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Monitoring and Evaluation of Nature Improvement Areas: Year 2 (2013-14) Progress Report



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**Collingwood
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**in partnership with
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Lead contractor:	Collingwood Environmental Planning Limited Address: 1E The Chandlery, 50 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7QY, UK Contacts: Ric Eales (Project Director) r.eales@cep.co.uk Owen White (Project Manager) o.white@cep.co.uk Tel. 020 7407 8700 Website: www.cep.co.uk
Partner organisations:	GeoData Institute: Contact: Chris Hill Email: cth@geodata.soton.ac.uk Cascade Consulting: Contact: David Kingsley-Rowe Email: David.Kingsley-Rowe@cascadeconsulting.co.uk
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Photograph Credits:	Cover photograph: Warton Volunteer Day: Our Lady of Lourdes Eco Club -have lunch in the area they have cleared (Tania Crockett) (Morecambe Bay)

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Foreword by Lord de Mauley



Three years ago, Government published the Natural Environment White Paper *The Natural Choice* – the first for 20 years. Informed and inspired by Sir John Lawton's report, *Making Space for Nature*, and the UK National Ecosystem Assessment, it set out a bold vision for well-connected habitats and a resilient natural environment that provides vital services for our economic prosperity and social wellbeing.

Our *Biodiversity 2020* strategy is a key part of our plans to deliver that vision. At its heart was the need to take a wider, landscape scale approach to managing our natural environment. We wanted to explore how that could work in practice and needed to find some partnerships of outstanding people with the ideas, energy and commitment to help us.

England's first twelve Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) are those landscapes and partnerships of people who rose to that challenge. The NIAs are not just about connecting habitats, they are about connecting people with their landscapes. This will be just as much a part of their legacy as the impacts they have on habitats and ecosystems.

I'm keen that we all learn as much as we can from the experiences and successes of the NIAs. This will help to spread this approach more widely and to continue sharing the knowledge gained. I welcome this second year report on progress in NIAs, which shows just how much has been achieved so far in creating, restoring and connecting habitats across the landscape, improving water quality, supporting pollinators, engaging communities, and contributing to people's health and quality of life. It provides the basis for an evaluation of this new, more integrated approach to delivering our objectives for biodiversity in England.

I hope this will also be an inspiration to others to adopt these approaches.

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for natural environment and science

Executive Summary

Introduction

The establishment of the Nature Improvement Area (NIA) programme was announced in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) – *Natural choice – securing the value of nature* (HM Government, 2011a). NIAs are large, discrete areas where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment that are intended to deliver a ‘step change’ in nature conservation. The programme takes forward the recommendations of the Lawton review, *Making space for nature* (Lawton *et al.*, 2010).

The NIA M&E Phase 2 project is supporting the delivery of NEWP commitment 11 “[Defra] will capture the learning from NIAs, and review whether further action is needed in planning policy, regulation or capacity building, to support their development”.

The 12 initial Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) aim to provide better places for wildlife, to improve the natural environment for people, and to unite local communities, land managers and businesses through a shared vision. They are trying out different approaches. The variety of landscapes, objectives, and partnerships seen across the NIAs reflects this purpose. A consistent approach for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was adopted to assess what works well, and potentially not so well, and to take stock overall. The NIA partnerships are applying several concepts where the practical use of science is still developing, for example relating to restoration of habitat connectivity and ecosystem services. This innovative, experimental and developmental work needs to be borne in mind when considering the results of this evaluation of the first two years of progress.

The 12 initial NIA partnerships started work in April 2012 and the Year 2 (2013-14) Progress Report follows the Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report¹ which was published in September 2013. It presents an overview of their delivery during two years of operation. The Year 2 Progress Report also starts to consider the potential longer-term ‘legacy’ impacts of the NIA programme that may be realised beyond the NIA partnerships’ three year grant funding period. These impacts will be more fully considered by the evaluation at the end of the three years of grant funding and reported towards the end of 2015.

Summary of the monitoring and evaluation purpose and process

The 12 initial NIA partnerships undertake monitoring and evaluation following a framework which includes four themes: biodiversity; ecosystem services; social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing; and partnership working. The framework enables the NIA partnerships to measure the progress towards their objectives. The framework includes ‘core’ indicators that have been adopted by all the NIA partnerships, while the others are optional. Overall it provides a consistent approach across all the NIAs. The NIA partnerships use an online reporting tool specifically developed to record their monitoring data. The NIA partnerships also report on progress quarterly, including financial monitoring and progress against their agreed objectives and outputs.

The overall approach to the evaluation of the NIA programme draws on guidance in the Magenta Book². A logic model³ approach was used to provide the overall framework within which the evaluation was designed. The approach is a combination of a process and impact evaluation – focussing on both how the NIA partnerships are delivering their objectives, as well as on what and how much they are delivering for biodiversity, ecosystem services and social and economic wellbeing.

¹ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5542385517854720>

² HM Government (2011) *The Magenta Book: Guidance for evaluation*. London, HM Treasury.

³ A logic model seeks to understand the complexity of a policy intervention and the relationship between an intervention’s inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

In Year 3, the M&E project will include research to further understand the difference the NIA partnerships have made over and above what would have happened anyway without their introduction.

Overview of key progress and achievements at the end of Year 2 in the 12 initial NIAs

Creating more, bigger, better and less fragmented places for wildlife

- The NIA partnerships have managed or are currently managing⁴ a total of **7,451ha to create or restore priority habitats**; and **11,342ha to maintain or improve priority habitat condition**.
- Actions are also currently planned to **create or restore a further 2,889ha of priority habitat**; and **maintain or improve the condition of a further 2,518ha**.
- In total, actions to restore / create and maintain / improve priority habitat have been completed, are ongoing or are planned on **24,200ha, or 4.7%, of the total area of the 12 initial NIAs**.
- The NIA partnerships have also reported on actions to create or improve boundary and linear priority habitats such as hedgerows and riparian buffers. A total of **87km of boundary and linear priority habitat has been restored or created**; and **183km have been managed to maintain or improve condition**. Further work is also planned for **18km of boundary and linear priority habitat**.
- **The habitat creation and restoration works within the NIAs are helping to improve habitat connectivity**, addressing the objectives of more, bigger, better joined. The increase in connectivity is difficult to quantify, but NIA partnership research and reporting has added to the understanding of how to deliver improved connectivity and how to measure change.
- The NIA partnerships have delivered **activities to enhance the status⁵ of focal⁶ and widespread⁷ species**. NIA partnerships are actively improving data and knowledge of species status in their areas through species surveys.

Enhancing the benefits that nature provides for people

- The NIA partnerships have worked to improve access to and enhance people's experiences of the natural environment; for example four NIA partnerships have reported that a total length of **10.5km of public rights of way and permissive paths have been improved or created**, with **access improved to a further 532km**.
- All the NIA partnerships have designed and delivered activities with the explicit objective of providing education and learning benefits. In the three NIAs that reported on this at the end Year 2, a total of **11,739 people had participated in educational visits⁸**.
- A total of **24,326 days of volunteer time** was reported, with volunteers being engaged in activities including habitat improvements and species surveys. The majority of this time (23,791 days) was on types of volunteering also likely to result in health and wellbeing benefits.

⁴ Note that these figures include actions that are underway and completed.

⁵ Note that species status includes both abundance and distribution.

⁶ Focal species in this context refers to species of high conservation status that are the focus of actions or sensitive to drivers of change that are a specific concern within an NIA.

⁷ Widespread species refers to species defined as such and monitored through the relevant English Biodiversity 2020 indicators, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/england-biodiversity-indicators>

⁸ An educational visit is defined as any organised visit to an NIA site or centre (e.g. visitor centre) which has an explicit educational objective.

- The NIA partnerships are improving ecosystem services; for example, in the three NIAs that reported it, a total of **9,189ha of habitat had been managed to improve water quality**⁹.
- Across the seven NIA partnerships that reported it, **the proportion of woodlands in active management increased by 3% between baseline (2012) and the end of Year 2** (compared to a 2% increase nationally over the same period).
- The NIA partnerships have been undertaking activities explicitly seeking to **deliver local economic benefits**. Six NIA partnerships have reported on their approaches to deliver economic benefits. They have used two main approaches: supporting the production and exchange of natural products, particularly wood fuel; and place-based marketing focussing on the character of the NIA and the natural environment.

Working with local communities, land managers and businesses

- **All the NIA partnerships have engaged with their local communities** through activities such as: organising and participating in events; engaging local people as volunteers; reaching out to schools and community groups to provide education and hands-on learning opportunities; and encouraging community involvement in decision making.
- The NIA partnerships have been **working with land managers and businesses** and bringing different types of organisation together. NIA partnerships have supported farmers in securing Environmental Stewardship funding and implementing sustainable land management practices. **Businesses are involved as partners in 10 of the NIA partnerships**.

Places of inspiration and innovation

- **All the NIA partnerships are engaged in activities that are either contributing to research or innovation**, including through working with universities.
- The NIA partnerships' **community engagement and volunteering activities have provided opportunities for learning and education** as well as knowledge exchange. All NIA partnerships have held events, created websites and developed publicity materials, such as newsletters.

