership and designating sites

Area Teams and project documentation included feedback about the challenges relating to land ownership and concerns raised by landowners about becoming a designated site.

A surveying project (small budget) highlighted **challenges relating to designating sites:**

'The whole idea of wanting to designate sites with a 'label' was a put off for some landowners so we had a couple of rejection responses which was unfortunate, and perhaps more work is needed from local record centres to educate landowners on what these designations are, what they help achieve and what they don't stop landowners doing with their land.'- Report

The challenges in progressing from the land surveying phase to land restoration work were also raised. It highlights the importance of clearly communicating the aims of the work and ensuring buy-in from landowners at an early stage.

A research and engagement project (large budget) highlighted **barriers relating to engaging land managers:**

'They have also outlined some barriers to engaging those with responsibility for land along the corridor. e.g. personal culture and attitudes may feel at odds with the mission and messaging; they may be concerned about peer pressure or feel personally or professionally threatened by the initiative. Land managers were concerned about potential barriers raised by any future designation or protected status, and committing to anything before new voluntary and statutory markets around BNG, NFM and carbon are better understood/established'- Report

Funding type was also a potential issue here. CDEL funding can only be used for land restoration and other 'boots on the ground' projects on land owned by Natural England.

A mapping project (very small budget) highlighted **challenges relating to progressing projects on private land:**

'Nidderdale AONB is not a landowner or land manager and almost all the land in the AONB is in private ownership - mapping of habitat opportunity does not compel any landowner to undertake habitat creation.' - Report

5.3.3 Loan of equipment

The funding restrictions resulted in challenges around the acquisition of equipment. The Seedcorn funding had to be used by local NE Area Teams to purchase the equipment themselves and then establish a loan agreement with the local project partner. This has resulted in long delays, issues with transporting equipment and challenging negotiations with partner organisations.

Local project delivery leads described the loan process as complicated, unhelpful and causing long delays. Area Teams commented that it would be helpful to have the loan procedure documented and shared across Area Teams.

Area Teams highlighted the **challenges relating to procurement and loan agreements:**

'It took a long time to get the loan agreement wording through which delayed us slightly. It also took the Area Team a while to navigate the procurement system, as we were purchasing the equipment ourselves. Plus, never underestimate how heavy monitoring equipment is, I had some delivered to my home and struggled to get it to our partners' - NE Area Team

5.3.4 Ownership of data and intellectual property

Challenges relating to discussions with external contacts around the ownership of data and intellectual property were mentioned by Area Teams.

Area Teams highlighted the **challenges relating to intellectual property agreements:**

'We had to get our legal team involved in quite difficult conversations with this third-party consultant. From our side, because we've given the funding, the intellectual property at the end of it should have stayed with Natural England. But it was quite a small start-up who were doing this work, and they felt that they were carrying out the work and there was really nothing in it for them unless they got the Intellectual property. Which resulted in many months of back and forth. Which effectively made it too late for the project to happen that year.' - NE Area Team

5.4 Value of the Seedcorn funding programme

When we asked local project delivery leads about the main value of the programme, their responses highlighted the unique opportunity provided by the funding. They attributed the reported impact of the project directly to the Seedcorn funding and responded that the project would not have gone ahead without the Seedcorn funding. Receiving funding from Natural England helped in raising the profile of the work and opened doors to new collaborations.

Highly valuable for project on a medium budget for the **development of a baseline and growing partnerships**:

'It's been amazingly useful for the trust. It's very much given us a baseline of certain key sites. From a biodiversity perspective it has given us an idea of what's possible. We wouldn't have got anywhere close to where we are now without it. We wouldn't have built up those contacts with Natural England with some of our Green Space colleagues and improve the connection with our other local partners.'- Local project delivery lead

The funding programme is unique in supporting pilots and ideas, which only few funders do. Project delivery leads emphasised the slight freedom and flexibility was one of the most important things.

Invaluable to receive funding to test an idea is described by this project on a small budget:

'Testing out an idea, which you don't often get with grants is invaluable really that we had the flexibility and the confidence from the funding officers that we could test different things.'- Local project delivery lead

Local project delivery leads described the funding allowed them to take a more strategic approach and produce assets vital for the future.

Highly valuable to support a more **strategic approach** (project on a large budget):

'We wanted to take a much more strategic approach to pulling all the different lines of explanation and habitat enhancement together into a strategic piece of work. We lacked the resources to do that. This [Seedcorn funding] gave us the resources to work with an external consultant.' - Local project delivery lead

One of the local project leads (large budget) highlighted how grateful they were for the **valuable support**:

'We are grateful to Natural England for this valuable early support. It has helped to bring out a significant leap in thinking and development and produced several assets that will be vital to the success of the next phase of the project. We hope this will mark the start of an ongoing relationship with Natural England.' – Local project delivery lead

Area Teams recognised the added value the Seedcorn programme brought in terms of supporting the nature recovery agenda.