Evaluation of biodiversity outcomes and impacts

At the end of Year 2 the key messages from the evaluation of outcomes and impacts for biodiversity include:

- **The NIA partnerships are making good progress: 73% of objectives in their funding agreements were assessed**¹⁰ **as being on, or ahead of, target**; 24% were assessed as not in line with original milestones but where satisfactory or good progress had been made; and only one objective across all the NIA partnerships was assessed as having no, little or only some progress.
- Just **over 10% of the total extent of priority habitat within all NIAs is subject to new management actions by NIA partners under the NIA programme**.
- **Lowland Grassland and Heath** is the predominant habitat grouping where new management actions by NIA partners under the NIA programme are underway or complete, with **nearly 18% of the total area of these habitats in the NIAs being subject to management**.
- **The NIA partnerships are actively improving data and knowledge of species status in their areas through species surveys**, and there are numerous examples where NIA partnerships have initiated habitat management to meet the needs of species.

⁹ This may include habitat also reported as being managed to create, restore, maintain or improve priority habitat.

¹⁰ Note that these assessments were based on a self-assessment of progress by all the NIA partnerships against their own objectives reported in their Progress Reports which the evaluation team analyses and categorised according to the progress made towards project outcomes and original milestones (see Appendix 2 to the main report for further details on the approach).

- The NIA partnerships have undertaken **research, tested approaches and shared experience in delivering and measuring habitat connectivity on a landscape scale.**

Evaluation of ecosystem services outcomes and impacts

At the end of Year 2 the key messages from the evaluation of outcomes and impacts for ecosystem services include:

- **The NIA partnerships are making reasonable progress: 55% of relevant objectives in their funding agreements were assessed as being on, or ahead of schedule;** the remaining 45% were behind schedule but there has been ‘satisfactory or good’ progress.
- **All the NIA partnerships have contributed to improved delivery of ecosystem services.** This has been achieved through activities explicitly seeking to achieve this outcome (e.g. increased carbon storage / sequestration) as well as an outcome of other activities, such as habitat creation and improvement which also affect ecosystem service provision. The NIA partnerships’ activities and projects have improved a range of:
 - **cultural services** by, for example, enhancing landscape character, increasing access to greenspace and facilitating understanding of the natural environment;
 - **supporting services** by, for example, improving conditions for pollinators; and
 - **regulating services** by, for example, changing land management to improve water quality and increase carbon storage and sequestration, and providing improved flood storage capacity and river flow management.
- **More sustainable agriculture and woodland management practices have delivered provisioning services** (e.g. food, timber). This has been achieved by contributing to an increase in the proportion of land under Environmental Stewardship and the proportion of woodland in active management (note these outcomes cannot be solely attributed to the work of NIA partnerships):
 - land under Environmental Stewardship has **increased by 10.3% across all the NIAs, compared to 7.8% across the whole of England over the period 2012 to 2014;** and
 - the proportion of woodlands in active management in the seven NIA partnerships that reported it has **increased by 3% over the period 2012 to 2014.** Over the same period the national (England) indicator for woodland in active management shows an increase in the percentage of woodland in active management of 2%.

Evaluation of social and economic wellbeing outcomes and impacts

At the end of Year 2 the key messages from the evaluation of outcomes and impacts for social and economic wellbeing include:

- **The NIA partnerships are making progress: 50% of relevant funding agreement objectives were assessed as being on, or ahead of schedule;** the remaining 50% were behind schedule but there has been ‘satisfactory or good’ progress.
- **In all NIAs, NIA partnership activities are resulting in social, economic and wellbeing benefits.** It was not possible to provide a detailed assessment of their scale or social distribution.
- For most NIA partnerships, **social and economic wellbeing benefits are considered welcome additions to the NIA partnerships’ work restoring and creating habitats.** There are likely to be under-reported benefits.
- All the NIA partnerships are **designing and delivering activities that will result in education and learning opportunities for children and for adults.**
- **Community engagement activities have led to the development of new social networks, or the strengthening of existing ones,** mostly as a benefit of volunteering.

- The NIA partnership activities that are delivering **spiritual, cultural and aesthetic** benefits include enhancing a sense of place and artistic enhancements / representations of local places.
- **Six NIA partnerships reported economic benefits**, for example through promoting bio-fuel markets.

Evaluation of Inputs and Process

At the end of Year 2 the key messages from the evaluation of inputs and processes include:

- **The NIA partnerships are generally on track in terms of delivery: 83% of relevant objectives in their funding agreements were assessed as being on, or ahead of schedule;** the remaining 17% were behind schedule but there has been 'satisfactory or good' progress.
- The NIA partnerships have generated added value¹¹: the original NIA government grant over the first two years was just over £4.5 million. Over the same period NIA partnerships have reported a **total added value of £15.7 million**. The ratio of added value to the grant funding is approximately 3.5, i.e. across the NIA partnerships on average **£3.50 of additional value** of which £2.26 was from non-public sources **was generated for each £1.00 of the original NIA government grant from Defra and Natural England**.
- The **largest contribution to added value came from NGOs / non-profit organisations (50% - £7.8 million)**. **Public sector organisations (national and local) have contributed a combined total of £5.6 million (36%), while the private sector has contributed £732,090 (4%)**. The remaining contribution came from financial value of the time given by volunteers (9%) and the academic sector (1%).
- The number of staff employed directly by NIA partnerships is relatively small¹². **Staff time and help in-kind made up 30% of total added value (equivalent to £4.7million)**.
- Of the **total amount of volunteering reported to the end of Year 2 (24,326 days), 88% (21,371 days) was under the general unskilled labour category**, 8% (1,921 days) was specialist skilled trained labour and 2% was specialist services and professional volunteering (approximately 500 days in each category).
- Based on interviews with the NIA partnerships, **the partnerships were assessed as functioning well**, with clear organisational and management structures in place, working and steering groups established and effectively managing challenges that have arisen.
- Key benefits of partnership working reported by the NIA partnerships include: **working towards consistent priorities across organisations that may not have coordinated activities before; sharing of data and knowledge; and the ability to reach-out to and involve local communities**.
- Based on interviews with the NIA partnerships, they have reported **on the overall benefit of the process of monitoring and evaluation**, despite some of the challenges.
- **There is evidence of research activity and innovation** across all the NIA partnerships, often in partnership with local universities, including on ecosystem services and practical habitat restoration or creation and/or land-management techniques.
- Across the NIAs there are ambitions to **continue the partnerships and to deliver outcomes after the end of the NIA funding period**. The NIA partnerships are all engaged in planning and discussions regarding sources of funding and delivery after 2015.

¹¹ Added value is defined here as any additional financial support over and above that provided by Defra and Natural England in the initial NIA scheme grant, and is based on financial information supplied by Natural England. It is likely that some of the financial support included as 'added value' will come from other public sector initiatives, including from within the Defra family.

¹² However most NIA partnerships have reported only on direct employment and thus these data do not consistently include contractors, sub-contractors or consultants.

Conclusions

This report provides a preliminary evaluation of the NIA programme and progress at end of the second of the three year funded period. The key conclusions that are emerging are:

Progress against the NIA partnerships' objectives

- The NIA partnerships have made 'good' or 'satisfactory' progress against their funding agreement milestones. At the end of the three year grant period the evaluation will analyse the NIA partnership' Progress Reports and other sources to review delivery against their objectives.
- There has been some variation in progress across the objectives when categorised under the M&E framework themes/sub-themes. At the end of the three year grant period, the evaluation will consider whether progress under these themes/sub-themes is more closely aligned to the original expectations.

Key cumulative progress and achievements

- The NIA partnerships' have delivered activities across all four main topics linked to their overall objectives: more, bigger, better and less fragmented places for wildlife; enhancing the benefits that nature provides for people; uniting local communities, land managers and businesses; and places of inspiration and innovation.
- The NIA partnerships' progress and achievements are also making a contribution to the Biodiversity 2020 outcomes. At the end of the three year grant period, the evaluation report on the contribution made.
- The NIA partnerships are all very different and have locally specific objectives and work programmes. This means that comparative and cumulative reporting is not always appropriate or possible. Where data is available, the Year 2 evaluation has indicated the scale of cumulative progress across common measures – for example at the end of Year 2 approximately 10% of the total area of priority habitat across all NIAs has been subject to NIA partnership activity under the NIA programme.
- Many of the NIA partnerships' activities will result in impacts that will only be fully realised in the long-term. It is a challenge for both existing monitoring systems and those developed specifically for the NIA programme to provide a direct measure of their outcomes and impacts during the three year funding period. The lessons from the NIA M&E Phase 2 project and dialogue between the NIA partnerships, Defra and Natural England will be used in considering the long term maintenance and uses of the M&E framework and online reporting tool.