Value of the Seedcorn funding:

'It's done an awful lot in terms of planning the nature recovery network for the future. I think it's been really effective in connecting people with nature and looking at how to reduce barriers to people accessing nature and it's been particularly good at planning the nature recovery network for future.'- NE Area Team

6. Lessons learned about Seedcorn Programme delivery

6.1 Seedcorn funding application process

The Seedcorn principles to guide spending was provided to the Area Teams. The Area Teams then developed their individual approach to distributing the funding, which included the following approaches before it was taken to the central team:

- Inviting partners to apply, using application forms, scoring of application forms by assessment panel, taking forward the highest scoring proposals.
- Inviting partners to apply, using application forms, discussing application forms in a panel, places forum or county team meeting, agreeing which proposal should be taken forward.
- Inviting partners to apply, using application forms and then having a conversation with local project partners to discuss what can be taken forward.
- Inviting partners to share project ideas or complete an expression of interest form, Area Teams developing the project proposals with partners.
- As a local team proactively choose and develop projects by offering funding to local partners and develop the application for partners.

Examples of good practice in the application process were described by the East Midlands and Thames Solent Area Teams as they opened the funding opportunity to all external partners and used a structured process for awarding funding.

Selection processes used by the Area Teams are different and can involve scoring processes:

'We had an application window (six or seven weeks). We've got an application form that we shared with external partners that we knew about, local nature partnerships, wildlife trusts, any Environmental NGO's, we could really think of and encourage people to share it with their networks as well to get a wider reach. We then scored each of the projects (around 20 applications) against the nature recovery network aims. We took forward the highest scoring projects.' – NE Area Team

One of the Area Teams described the benefits of bringing all the different funding streams together in a central spreadsheet so that staff only have to put one bid forward in one place. Some Area Teams have decided only to fund scoping work with Seedcorn funding if they know they will get further funding for delivering the work. The Area Teams emphasised the value of flexibility.

Flexibility in selecting projects for Seedcorn funding:

'Each Area Team has flexibility, how we administer it and I think that's a really a good strength of the Seedcorn.' – NE Area Team

Opening the application process to partners and inviting them to share the opportunity has allowed Area Teams to discover new potential partners. Being able to offer funding opened doors and meant they were taken more seriously.

Connecting with new partners through the application process:

'It's invaluable really. It means we've been able to go out to a broad range of people and also those people then advertise it with other people. It means we've been able to work with people that we didn't know about before, groups that we've never come across places we don't know about. So, I think it's meant it's really broadened our horizons.' – NE Area Team

Local project delivery leads discussed finding out about Seedcorn funding through the Area Teams and serious expressed concerns about the lack of time to write an application.

Extremely short notice for putting in Seedcorn applications (small budget):

'In 2023 my recollection is we received a 24-hour deadline to see if we had suitable projects and I think this would be a theme running through. They don't seem to necessarily have someone who's dedicated with a chunk of time and capacity.' – Local project delivery lead

Interviewees said they had difficulty understanding the criteria and the 'CDEL language' and said the (small/large amount of) help from the Area Teams in preparing their proposal was essential. Local project delivery leads who had applied for RDEL funding said the process was clear and straightforward. Most interviewees said they would apply again if the timing and criteria would work for the projects they had planned.

6.2 Lessons learned and suggestions for improvement

6.2.1 Challenges due to delays

The Area Teams described difficulties in the process and time delays of up to 12 weeks in DEFRA finance responding to applications. When some of the projects they had selected for funding were later rejected for not meeting the criteria, it resulted in a long drawn out process which was frustrating when they were dealing with external partners. Other issues relating to the application process reported by Area Teams were 'a lack of staff', 'staff turnover', 'not enough time to work with partners', 'changing political priorities impacting on the work' and 'type of projects which can be funded' and the 'delays due to slow and complicated procurement processes'.

Local project delivery leads described 'timescale' as the main issue which should be improved. They said the funding had been advertised as 'a 12-month funding window' but turned into a three-month project window. They suggested the biggest improvement to the programme would be changing it to a two-year programme. Other suggestions included 'an early heads up about the funding', 'quicker turnaround of approval' and 'improved transparency of the local processes'.

Key improvement suggested by local project delivery lead (project on a small budget):

'If there was the opportunity to go multi year, I think that would be the biggest thing. Or even if it was just the financial year, but the whole of the financial year.' – Local project delivery lead

6.2.2 Lessons learned in relation to guidance documents

Area Teams described facing significant challenges due to lack of detail describing what is eligible for CDEL funding. They described that it would be helpful to have more detailed guidance for staff

new in post on CDEL criteria and loan agreements for the purchasing of tools. Furthermore, guidance on CDEL and examples of CDEL projects to be shared with partner organisations would help to improve communication around opportunities.

Lack of detailed information on project priorities:

'We've very much been stuck in the middle of a lot of the time with the project lead asking for information and us not having it. And a lot of the projects have had to be either postponed or pushed back by months and months just because we don't have the information.' – NE Area Team

Lack of detailed information on eligibility criteria:

'It's been very difficult to go to our colleagues and say, can we have some Seedcorn funding proposals? Because it's really difficult to give confident answers about what a what might or might not be eligible. The guidance around what is CDEL and what isn't, is really difficult.' – NE Area Team

Area Teams also discuss the need for guidance on what can be commissioned directly as a Seedcorn project and what needs to go out for tender.