Evaluation of the outcomes and impacts across the M&E framework themes and the extent to which any change can be attributed to NIA partnerships' activities

- The Year 2 Progress Report shows outcomes emerging across the biodiversity, ecosystem services and social and economic wellbeing themes. It is generally not yet possible to evaluate impacts due to time lags between action and impact. There are also some challenges to aggregating data across NIAs; and in determining the extent to which NIA partnership activity itself has contributed to improvements or changes.
- In Year 3 the evaluation team will be undertaking additional work to help determine whether some or all of the outcomes might have taken place in the absence of the NIA partnerships and the added value that the NIA partnerships have provided. This will use three agreed approaches: a counterfactual scenario based approach, will focus on gathering a range of insights from practitioners and stakeholders into what would have happened without the NIAs; an approach based on NIA data to determine trajectories both before and

after the NIAs were established, and an approach based on a comparison of the NIAs with similar non-NIA areas or landscapes.

- The NIA partnerships have engaged in activities to test innovative approaches, research and share knowledge, including in developing and measuring habitat connectivity or ecosystem services. All the NIA partnerships are developing knowledge or skills in these rapidly developing areas and they are forging links with universities and research institutions that should provide long term benefits. This knowledge and skills will be valuable for the future work of the NIA partnerships, and lessons will be useful to share amongst both the initial 12 NIA partnerships and in the longer term with any new NIAs.
- All of the initial NIA partnerships are involved in activities that are resulting in social, economic and wellbeing benefits. The qualitative data from the interviews and case studies that have been undertaken in Year 2 have helped to identify emerging outcomes for social and economic wellbeing.
- At the end of Year 2, the evidence shows that all NIA partnerships are working well and have been effective mechanisms for coordinating activities, sharing data and knowledge and helping to reach-out to and involve local communities. This provides some lessons for any future application of the approach by locally determined NIAs, as well as for other similar partnerships. The evaluation at the end of the three year grant period will consider the likely long-term benefits of the NIA programme and the NIA partnerships' plans for continuing their work to fund and deliver their visions to 2020.
- The benefits of the structured monitoring and evaluation framework reported, by the NIA partnerships, included: using the results of the M&E process to communicate change and achievements, as an input into decision-making; sharing data amongst partners and other organisations; and learning monitoring skills from other partners and building capacity, including within the local community. Challenges have occurred, such as the availability and processing of certain national datasets and some data collection and recording by partners, but generally the M&E process has been seen as beneficial by the NIA partnerships and has been more efficient in Year 2 than in Year 1.

Next steps

The end of the third year reporting period for the NIA partnerships coincides with the end of the three year grant funding period at the end of March 2015. The final reporting deadline for the M&E Phase 2 project is November 2015. The proposed timings for the activities are:

- **Online reporting tool** available for Year 3 reporting by the NIA partnerships from the end of November 2014.
- NIA partnerships to commence Year 3 **data entry** - November 2014.
- M&E Phase 2 project contractors proceed with **counterfactual work** during last quarter of 2014 and first quarter of 2015.
- A Year 3 **M&E workshop** to discuss reporting and reflective consideration of the NIA partnerships work will potentially be held in early 2015.
- NIA **Best Practice event** on habitat connectivity likely to be held in February 2015.
- End of Year 3 **reporting period** 31 March 2015.
- Some **national data** (e.g. BARs bulk upload, Environmental Stewardship) likely to be supplied after March 2015 – Natural England and M&E Phase 2 project contractors to agree approach to data entry and verifying analysis if some NIA partnerships are not available to undertake these tasks.
- Depending on NIA partnerships availability post March 2015 to review / validate Year 3 reporting, possibly invite interested NIA partnerships to form a small **review group** for this

purpose.

- Year 3 **data analysis and validation / quality assurance** - ongoing February – June 2015.
- Drafting of and feedback on **overall NIA evaluation report** and other deliverables – June– October 2015.
- **Final overall NIA evaluation report** and other project deliverables - November 2015.

1. Introduction

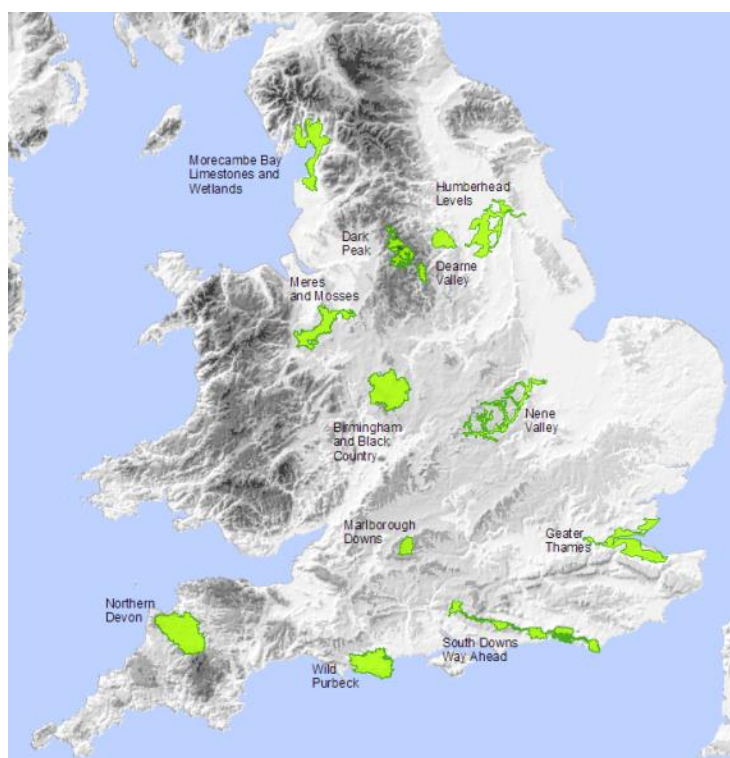
1.1 Policy background

The establishment of the Nature Improvement Area (NIA) programme was announced in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) – *Natural choice – securing the value of nature* (HM Government, 2011a). NIAs are large, discrete areas where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment that are intended to deliver a ‘step change’ in nature conservation. The programme takes forward the recommendations of the Lawton review, *Making space for nature* (Lawton *et al.*, 2010).

The aims of the NIA partnerships are to:

- **become much better places for wildlife** – creating more and better-connected habitats over large areas which provide the space for wildlife to thrive and adapt to climate change;
- **deliver for people as well as wildlife** – through enhancing a wide range of benefits that nature provides us, such as recreation opportunities, flood protection, cleaner water and carbon storage; and
- **unite local communities, land managers and businesses through a shared vision for a better future for people and wildlife.** The hope is that they will become places of inspiration, that are loved by current and future generations.

Figure 1.1: Location of the 12 initial NIAs



Source: Natural England¹³

The 12 initial NIA partnerships¹⁴ started work in April 2012, following a national competition for a share of £7.5 million of government funding. The selected NIAs are partnerships of local authorities,

¹³ Natural England NIA boundary data on Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (STRM) hill-shaded relief base map

local communities and landowners, the private sector and conservation organisations. The NIA Grant Scheme provides funding to the 12 initial NIA partnerships and is operating over a three year period from 2012 to 2015. The NIA programme promotes actions at a landscape scale to improve biodiversity, ecosystem services and people's connections with their natural environment.

1.2 Context of this Progress Report

This is the Year 2 (2013-14) Progress Report produced as part of the second phase of the NIA Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) project¹⁵. It follows the Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report which was published in September 2013 (CEP, 2013). The Year 2 Progress Report presents an overview of the NIA partnerships' progress during their two years of operation, both individually and aggregated as an overall programme. The Year 2 Progress Report also starts to consider the potential longer-term 'legacy' impacts of the NIA programme that may be realised beyond the NIA partnerships' three year grant funding period. These impacts will be more fully considered by the evaluation at the end of the three year programme, which will be reported towards the end of 2015.

The Year 1 Progress Report mainly focussed on inputs to the NIA partnerships and their initial processes and activities. This Year 2 Progress Report includes a greater emphasis on outputs and any emerging outcomes and impacts (see sub-section 1.4). The NIA partnerships are more advanced in the delivery of their Business Plans (and associated funding agreements) and have been undertaking more 'on-the-ground' activities in Year 2. In addition, improvements have been made to the reporting of the NIA partnerships' monitoring and evaluation indicators to enhance the comparability of the data available in Year 2.

The Year 2 Progress Report reports on:

- the NIA partnerships' ongoing progress towards their own objectives;
- the key cumulative progress and achievements made by the NIA partnerships by the end of Year 2;
- an evaluation of the activities within the NIAs across the M&E themes (see sub-section 1.3.2) and the extent to which any change can be attributed to NIA partnerships' activities; and
- emerging evidence of wider outcomes and longer-term impacts.

The Year 1 Progress Report provided an overview of the 12 initial NIA partnerships, including their key characteristics (such as their area, broad habitat types and the area of environmental designations). These aspects remain largely unchanged so readers should refer to the Year 1 Report for this information⁴.

The Year 2 Progress Report begins reflecting on the wider learning from the NIA programme, such as: the ability of NIA partnerships to help deliver improvements to existing wildlife sites and to enhance the local ecological network; lessons for landscape-scale delivery of natural environment activities; challenges and opportunities of partnership led approaches; and lessons learned in relation to monitoring and evaluation.

1.2.1 Intended audience

The principal audiences for this report are the 12 initial NIA partnerships and relevant Government bodies including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Natural England, the Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Department for Communities and Local

¹⁴ See Figure 1.1.