Lack of detailed information on tender requirements:

'Quite often we get quite far down the line with a consultant because we know that they can do exactly what we want them to. But then we realise that we really should have gone out to tender and we have to either backtrack or figure out how to do a single tender agreement.' – NE Area Team

Local project delivery leads also discussed that it would be helpful to have more detailed information on the eligibility criteria.

6.2.3 Change from revenue to capital funding

Conversations with Area Teams highlighted the biggest barrier to delivering nature recovery projects has been the switch from revenue (RDEL) to capital (CDEL) funding. This restriction has damaged relationships with partners and account for many missed opportunities to deliver significant nature recovery improvements on a small budget. It has resulted in underspend in Seedcorn funding budgets.

Change to capital funding has severely reduced the number of projects focused on people's experience of nature:

'Since we've switched to capital funding, we haven't been able to get any of our people focused work to fit the criteria and we've got a lot of projects on our wish list and we've not been able to make them work. So, I think that's a funding issue, not an appetite issue.' – NE Area Team

It has prevented the delivery of practical nature restoration works by local project delivery leads who were keen to take the learning from surveying and biodiversity mapping projects forward to make a real difference to local nature sites.

Change to **capital funding has blocked Area Teams** from providing the most appropriate support to partners:

'We can now fund organisations to go out and do research on what might be blocking people's access to nature, and that's really important. But I think it's frustrating that we can't go a step further to say, you've produced this really interesting report for us on what the barriers might be, and now we can give you a little bit more funding to maybe address some of those barriers.' – NE Area Team

Area Teams report that CDEL has made it very difficult to do any restoration work on properties which are not owned by Natural England.

CDEL criteria blocks Nature Restoration work on land not owned by Natural England:

'It's very difficult for us to spend CDEL on land that isn't owned by Natural England. So that means where we can do these habitat improvement works have been quite limited over the past couple of years.' – NE Area Team

The restrictions of CDEL funding also risk resulting in suboptimal outputs of projects, as they need to fit the CDEL criteria.

Change to capital funding reduced possibilities for developing suitable outputs:

'I recently had a partner who wanted to do a really interesting piece of work, but they wanted at the end to produce a film because their work is about teenagers and they thought that would be a better way to engage them [than a written report]. And I was told that they couldn't have a film as the output because that would be considered promotional materials and that we couldn't fund that. So, I think that from that perspective, the restrictiveness of the funding is really limiting who the audience of the final product is.' – NE Area Team

The Area Teams emphasised the importance of clarity and consistency around CDEL and RDEL at the start of the financial year as switching between these during the year had damaged relationships with partners and made planning very challenging.

Lack of clarity in CDEL/RDEL funding has a negative impact on relationships:

'Inconsistency of funding types (CDEL and RDEL) - needs to be one or the other. It's no good having one and then having the other. Then halfway through the year, suddenly we've got the other one available. I think that makes it very difficult because you're constantly having a back and forth with external partners of like, oh, we can't fund that type of project. Oh, now we can. And I think that is not good for relationship management either.' – NE Area Team

There is a higher level of interest in RDEL from partners. Not being able to provide clarity at an early stage on the type of funding available (RDEL/CDEL) can negatively impact partnerships.

Late confirmation of CDEL or RDEL has a negative impact on partnerships:

'In March we asked people to apply. The problem was the week after we got all the applications in, we got the information to say it is only CDEL. Of those over 50 applications probably 90% of them were for RDEL. So embarrassingly then, we then had to go back to everyone and say I'm really sorry we haven't actually been able to secure any money. So, we had quite a lot of disgruntlement from partners.' – NE Area Team

One Area Teams discussed that they recognised the opportunities that CDEL funding brought and had adapted their approach to Seedcorn funding to support local projects.

Opportunities for using CDEL funding to support engagement leading to a research output:

'We were funding charities that might be getting volunteer groups out who would otherwise be underrepresented in that space. This might have been children missing in education or ethnic minorities who hadn't previously had access. I'd say our Seedcorn has taken on sort of a new lease of life in the last couple of years. We've also got much better understanding the research and development process so that we can fund engagement that leads to a research output.' – NE Area Team

Another Area team highlighted the impact of additional guidance and experience with CDEL funding.

Guidance relating to CDEL funding has improved in the last year:

'I felt that the guidance that we got about CDEL this year was clearer now. Some of that might be just because I'm more used to it. I've got my head round it better, so I felt a little bit better equipped to go to our colleagues and to get projects in.' – NE Area Team

6.3 Awareness of Seedcorn Principles

Most Area Teams were aware of the Seedcorn principles, but some Area Teams said they were only aware of the NRN principles. Area Teams reported having seen the seven principles in the project spreadsheet, but not the extended list of nine principles. Some Area Teams used the criteria in their application form, others said the principles were embedded in all their work, so they did not need to refer to them. Area Teams described the principles as 'a useful steer' for people new in the job and 'they are good'. However, most Area Teams expressed some confusion about what some of the principles meant.

Some of the Seedcorn principles are unclear:

'We do struggle with [principles] four and five and how they're different. And in fact, on our application form we bundle them together. Plugging gaps and unblocking blockages to me feels like the same thing, so maybe I'm not understanding or maybe they could be merged.' – NE Area Team

When local project delivery leads were asked about the principles, most interviewees responded not having seen the principles before and a few said they might have seen them in the application form. When asked about the principles during the interview most interviewees reported that their

work aimed towards principle 1, 2 and 3 and they were unsure what was meant by principle 4, 5, 6, and 7 as they referred to multiple objectives and some of the descriptions were not clear. Two interviewees responding to the questions about the principles saying the principles are 'clear' and one interviewee continued to say their project aligned to all principles.

6.4 Monitoring and evaluation

Most of the Area Teams reported not having any monitoring or evaluation processes in place, explaining that reporting to the central team had not been required. They discussed only being aware of the outcomes of some of the projects and their ability to secure further funding if the project partner had applied for further NE funding. Time pressure often meant they were unable to read and respond to project reports.

Time pressure prevented monitoring and evaluation activities:

'I had a meeting with them before they submitted their reports. Sort of agreed that we were happy with the work they've done, so I had an understanding. But when the reports came in, I just didn't have time to read them. So it's very difficult to evaluate the projects. Then suddenly you're in the next cycle.' – NE Area Team

Area Teams described the absence of monitoring being due to time pressures and limited staff resources. Area Teams said they would be keen to obtain monitoring and evaluation data, but only if this can be achieved with minimal staff resourcing. Area Teams also discussed finding it difficult to ask local project delivery leads for an evaluation report if there had been delays in the approval and procurement processes leaving the projects with a very limited time to deliver the project.

One Area Team reported that monitoring and evaluation was part of their processes and that they included the requirement to complete the NE reporting template in the Memorandum of agreement, which they must submit before the Area Team makes the final payment.

The analysis of reporting documents during this evaluation highlighted the value of the NE reporting template. The completed template allowed for effective analysis of outcomes against plans and the mapping of direct impact against the principles. The NE reporting template was at points repetitive with projects leads answering 'see above' or leaving boxes blank.

6.5 Support provided by the Area Teams and central Seedcorn team

Partners valued the partnership with Natural England, praised the support and time commitment of the Area Team members and valued the knowledge of Senior Advisors relating to Nature Recovery, local challenges and local priorities. Partners discussed that the flexibility allowed them to make the most of the small amount of funding.

Area Teams discussed the helpful support provided by the central Seedcorn team, the value of regular meetings and ongoing advice and support for dealing with procurement and loan issues. They commented how helpful the central project spreadsheet was and asked for more templates and guiding documents to improve their processes.

7. Case studies showcasing the impact of Seedcorn projects

The following four articles provide insights into the key outcomes and impacts reported by local project delivery leads.

7.1 Transformative impact of Seedcorn funding on improving peatland restoration

Nik Taylor, Area Ranger from the National Trust provided insight into the transformative impact of Seedcorn funding on their ambitious project, the "Holcombe Moor Peat Monitoring and Improvement," supported by the Natural England's Cheshire and Lancashire Area Team through its Seedcorn programme.

Holcombe Moor, the operational base for this peatland restoration endeavour, boasts a small but dedicated team working closely with key partners such as Natural England and the Environment Agency. The team, along with enthusiastic volunteers and a few rangers, considers itself an integral part of the local community.

The Seedcorn funding, tailored for specific environmental needs, provided crucial support in understanding and monitoring the habitats targeted for improvement. Nik expressed satisfaction with the programme, stating, 'we found it [the Seedcorn funding] a very positive experience because of what we've achieved. Without this Seedcorn funding we would not have bought the monitoring equipment.'

The funding facilitated the acquisition of essential equipment, including hydrological data loggers, a rugged tablet for fieldwork in all weather conditions, a rain gauge, a peat corer for sampling, and a basic electronic microscope for analysis. Nik emphasized the grant's adaptability, filling gaps in their capabilities and supporting ongoing engagement with the community.

The project's success was highlighted by its ability to support the expansion and connectivity of nature beyond protected sites. The funding played a pivotal role in gathering baseline information about habitat quality, addressing a historical lack of monitoring in previous restoration efforts.

The acquired equipment not only aided in current projects but also proved instrumental in securing further funding. Nik detailed a subsequent application to the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant scheme, totalling just over £700,000 for the restoration of the remaining third of the deep peat plateau.

The monitoring initiative garnered interest beyond the local community, attracting visits from teams across the UK, including Scotland and Northumberland. The project's success, backed by scientific data, has established partnerships with institutions like the University of Manchester and the Environment Agency, solidifying collaborations and enhancing the project's credibility.