¹⁵ Defra Research Project WC1061 which Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP), with its partners GeoData Institute and Cascade Consulting, were commissioned by Defra, in collaboration with Natural England, to undertake in March 2012. <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=2&ProjectID=18555>.

Government. Other intended audiences include those involved or with an interest in landscape-scale conservation initiatives, such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), local authorities and the academic community involved in research related to the natural environment and the benefits it provides. Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), local planning authorities and others considering supporting locally determined NIAs in addition to the original 12 NIAs may also be interested.

1.2.2 Report structure

The structure of the Year 2 Progress Report draws on the steps in the logic model (i.e. inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts - see sub-section 1.4.2) and the themes in the M&E framework (i.e. biodiversity, ecosystem services and social & economic benefits & wellbeing and partnership working - see sub-section 1.3.2).

Figure 1.2 provides a guide to readers on how the information is organised in the report and which steps in the logic model and which themes in the M&E framework are covered by which sections.

Figure 1.2: Structure of the report and links to the logic model and M&E framework themes

Section 2: Overview of Progress and Achievements	<p>Focus of the section: <i>Overview of the evidence</i> of the NIA partnerships' progress and achievements by the end of the second year of operation.</p> <p>Scope / themes covered: Organised by the four overall objectives of the NIAs and covering all four M&E framework themes.</p>
Section 3: Evaluation of Biodiversity Outcomes and Impacts	<p>Focus of the sections: <i>Analysis of the evidence</i> in Section 2 within the evaluation framework, including the evaluation questions.</p> <p>Logic model steps: Focussed on the contribution the NIA partnerships have made to <i>outcomes and impacts</i>.</p> <p>Scope / themes covered: Across three of the M&E framework themes (<i>biodiversity, ecosystem services and social & economic benefits & wellbeing</i>).</p>
Section 4: Evaluation of Ecosystem Services Outcomes and Impacts	
Section 5: Evaluation of Social & economic benefits & wellbeing Outcomes and Impacts	
Section 6: Evaluation of Inputs and Process	<p>Focus of the section: <i>Analysis of the evidence</i> in Section 2 within the the evaluation framework, including the evaluation questions.</p> <p>Logic model steps: Focussed on the <i>inputs and processes / activities</i> supporting delivery of the NIA partnerships.</p> <p>Scope / themes covered: Includes the <i>partnership working</i> theme within the evaluation framework. Inputs include financial and human resources; and processes include management, planning knowledge sharing and monitoring and evaluation of the partnerships.</p>
Section 7: Conclusion and Next Steps	<p>Focus of the section: Drawing conclusions from the findings of the evaluation at the end of Year 2 and providing an overview of the steps planned for Year 3.</p> <p>Scope / themes covered: All four M&E framework themes.</p>

In addition, the report includes two appendices which provide further information on the indicators selected and completed by the NIA partnerships and the data sources and methods of analysis used. The report is also supported by a separate annex which presents a literature review on the social and economic benefits associated with natural environment initiatives and their contribution to wellbeing. This work was undertaken as part of second phase of the NIA M&E project and has informed the Year 2 evaluation (see sections 5 and 6).

1.3 Summary of the monitoring and evaluation requirements and process

1.3.1 NIA monitoring and evaluation requirements

The 12 initial NIA partnerships report on progress quarterly, including financial monitoring and progress against their agreed objectives and outputs. The NIA partnerships undertake M&E, reporting both qualitative and quantitative information, following an M&E framework (see sub-section 1.3.2)¹⁶. In addition, the NIA partnerships use an online reporting tool (see sub-section 1.3.3) specifically developed to record data required by the M&E framework.

1.3.2 NIA monitoring and evaluation framework

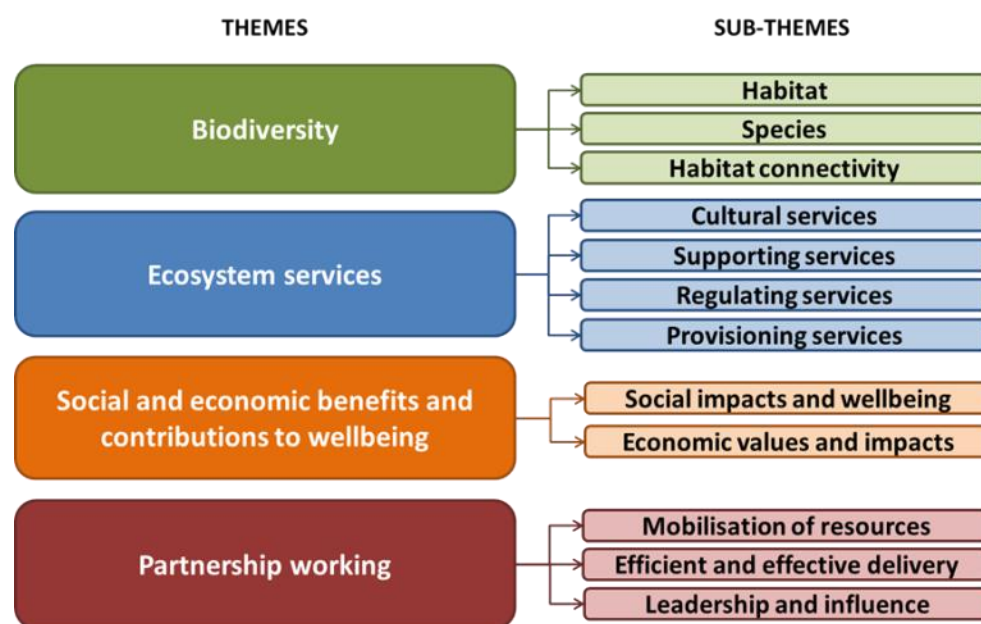
Phase one of the M&E work developed a draft M&E Framework for the NIA partnerships. This M&E Framework, and the indicators and protocols included within it, was reviewed and updated during Year 2. The review drew on feedback from the NIA partnerships and research undertaken as part of the M&E Phase 2 project into specific themes, such as ecosystem services and habitat connectivity. Key changes to the indicator protocols included: the introduction of a new core comparative indicator of habitat connectivity; clarification of indicator descriptions and methods; minor amendments to some of the indicator titles; and the provision of additional information and guidance including FAQs¹⁷ for the use of BARS (Biodiversity Action Reporting System) and the use of local community surveys.

The updated M&E Framework (CEP, 2014a) includes a set of principles, relevant roles and responsibilities, the overall approach to M&E and an overview of information sources. It was accompanied by updates to the online reporting tool (see sub-section 1.3.3).

The M&E Framework is structured by four themes (biodiversity; ecosystem services; social and economic benefits; and partnership working) and a number of sub-themes (see Figure 1.3). A menu of 36 indicators was developed, each with a supporting protocol to guide the NIA partnerships in their monitoring and reporting activities.

¹⁶ More details on the NIA M&E requirements and process can be found on the NIA webpages: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-improvement-areas-improved-ecological-networks/nature-improvement-areas-about-the-programme>

¹⁷ Frequently Asked Questions

Figure 1.3: NIA M&E indicator themes and sub-themes

The framework and indicators enable the NIA partnerships to measure progress towards their objectives and wider impacts. Indicators are used as they are a way of describing complex factors and provide a more practical and economical way to track outcomes than recording every possible variable. Ideally, the indicators would focus on measuring the outcomes and impacts resulting from the NIA partnerships' activities. This is not always practicable, for example, due to lack of available data and the time lag before outcomes and impacts might become apparent and measurable. Some of the indicator monitoring involves measuring processes and outputs (see sub-section 1.4.2).

The framework includes seven 'core' indicators that have been adopted by all the NIA partnerships, while the other indicators are optional. In addition, NIA partnerships can develop their own supplementary local indicators. The NIA partnerships are not expected to select and monitor all the indicators, rather, in addition to the core indicators, they can choose from the menu of optional and local indicators across the four themes and select the indicators most relevant and suited to their specific objectives.

Appendix 1 shows the indicators selected and the data entered in the online reporting tool in Year 2 by the NIA partnerships. In total, 215 indicators were selected by the 12 initial NIAs with data entered for 201 of them.

1.3.3 The online reporting tool

An online reporting tool¹⁸ (Natural England, 2014b), was developed by the M&E Phase 1 project¹⁹ to provide a structured data-entry tool for the recording, storing, reporting and sharing of data and information relating to NIA partnership activities and outputs. The online tool was reviewed and updated for reporting in Year 2. This drew on the NIAs' experiences of using the online reporting tool in Year 1. Key changes made to the online reporting tool were focused on improving its accessibility and usability for the NIA partnerships, including: the user registration process; to reflect

¹⁸ See: <http://nia.naturalengland.org.uk/index>

¹⁹ Defra Research Project WC1029: Developing a framework for design, monitoring and evaluating pilot Nature Improvement Areas: Phase 1 Scoping Study.
[http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&ProjectID=17960&FromSearch=Y&Publisher=1&SearchText=nature improvement&SortString=ProjectCode&SortOrder=Asc&Paging=10#Description](http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&ProjectID=17960&FromSearch=Y&Publisher=1&SearchText=nature%20improvement&SortString=ProjectCode&SortOrder=Asc&Paging=10#Description)

the updates to the indicator protocols; and improvements to the data export function. Generally the changes did not affect the comparability of the data between years. Where there were some clarifications to baseline expectations or calculation methods that required alterations to baseline or Year 1 data, the NIA partnerships were provided with specific guidance to amend these data in line with clarified protocol guidance.