Lessons learned from the initiative, including the importance of long-term experimental catchments and practical considerations in implementing interventions, for example the formation of scallop bunds and compacting of peat through machinery, are shared with other National Trust properties undertaking similar projects. Nik emphasises the importance of learning together 'we

share our experiences, so it'll allow us to say what worked well and what didn't'. The project's impact extends beyond scientific advancements, fostering community engagement and providing valuable educational opportunities for diverse audiences, from schoolchildren to academic partners.

Nik's enthusiasm for the project is clear when he explains one of the aims of the work: 'Very wet, very marshy, perfect conditions, where our upland breeding species prefer. So, we're doing this work to improve the habitat of our waders such as the Golden Plover, Dunlin, Curlew, and Snipe.'

As Holcombe Moor continues its journey towards peatland restoration, the Seedcorn funding has proven to be a catalyst for positive change, ensuring a lasting legacy of improved habitats and community involvement.



7.2 Bearing Fruit: The Seedcorn project orchestrating community growth

In an insightful interview with Sarah Baker, Group Manager for Climate and Environment at East Lindsey District Council, the success story of the Seedcorn funded project, 'Bearing Fruit,' became evident. The initiative aimed to establish community orchards, fostering environmental sustainability and community well-being. Sarah highlighted the opportunity provided by the Seedcorn funding programme, stating, 'It's not a particularly expensive project, but it's something for which there was no existing budget in my team.'

The project received £3,458 Seedcorn funding in 2020 and commenced with tree planting in January 2021. The community orchards project addressed the pressing need for tree planting while offering additional benefits. Sarah explained, 'We don't have vast areas of land which lend them to planting as a Council, so the community orchards project was a way that we could deliver planting trees on a relatively small scale.'

What sets 'Bearing Fruit' apart is its holistic approach. Sarah emphasised, 'The idea of the community orchards was that we would also run some training. We'd get volunteers involved, so in addition to the obvious biodiversity and additional habitats benefit, there would be the kind of social, mental, physical, health and well-being side.'

The success of the Seedcorn project was evident, with Sarah noting, 'We've actually secured £5,500 funding from social value credits this year to do another round of projects because people have told us they really like to have a community orchard in their village or town.' Leveraging additional funding, the project expanded, contributing to the broader community and environmental goals.

The legacy of the Seedcorn project extends beyond its initial phases of site development, volunteer involvement and fruit production. The long-term vision includes engaging communities through events like "Apple Days," fostering connections and appreciation for nature.

The project's impact is undeniable, as Sarah expressed, 'I think it's done exactly what we hoped it would.' 'Bearing Fruit' not only established orchards but also created a platform for knowledge exchange. Sarah described an event organised at their flagship site as 'an opportunity for everybody from different sites to come together and discuss what they were doing and their experiences.'

The Seedcorn funding played a pivotal role, enabling the council to kick-start projects that wouldn't have materialised otherwise. Sarah emphasised, 'It certainly wouldn't have happened at the point it did without the Seedcorn funding.' The project not only expanded nature outside protected sites but also demonstrated the effectiveness of small-scale funding in initiating impactful initiatives.

Sarah reflected on the value of Seedcorn funding, stating, 'I think sometimes it only takes a small amount of funding to get some of these projects off the ground.' The success of 'Bearing Fruit' proves that a modest investment can catalyse meaningful change, filling crucial gaps in environmental and community development initiatives. This Seedcorn project stands as a testament to the power of strategic funding in sowing the seeds of positive transformation.



7.3 Seedcorn Funding's impact on Unlocking the Secrets of the Coastal Realm

In an interview with Ian Hendy, a coastal marine ecologist, we hear about the journey of the Seedcorn-funded project titled 'Assessment of saltmarsh, seagrass, and kelp.' Ian sheds light on the pivotal role of Seedcorn funding in mapping the coastal ecosystem.

Describing the essence of good research, Ian notes, 'you need an initial project to get boots on the ground, to establish baselines, and look for gaps in the research.' The Seedcorn funding, as he emphasises, played a crucial role in exposing these gaps within the research and allowed for the collection of baseline data, paving the way for more extensive future projects.

The Seedcorn project was a collaboration between the University of Portsmouth and the UNESCO biosphere team on the Isle of Wight. The project exemplifies the synergy between academic institutions and government bodies. Ian states, 'Natural England came to me and said we've got Seedcorn funding, this is what we want to do from our side at Natural England.'

The Seedcorn funding, acting as a catalyst, allows researchers to meet stakeholders, build relationships with communities and develop scientific partnerships.