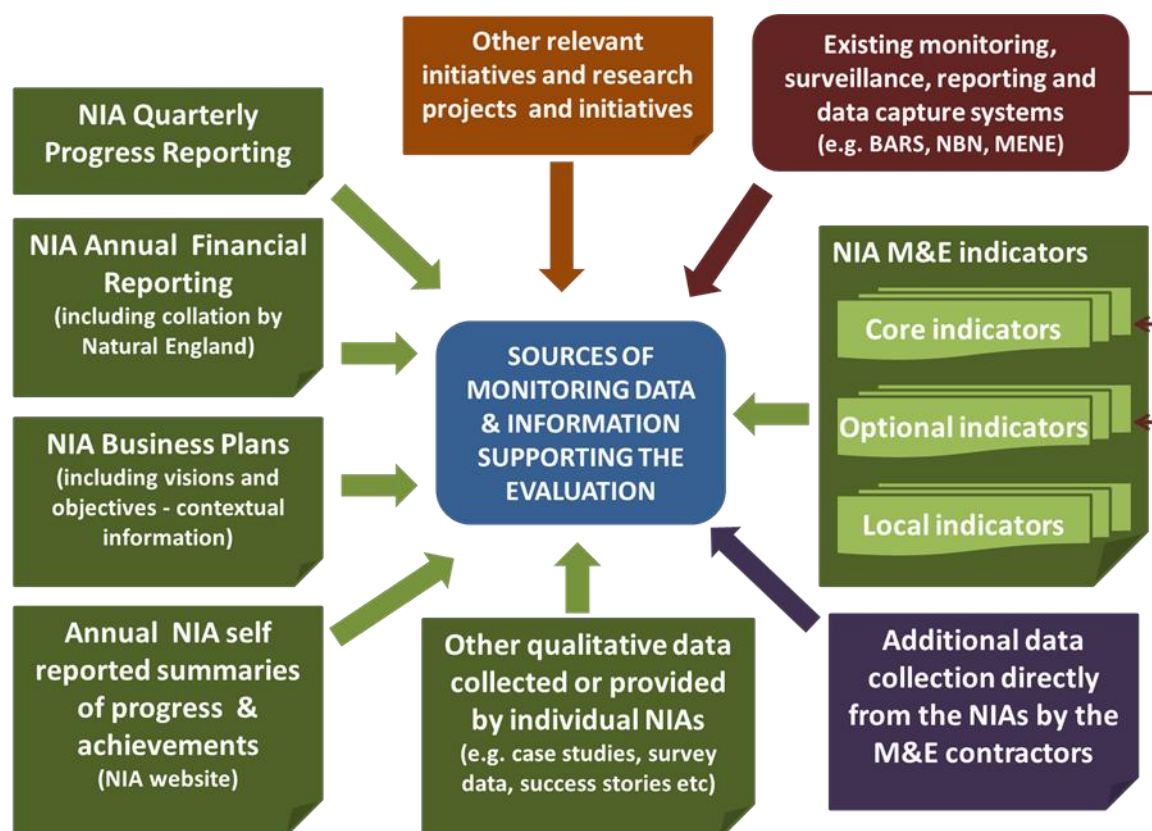
The online reporting tool is structured around the M&E framework and associated indicator protocols and is designed to enable the NIA partnerships to record their achievements relating to each indicator each year. The tool is also intended to complement rather than duplicate other existing systems of data recording, such as BARS.

The online reporting tool has a 'Report' page which uses a 'tick-box' interface to enable anyone to generate an online or downloadable data report by selecting any combination of NIA partnerships, M&E themes and indicators (e.g. it is possible to view all indicators for a specific NIA partnership, or a specific theme or indicator across all NIA partnerships). The report page is publically accessible so reports can be viewed or downloaded by anybody using the online tool.

1.3.4 Information and data sources

A variety of qualitative and quantitative information is being gathered for monitoring of the NIA partnerships. The information supporting this Year 2 evaluation and this report was drawn on from several sources, in addition to the online tool, as illustrated in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.4: Sources of monitoring data and information supporting the evaluation



Key developments in M&E data management and data sources during Year 2 include:

- updates to all the M&E indicator protocols (see sub-section 1.4.2);
- developments in the online reporting tool (see sub-section 1.3.2);

- the completion of two separate semi-structured interviews with the NIA partnerships²⁰ focussing on:
 - NIA research activities and innovation (December 2013 – January 2014); and
 - partnership working and social, economic and wellbeing benefits (April – May 2014);
- compilation of case studies relating to social, economic and wellbeing benefits developed by eight NIA partnerships.

1.4 Overall objectives and approach to the evaluation

1.4.1 Objectives of the evaluation

The overall objectives of the NIA M&E Phase 2 project, as set by Defra and Natural England, are:

- to assess the individual and aggregated contribution of the 12 initial NIA partnerships towards meeting biodiversity commitments in the NEWP, as well as outcomes in Biodiversity 2020 (Defra, 2011) and other national and international objectives, targets and commitments²¹; and
- to gather evidence of approaches used within the NIA partnerships and their outcomes, to maximise learning from them and build a practical evidence base to inform future landscape-scale initiatives about the NIA approach.

1.4.2 Overall approach

The overall approach to the evaluation of the NIA programme draws on guidance in the Magenta Book (HM Government, 2011b). A logic model²² approach was used to provide the overall framework within which the evaluation was designed. The logic model (see Figure 1.5) is used to describe the relationship between the inputs, processes/activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the individual NIA partnerships or the NIA programme overall. This provides the framework for understanding and systematically testing the assumed relationships between the individual and collective outcomes (both short term and longer term impacts) of the NIA partnerships with the inputs, activities and processes.

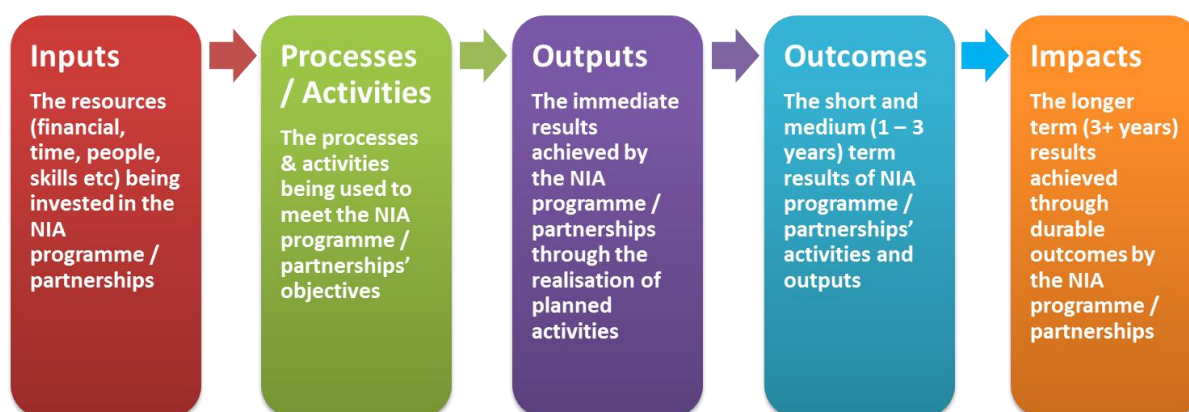
The approach is a combination of a process and impact evaluation. The evaluation seeks to understand how the NIA partnerships are delivering their objectives (the process aspect of the evaluation of inputs and processes / activities), as well as how much they are delivering for biodiversity, ecosystem services and social and economic wellbeing (the impact aspect of the evaluation focusing on outputs, outcomes and impacts). See sub-section 1.2.2 for further guidance on how the information is organised in this report in relation to the steps in the logic model.

²⁰ Note: the interviewees agreed that quotes could be used from the interviews; but this was on the understanding that they would be anonymised. Therefore, where quotes are used in this report an NIA code [e.g. NIA 1] is used to identify them rather than the name of the interviewee or NIA partnership.

²¹ e.g. the UK Governments' wider ambitions for economic growth and the expansion of the green economy; targets agreed at the Tenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity; and the broader aims and intent of the European Landscape Convention.

²² A logic model seeks to understand the complexity of a policy intervention and the relationship between an intervention's inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

Figure 1.5: The Logic Model for the NIA programme evaluation



The Magenta Book has been used for guidance on potential methods to use as part of an evaluation, in particular for process and impact evaluations. This includes methods for both data collection and analysis. The evaluation of the NIA programme is using a variety of methods of data collection, including interviews, case studies and workshops. This is in addition to the data drawn from existing data monitoring systems and the self-reporting of indicators and data by the NIA partnerships (see sub-section 1.3.4). The analysis performed for quantitative data included aggregating data across NIA partnerships, calculating change over time, comparing NIA and national trends, as well as some qualitative methods (see Appendix 2 for further details).