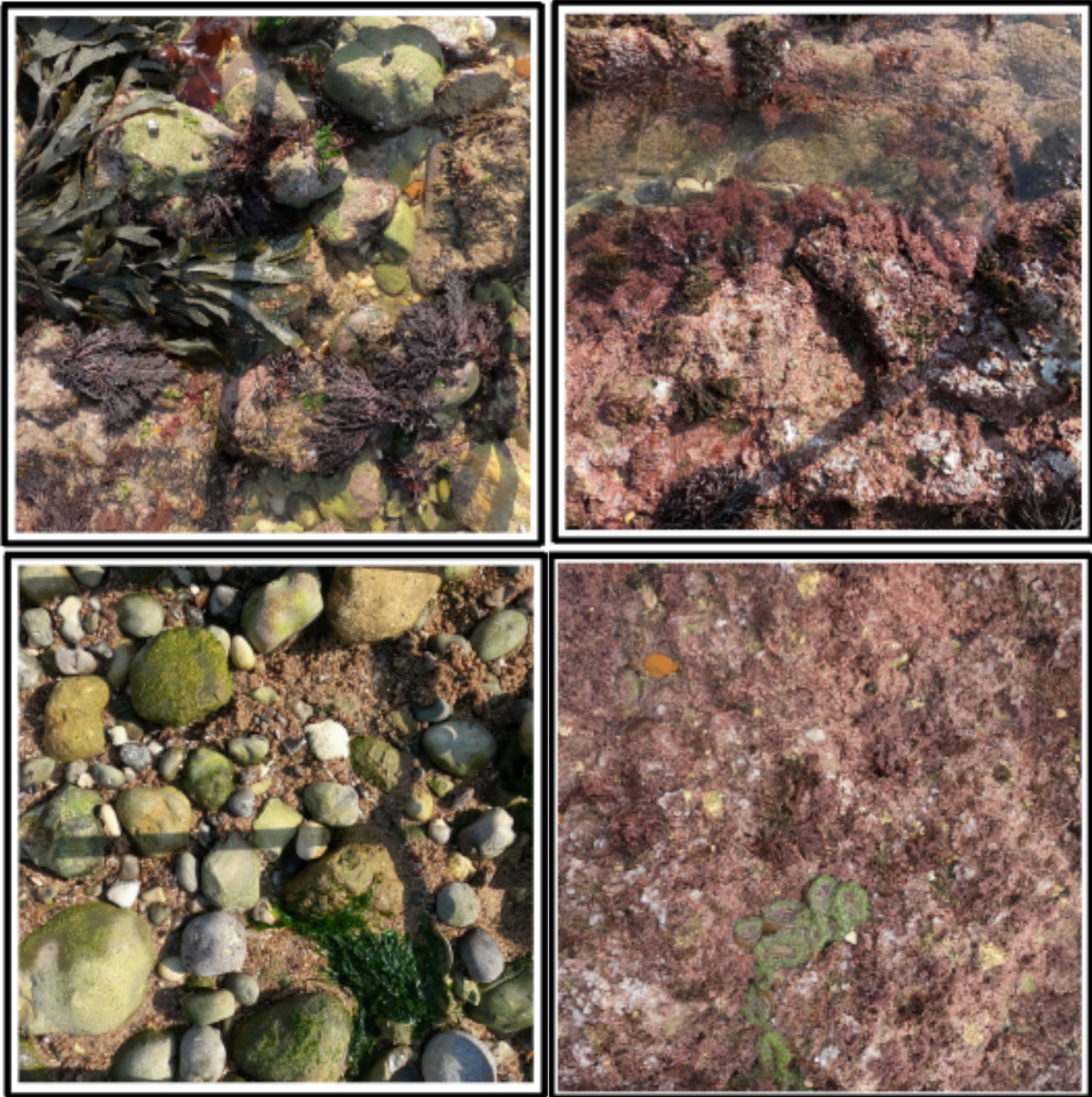
The Seedcorn project has sparked significant interest within the biosphere community. The project focused on the southern coast of the Isle of Wight, an area previously mostly ignored but integral to the UNESCO biosphere. Ian points out the gaps in knowledge and the need to understand the value of natural resources. He notes, 'salt marsh, seagrass, kelp, fisheries, all have a value.' The Seedcorn funding facilitated comprehensive scientific surveys to better understand this value.

The outcomes of the project included significant scientific discoveries. Ian explains, 'we found a whole different array of ecosystems that were not known to the UNESCO biosphere. We found a huge bream nursery associated with a moving kelp forest. There are thousands of baby bream in there and they're thriving.' The project not only revealed hidden ecosystems but also contributes to understanding the dynamic changes in essential fish habitats.

Engagement with local communities has been a key aspect of the project, involving schools and collaborating with the UNESCO biosphere team. The outreach efforts aim to educate and generate interest in nature-based solutions. Ian expresses, 'People are fully on board,' especially in areas vulnerable to flooding.

Seedcorn funding has proven instrumental in expediting research. Ian notes, 'Without the Seedcorn funding, it probably would have taken us about five years.' The funding allowed for a full-time researcher for almost a year, accelerating the project's timeline and enabling a more detailed plan for future research.

Reflecting on the overall experience, Ian describes it as 'exciting, exhilarating, and enlightening.' The Seedcorn initiative has deepened his appreciation for the natural capital within coastal areas. Ian concludes with enthusiasm, stating, 'Without a shadow of a doubt, we will be looking at more Seedcorn funding,' underscoring the programme's crucial role in advancing scientific exploration and nature conservation.