The use of evaluation questions is applied here based on the description in the Magenta Book. The logic model guided the development of specific evaluation questions under each of the M&E themes (see sub-section 1.3.2), and also helped to identify the evidence required to answer the evaluation questions. These questions are presented at the start of each evaluation section (see sections 3, 4, 5 and 6).

The evaluation questions related to biodiversity, ecosystem services and social, economic and wellbeing outcomes and impacts (see sections 3, 4 and 5) were developed at two levels of detail:

- Firstly, at the level of each M&E framework sub-theme a headline evaluation question was developed. These questions took the form of asking, overall, if the NIA partnerships had contributed to a change in each sub-theme. For example, for the M&E framework sub-theme of cultural ecosystem services the overall evaluation question asks: *'to what extent have NIAs contributed to improved cultural services?'*
- Secondly, reflecting the specific indicators included in the M&E framework (which represents a key aspect of the evidence used in the evaluation) and the topics covered by each sub-theme, sub-questions were developed to enable a more detailed evaluation of the evidence. These considered both change within an NIA and the extent to which the NIA partnerships contributed to these changes. Taking the example of cultural ecosystem services, an example question asks: *'What improvement has been made to the extent of land managed to maintain and / or enhance landscape character in NIAs; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?'*

The outcome and impact evaluation questions show that for most outputs, outcomes, and impacts, the NIA partnership activities are likely to be only one mechanism potentially influencing change in their area. The questions ask: to what extent has a factor changed and the extent to which the NIA partnership/s have contributed to any observed change.

The inputs and processes evaluation questions (see section 6) were developed to help understand the range of factors supporting and influencing the NIA partnerships' implementation: income and

expenditure; effective partnership working, planning and management; monitoring and evaluation; research and innovation; and the support of Natural England, Defra and other agencies. In the case of inputs and processes, evaluation sub-questions seek to explore in more detail these aspects, for example relating to partnership structures, management and planning processes and information / knowledge sharing and exchange.

It is anticipated that understanding the outcomes and impacts of the NIA partnerships will be challenging at the end of Year 3. This is partly due to confounding variables and the limited time available to realise the desired outcomes and impacts of the NIA programme. The focus may still be on processes and outputs at the end of Year 3, but outputs and impacts will be reported as far as possible.

Understanding the baseline and counterfactual

The baseline and counterfactual are important to the evaluation as they describe the context within which the impact of the NIA programme can be measured and evaluated. A counterfactual - i.e. in this case what would have happened if individual NIA partnerships or the NIA programme as a whole were not established - is, as acknowledged by the Magenta Book, frequently a very challenging part of impact evaluation.

The main work to attribute causes of changes within the NIA areas so far has been through interviews with the NIA partnerships which included some exploration on what would have happened without the programme.

In Year 3, the M&E project will include research to increase understanding of the difference the NIA partnerships have made over and above what would have happened anyway without their introduction (see section 7).

The baseline provides information on the situation before the NIA partnerships started work. The M&E framework indicators include a requirement to record a baseline using available data. The baseline year may differ between indicators depending on data availability. The challenge for the evaluation is to attribute change within an NIA to the NIA partnerships' activities as opposed to other factors or delivery mechanisms. Some M&E indicators explicitly measure just the NIA partnerships' activities, whilst others are more contextual and record change in the NIA generally. The evaluation is working with the data available and where necessary highlights any assumptions and uncertainties with the data used and findings drawn from it.

2. Overview of Progress and Achievements

Key messages from Year 2: Overview of progress and achievements

Creating more, bigger, better and less fragmented places for wildlife

- The NIA partnerships under the NIA programme **have managed or are currently managing** a total of **7,451ha to create or restore priority habitats**; and **11,342ha to maintain or improve the condition of priority habitats**.
- Actions are also currently planned (at end of Year 2) to **create or restore a further 2,889ha of priority habitat**; and **maintain or improve the condition of a further 2,518ha**.
- The NIA partnerships have also reported on actions under the NIA programme to create or improve boundary and linear priority habitats (such as hedgerows, rivers and riparian buffers, canals and wood margins). A total of **87km of boundary and linear priority habitat has been restored or created**; and **183km have been managed to maintain or improve its condition**. Further work is also planned for **18km of boundary and linear priority habitat**.
- The NIA partnerships are actively improving **data and knowledge of species status in their areas through species surveys**, and NIA partnerships have **integrated the needs of species through habitat management**.
- **Discussion and sharing of experience among the NIA partnerships of the comparative indicator of connectivity and its use in the consideration of conservation actions appears to have been a useful outcome**. NIA partnerships have also undertaken research and tested approaches to delivering and measuring habitat connectivity.

Enhancing the benefits that nature provides for people

- The NIA partnerships have worked to improve access to and enhance people's experiences of the natural environment; for example four NIA partnerships have reported that a total length of **10.5km of public rights of way and permissive paths have been improved or created**, with **access improved to a further 532km**.
- All the NIA partnerships have designed and delivered activities with the explicit objective of providing education and learning benefits. In the three NIAs that reported on this at the end Year 2, a total of **11,739 people had participated in educational visits²³**.
- A total of **24,326 days of volunteer time** was reported, with volunteers being engaged in activities including habitat improvements and species surveys. The majority of this time (23,791 days) involved types of volunteering likely to result in health and wellbeing benefits.
- The NIA partnerships are improving ecosystem services; for example, in the three NIAs that reported it at the end of Year 2, a total of **9,189ha of habitat had been managed to improve water quality²⁴**. Across the seven NIA partnerships that reported it, the proportion of woodlands in active management increased by 3% (compared to 2% nationally over the same period).

Working with local communities, land managers and businesses

- **All the NIA partnerships have engaged with their local communities** through activities such as: organising and participating in events; engaging local people as volunteers; reaching out to schools and community groups to provide education and hands-on learning opportunities; and

²³ An educational visit is defined as any organised visit to an NIA site or centre (e.g. visitor centre) which has an explicit educational objective.

²⁴ This may include habitat also reported as being managed to create, restore, maintain or improve priority habitat.

encouraging community involvement in decision-making.

Becoming places of inspiration and innovation

- **All the NIA partnerships are engaged in activities that are either contributing to research or are innovative.** Examples of NIA partnerships working with universities include a PhD student from Sheffield University undertaking research in Humberhead Levels on ecosystem services in the NIA, and a study in Birmingham and Black Country by Wolverhampton University that has helped to monitor and improve restoration techniques related to grasslands / meadows.

2.1 Introduction

This section presents an overview of the progress and achievements in the 12 initial NIAs by the end of the second year of the grant funding period (i.e. between April 2012 and March 2014). It focusses on what the NIA partnerships have delivered under four main topics linked to their overall objectives:

- creating more, bigger, better and less fragmented places for wildlife;
- enhancing the benefits that nature provides for people;
- working with local communities, landowners and businesses; and
- becoming places of inspiration and innovation.

The progress and achievements reported here should be considered within the following context:

- The NIA partnerships are all very different and have locally specific objectives and work programmes. This means that comparative and cumulative reporting is not always appropriate or possible.
- Factors beyond the NIA partnerships' control can influence their ability to deliver actions, such as weather conditions or where delivery is partly reliant on other organisations.
- The NIA partnerships are not responsible for all activity in their areas, and it is not always possible to attribute change directly to the activity of an NIA partnership. In some cases contextual indicators are used to provide a broad measure of change within the areas covered by the NIA partnerships. Work is being undertaken in Year 3 to help understand the difference that NIA partnerships will have made compared to what would have happened anyway.
- The work of the NIA partnerships is resulting in a range of benefits, in addition to the main purposes of the programme. The monitoring and evaluation framework was not designed to capture all of these additional benefits so the progress and achievements reported may not represent the full scale and breadth of benefits.
- Many of the NIA partnerships' activities will result in impacts that will only be fully realised in the long-term. At this relatively early stage, it is often only possible to monitor and report on the completion of actions to provide an indication of achievement and the direction of change, rather than being able to measure the final outcomes or impacts.
- All the NIA partnerships have submitted data using the online reporting tool (see sub-section 1.3.3), and although these data have been quality assured, there is some variation in the interpretation of the indicator protocols and the quality of data.

This section utilises data and information recorded by each of the NIAs partnerships in the online reporting tool, the NIA partnership quarterly Progress Reports and financial claim forms submitted to Natural England. It also uses national datasets provided by Natural England, and information

collected from interviews with the NIA partnerships to explore research and innovation, social and economic wellbeing, and partnership working.

The selected examples of NIA partnership activities presented in this section are illustrative rather than comprehensive. Any difference in the number of examples across NIA partnerships should not be interpreted as being illustrative of more, or less, activity or ambition in different NIAs.

2.2 More, bigger, better and less fragmented places for wildlife

2.2.1 More, bigger and better places for wildlife

The habitat actions reported by NIA partnerships under the NIA programme at the end of Year 2²⁵ (see Figure 2.1) include:

- A total of **11,342ha of priority habitat has been managed to maintain or improve its condition**²⁶. Of this, management actions were ongoing on 89% (10,070ha) at the end of Year 2, with projects completed on 11% (1,272ha).
- A total of **7,451ha has been managed to restore or create priority habitats**²⁷. Of this, actions were underway on 85% (6,346ha) and completed on 15% (1,105ha).
- Within the NIAs there are currently **planned actions for maintenance and improvement of priority habitat condition on a further 2,889ha, and 2,518ha for restoration and creation**.

Reported actions on boundary and linear priority habitats²⁸, included:

- Actions to **maintain or improve the condition of 183km of boundary and linear priority habitat**. Almost all of these actions (99%) are reported as being underway, with 1% completed.
- Actions to **restore or create 87km of boundary and linear habitat**. Of these actions 16% are reported to be underway and 84% completed.
- Planned actions were reported to **maintain or improve the condition of 8km of linear habitat, and to restore or create 10km of linear habitat**.

Six NIA partnerships reported on site based actions²⁹, with a total of 239 sites with actions underway (160 sites) or completed (69 sites). Actions are reported to be planned on a further 20 sites in NIAs.

²⁵ Note: it is not possible to determine from the online reporting what proportion of actions currently underway or complete may have started before the NIA grant funding period.

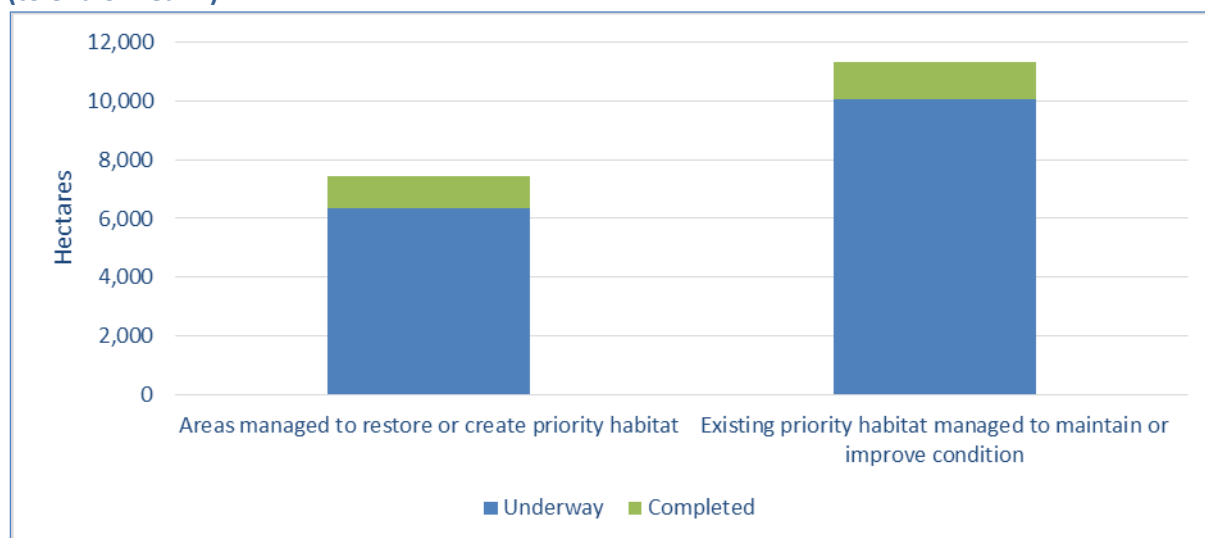
²⁶ The total area of the NIAs is 513,144ha, so this represents approximately 2.2% of total land area.

²⁷ This represents approximately 1.5% of total land area in the NIAs.

²⁸ These includes hedgerows, rivers and riparian buffers, canals and wood margins

²⁹ Site based actions were reported in relation to specific sites (e.g. ponds), without an area of intervention provided.

Figure 2.1: Area and status of actions to restore / create and maintain / improve priority habitat (to end of Year 2)



Source: Data recorded by NIA partnerships in the online reporting tool

Box 2.1 presents selected examples of NIA partnership activities to create, restore and enhance habitats. Note that many of these activities deliver multi-functional benefits, in addition to the direct benefits of habitat creation, restoration and enhancement. For example, benefits can include: improved habitat connectivity; development and enhancement of recreational corridors; development of open space; and the enhancement of ecosystem services.

Box 2.1: Selected examples of activities to create, restore and enhance habitats

- **Restoration of lowland calcareous grassland across five focal areas** (totalling approximately 1000ha), with re-establishment of diverse grassland species (South Downs).
- **Creating two meadows on former industrial sites using different sources of green hay** (Birmingham and Black Country). These activities also aim to increase the number of species, and the work is monitored by a PhD student associated with the project from University of Wolverhampton.
- **93ha of Lowland heathland restoration and connectivity enhancements** (Wild Purbeck).
- NIA partnerships are also involved in other activities to support habitat improvements and ensure appropriate long-term habitat management, such as holding **biodiversity and land management seminars for landowners** (Marlborough Downs), and **providing landowner advice alongside improvement actions** related to flood alleviation and habitat management (Humberhead Levels).



Meadow creation, Birmingham and Black Country. Photo credit: Simon Atkinson

Source: Online tool data entry and narrative, Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports and BARS Actions records.

2.2.2 Less fragmented places for wildlife

Activities to improve connectivity between habitats include the creation, improvement, restoration and maintenance of habitats within the landscape matrix of habitats (creating habitat ‘stepping stones’³⁰), including boundary and linear habitats. The habitat activities reported in sub-section 2.2.1 have the potential to contribute to the creation of less fragmented habitats, even where this is not a specific objective.

Efforts have also been made to enhance ecological networks, such as through re-wetting and raising water levels on lowland raised bogs (Humberhead Levels). Other activities include supporting functional connectivity³¹, such as restoration of traditional grazing marshes (Greater Thames Marshes).

A particular focus of activity has been on exploring appropriate measures of ecological connectivity, including ones which can be aggregated across the different ecosystems and habitats within the NIAs. A range of approaches have been used by NIAs partnerships. These are based on the principle of reporting on habitat features considered relevant to connectivity in the local context of an NIA and then weighting habitat creation, restoration, and improvement based on relative contributions to ecological connectivity. The results of the NIA partnerships’ testing of this approach will help refine the measure and inform future indicator development.

Habitat connectivity has been an area of research and innovation by the NIA partnerships, often working jointly with research and academic institutions (see sub-section 2.5 for further details). This has included work on: the role and nature of connectivity within the NIAs; how connectivity should be measured; and whether connectivity is always the appropriate conservation strategy. NIA partnership research and reporting has added to the understanding of how to deliver improved connectivity and how to measure change³².

Box 2.2 presents selected examples of activities reported by the NIA partnerships to improve habitat connectivity.

Box 2.2: Selected examples of activities to create less fragmented areas for wildlife

- **Improved functional connectivity through the restoration of 158ha traditional grazing marsh** on agricultural land (Greater Thames Marshes).
- **Creation of 2.92ha of wildflower corridor** linking wildlife sites, ponds, woodland and other semi-natural habitat (Marlborough Downs)
- **Restoration of a mosaic of 25ha of new heath** and creation of 23ha of new oak-birch woodland, ride and glade creation and new open ground habitats (Dark Peak).
- **46ha of riparian and river restoration to improve habitat corridor for water voles.** Arable field margin creation over 50ha and wet woodland creation over c 100ha (Meres and Mosses).
- Using **habitat opportunity mapping** as the basis for working with landowners and farmers to implement a coordinated delivery plan and habitat creation and restoration targets (Nene Valley).

Source: Online tool data entry and narrative, Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports and NIA website records.

³⁰ Patches of habitat located / created in sufficient proximity to create connectivity and to link larger areas of continuous habitat.

³¹ Functional connectivity refers to the ability of species typical of a type of habitat being able to move within and between habitat patches in an area.

³² For example: the Dearne Valley Ecological Network modelling with Forest Research which includes mapping the ecological network (GIS) and the effects of changing land use on connectivity; Meres and Mosses are preparing a paper on the practical application of the Lawton Principles within the NIA with a focus on connectivity; and Wild Purbeck have worked with a Landscape Permeability Tool to inform locations for restoration works and achieve increased habitat connectivity.

2.2.3 Species

The NIA partnerships have delivered activities to enhance the status³³ of focal³⁴ and widespread³⁵ species. Box 2.3 presents selected examples of activities reported by the NIA partnerships to enhance and protect species.

Box 2.3: Selected examples of activities to enhance and protect species

- **Introduction of native species sourced from old woodlands.** Two separate meadows created from two different SSSI donor sites. Installation of bird and bat boxes (Birmingham and Black Country).
- Extensive use of **direct planting and seeding to enhance plant species diversity:** seed mixes, direct planting of plugs, hay spreading, and hydroseeding³⁶ (Dark Peak).
- **Water vole habitat creation:** over 800m of linear site improvements for water vole communities (Meres and Mosses).
- **River restoration targeted at fish and invertebrate populations:** over 1.1km of river has been enhanced, including action relating to improved weir design to reduce impact on species movements (Nene Valley).
- **NIA action plan to help protect the Freshwater Pearl Mussel** with restoration of channels and control of nutrients and sediments through Catchment Sensitive Farming programme and landowner advisory visits (Northern Devon).
- Actions including **scrub and invasive tree removal, fencing to control access, intended to support Adonis Blue and Duke of Burgundy butterflies** on seven sites covering 1,397ha (South Downs).