7.4 Restoring Nature: The Story of the North Yorkshire Turtle Doves

Populations of turtle dove are in rapid decline across Europe and this species has red list conservation status globally. In the UK, its numbers have declined by more than 90% since the 1990s. According to a study by the European Commission (2007) four potential threats to the turtle dove are (1) habitat loss or modification, (2) droughts and climate change, (3) hunting and (4) competition with the collared dove.

Elspeth Ingleby, Senior Ecologist at the North York Moors National Park Authority, led the delivery of the remarkable 'North Yorkshire Turtle Dove' nature restoration project. This initiative, fuelled by Seedcorn funding from Natural England, aimed to revitalise habitats crucial for the conservation of turtle doves in the North of England.

Elspeth's insights from the project shed light on its significance and the strides made in engaging land managers and restoring land to help preserve this vulnerable species. 'The purpose of the project was to carry out land management works and develop pond management plans focused on conserving turtle doves' Elspeth explains. Recognising the pivotal role of water for turtle doves, the project prioritised restoring ponds, essential for the birds' survival and breeding success.

Elspeth highlights the critical importance of water sources for turtle doves: '*They use the water that they can get from ponds to soften grains and create a kind of milk that they then feed to their young.*' Without access to water, the survival of young turtle doves is jeopardised, emphasising the urgency of restoring these habitats.

A previous project had mapped pond restoration priorities, which could not be delivered due to limited resources. However, with the Seedcorn funding, they were able to engage a consultant and a contractor to carry out essential works and continue developing partnerships with land managers. Elspeth reflects on the Seedcorn project as an invaluable experience gained and opportunity to nurture skills and knowledge among staff and volunteers.

Turtle doves have faced drastic declines over the past decades. Elspeth notes that the current population trends for the North Yorkshire population appear to remain fairly stable. The project's ultimate goal is to reverse these fortunes through targeted conservation efforts.

The success of the Seedcorn-funded project laid the groundwork for securing additional funding, such as the £270,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for the 'Birds on the Edge' project. This funding enabled the continuation and expansion of vital conservation work, including pond restoration and habitat enhancement.

Reflecting on the broader impact of the project, Elspeth emphasises the interconnectedness of nature recovery efforts. Pond restoration benefits not only turtle doves but also a myriad of other species. The project's success has catalysed further initiatives within the community and among land managers, fostering a collaborative approach towards conservation.

In conclusion, Elspeth underscores the value of small-scale projects like Seedcorn in laying the foundation for more extensive and enduring conservation endeavours. The North Yorkshire Turtle Dove project exemplifies the power of collective action in safeguarding our natural heritage and ensuring a brighter future for wildlife.

Turtle Dove image by Richard Bennett



8. Discussion and recommendations

The Seedcorn funding has provided a unique opportunity for 389 impactful nature recovery projects to be delivered between April 2020 and March 2023. Feedback demonstrated that most of these projects would have been unlikely to go ahead without the funding of up to £25,000 provided by the programme.

Interviews with Area Teams and local project delivery leads provided a list of challenges and lessons learned. Area Teams reported significant challenges related to the change from revenue to capital funding, as this impacted the type of projects which can be delivered and limited Area Teams' ability to support practical nature restoration work and engagement activities. In the current spending cycle, future funding will continue to support capital projects. One Area Team discussed how they recognised the opportunities that CDEL funding provided and how they had adapted their approach to Seedcorn funding to support local projects. It would be helpful to share this learning across all Area Teams to help them use the CDEL funding effectively.

It is essential that project partners are informed about how they could use the outcomes of Seedcorn projects to evidence the need for further work, including practical nature restoration work and/or stakeholder engagement activities. Providing local project partners with a list of possible funders to approach to leverage further funding, could help towards strengthening the springboard potential of the Seedcorn funding.

This evaluation covered projects delivered in the three financial years up to March 2023. Reported issues relating to lack of guidance relating to CDEL and late notification of type of funding (RDEL/CDEL) have already been addressed in the 2023-2024 financial year.

Evaluation of the programme delivery showed large variations in the processes used for allocating Seedcorn funding, which resulted in different/more/less opportunities for partner organisations dependent on their location. It also demonstrated limited availability of reporting documents.

It will be helpful to streamline processes and we recommend developing a 'Seedcorn toolkit' with a set of documents and systems including:

- Application template
- Application guidance
- Assessment guidance
- Scoring template
- Examples of CDEL-funded Seedcorn projects
- Guidance for external local project partners on CDEL criteria
- Procurement guidance for Area Teams
- Loan guidance for Area Teams
- Intellectual property guidance for Area Teams
- Reporting survey to be completed by external local project leads
- Central repository for reports, summary documents, PowerPoint presentations and photos
- List of funders and grants relevant for Nature Recovery projects for external local project partners

The availability of this toolkit will help to reduce time commitment required for the delivery of the programme, improve consistency of processes and support future monitoring and evaluation.

This evaluation highlighted confusion about several Seedcorn principles, we therefore recommend simplifying the principles to a general description of the aims of the Seedcorn funding. Projects who meet one or more of these aims could be considered for funding by the Area Teams. Area Teams should continue to have flexibility in selecting projects which align to local priorities.

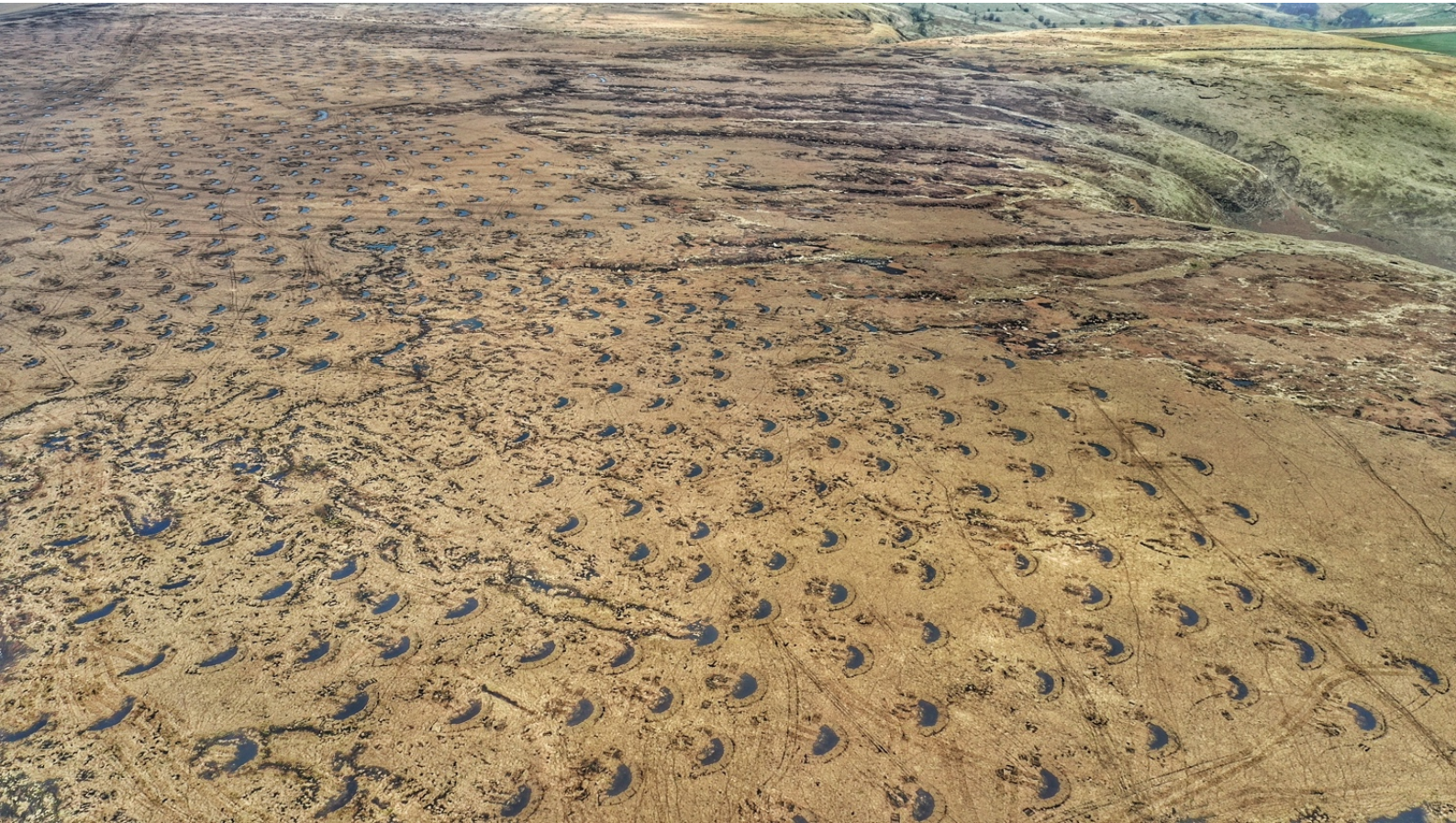
Recording in the central spreadsheet of projects according to the principles did not provide a clear picture for monitoring. More meaningful information for monitoring and evaluation would be obtained by asking Area Teams to select one or two of the most relevant project types in the central spreadsheet. Please see below the suggested list of project types.

Project types:

1. On site mapping/ survey of areas, collecting new data
2. Development of recommendations, options, management plan
3. Development of data collection tools and review of existing data
4. Buy tools (for example land management tools or monitoring tools)
5. Consultation activities with farmers, landowners, land managers, community
6. Education, interpretation signs and social media campaigns
7. On site nature restoration work
8. Purchase of area
9. Other desk research
10. Other

The Seedcorn projects represent high value for money with projects on relatively small budgets delivering impact on the quality of nature, improving people's experience of nature, availability of baseline and monitoring data, plugging gaps and leveraging large amounts of further funding.





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