Source: Online tool data entry and narrative, Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports and NIA website records.

Six NIA partnerships³⁷ reported on the status of focal species and four NIA partnerships³⁸ reported on widespread species, with 117 focal species and 82 widespread species recorded³⁹. This recorded the change in status (decreasing, stable, increasing, unknown) of local populations of focal and widespread species from baseline (start of NIA activity) to the end of Year 2. Within the six NIA partnerships that reported on focal species⁴⁰:

- The status of 39% of focal species was reported to be ‘increasing’, compared with 15% at baseline.
- The percentage of focal species recorded with a ‘decreasing’ status fell from 26% at baseline to 18% in Year 2, and the percentage reported as having an ‘unknown’ status reduced from 44% at baseline to 26% in Year 2.

³³ Note that species status includes both abundance and distribution.

³⁴ Focal species in this context refers to species of high conservation status that are the focus of actions or sensitive to drivers of change that are a specific concern within an NIA.

³⁵ Widespread species refers to species defined as such and monitored through the relevant English Biodiversity 2020 indicators (Defra, 2013)

³⁶ Hydroseeding (hydraulic mulch seeding) is a planting process that uses a slurry of seed and mulch which are applied together, typically through spraying.

³⁷ Birmingham and Black Country; Dearne Valley; Meres and Mosses; Nene Valley; Northern Devon; and Wild Purbeck.

³⁸ Humberhead Levels; Marlborough Downs; Meres and Mosses; Dark Peak.

³⁹ The focal and widespread species reporting recognises that it is not possible to fully attribute change in status over the life of an NIA partnership directly to NIA partnership activity. Changes in status may be subject to many other influences and to lags and external factors outside the influence of the NIA partnership, such as weather, disease, recruitment, dispersal or predation. The monitoring and recording by NIA partnerships offers a picture of the status within each area. NIA partnership survey data has typically been fed to Record Centres or to the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) directly and represent a contribution to an improved information base from which to assess change.

An unknown status in most cases reflects the fact that three years of data will be required to assess change in certain species' status, so where an NIA partnership started recording in Year 1 the status is expected to be reported at the end of Year 3.

⁴⁰ Note that there is a risk of survey bias in relation to surveying species status. From the available data it is not possible to distinguish between real changes in species status / numbers as opposed to increased survey effort where there is an incomplete historical record.

- The percentage of focal species recorded with a 'stable' status increased from 16% at baseline to 17% in Year 2.

Across the four NIA partnerships that reported on widespread species:

- The status of 9% of widespread species was reported to be 'increasing' at the end of Year 2 compared to 1% in Year 1, and 17% at baseline (2012). The fall between baseline and Year 1 is likely to reflect the more accurate picture of widespread species' status as a result of NIA partnership survey activities.
- The percentage of widespread species with a reported status of 'unknown' increased from 27% at baseline to 78% in Year 2. This could reflect the introduction of surveying for species previously not surveyed in the NIAs, i.e. the baseline reflects national or historic status records but local status may have been unknown. This will be investigated further in Year 3.
- The percentage of widespread species with status reported as 'decreasing' declined from a baseline of 23% to 12% in Year 2, and the percentage of 'stable' widespread species reduced from 33% at the baseline to 1% in Year 2.

2.3 Enhancing the benefits that nature provides for people

This sub-section considers progress and achievements of the NIA partnerships in relation to the benefits that nature provides. Many of the benefits to human health and wellbeing are provided by ecosystem services, including: cultural; supporting; provisioning; and regulating ecosystem services. The NIA partnerships' contribution to the provision of these services or benefits is a result of activities specifically intended to achieve these benefits and as an indirect consequence of other activities, such as encouraging volunteering in activities related to habitat improvements.

The benefits reported here include: health; education and learning; symbolic, cultural and aesthetic benefits; increasing supporting, regulating and provisioning ecosystem services, and the contributions to the local economy.

2.3.1 Health

Encouraging volunteering is one way the NIA partnerships have been delivering potential health benefits. The potential health benefits of volunteering include⁴¹: aerobic exercise; improved respiratory and cardiovascular health; reduced stress; sense of achievement; reduced social isolation; relaxation and recovery. See Figure 2.2.

⁴¹ Based on the outcomes of the literature review on the social and economic benefits associated with natural environment initiatives and their contribution to wellbeing (CEP, 2014b – see Annex).

Figure 2.2: Volunteers, activities and likely health benefits⁴²

Physical works – scrub clearance, habitat management, hedge-laying and coppicing.



Benefits:

- Improved respiratory health
- Aerobic exercise and improved cardiovascular health
- Reduced stress hormones

Undertaking ecological surveys – on-going recording, supporting national surveys, NIA specific (e.g. habitat, species) monitoring.



Benefits:

- Sense of achievement
- Recovery and relaxation
- Reduced social isolation and friendship

Photo credits: Simon Atkinson (Birmingham and Black Country NIA) and Tania Crockett (Morecambe Bay NIA).

Note: The figure of 23,791 is based on the Year 1 and 2 totals for general unskilled labour and specialist, skilled trained labour and specialist services compiled by Natural England based on NIA partnership claims submissions.

By the end of Year 2 a total of 24,326 days⁴³ of volunteer time had been reported by the NIA partnerships⁴⁴ ⁴⁵. Within this total, 23,791 days (96% of the total) was reported under categories that are likely to result in health benefits⁴⁶: general unskilled labour; specialist, skilled trained labour; and specialist services. Volunteers are involved in a broad range of activities in the NIAs. Box 2.3 presents selected examples of specific volunteering activities reported by the NIA partnerships. These activities broadly fall into three categories:

- Habitat management and improvements, including: planting; scrub-clearance; fence construction; pond restoration.
- Surveying and monitoring, particularly species related, including: water vole surveying; butterfly monitoring; breeding bird surveys.
- Training and capacity building, in relation to: habitat / woodland management; planting and sowing; surveying and sampling techniques; activity leadership (e.g. walks).

⁴² Based on the outcomes of the literature review on the social and economic benefits associated with natural environment initiatives and their contribution to wellbeing (CEP, 2014b – see Annex).

⁴³ Volunteer time was recorded by NIA partnerships as number of hours volunteering under four categories: general unskilled labour; skilled trained labour; specialist services; and professional. The number of days was calculated by summing the hours reported and dividing by 7 (assuming a 7 hour working day).

⁴⁴ Volunteering data as compiled by Natural England based on claim forms submitted by NIA partnerships.

⁴⁵ Note it is not always apparent from NIA partnership reporting if volunteering is a direct result of NIA funding / coordination, or if these are volunteering activities which were occurring anyway within the NIA and are contributing to NIA objectives.

⁴⁶ These categories are likely to engage volunteers in physical activity, working with other people and learning new skills and knowledge and are therefore likely to have health benefits (CEP, 2014b).

Box 2.3: Selected examples of activities related to volunteering

Habitat improvement

- Volunteers helping implement the **introduction of wildflower seed and wildflower plug planting, removal of scrub from grasslands and woodland restructuring** (Dark Peak).
- In one particular project, volunteers engaged in the **creation of 10ha of habitat and the restoration and long term management of an additional 60ha of habitat**. Also engaged volunteers in a fence construction to enable long term management of the meadow by grazing (Humberhead Levels).
- Public access project **cleared bridleway through wood** with the assistance of a student volunteer party (Marlborough Downs).
- Enhancing and restoring priority habitats through **scrub and brash clearance**: two scrub management volunteer work parties were held (Morecambe Bay).
- Engagement of volunteers to assist with **site preparation for the introduction/ establishment of the Ladybird spider** (Wild Purbeck).

Surveying and monitoring

- A **water vole group meeting** for volunteers to coordinate surveys across the NIA. **Phase 1 habitat volunteer surveys and botanical surveys** were undertaken with the support of volunteers (Meres and Mosses).
- Recruitment and training of volunteers to support the **baseline survey and monitoring needs associated with a wetlands creation project** (Humberhead Levels).
- **Butterfly monitoring** across 11 sites to end Year 2, with further 6 sites planned for Year 3 (Morecambe Bay).



Volunteers undertaking water vole survey, May 2014 (Meres and Mosses). Photo credit: Luke Neal

Training

- **Four training days for volunteers contributing to delivery of thinning, planting and sowing**. Also **trained volunteers in woodland management techniques** (tree felling, coppicing, snedding and dead-hedging) (Birmingham and Black Country).
- Presentation and workshop at Barnsley Naturalist Society to provide **information required to survey for water voles** with the ambition to engage some of its members in voluntary work (Dearne Valley).
- **Training courses for volunteers on freshwater sampling** (Northern Devon).

Source: Selected information from NIA Year 2 summary reports and quarterly Progress Reports

NIA partnerships are also implementing projects that seek to encourage individuals to experience and engage with the natural environment (see Box 2.4).

Box 2.4: Examples of NIA partnership projects with health benefits

Physical health benefits from being active in the environment

Marlborough Downs has led 11 farm walks to showcase the project and demonstrate particular aspects of its delivery including a Dawn Chorus walk, a Walk in the Woods, a Butterfly Walk, a Bat Walk and an Owl Prowl.

Mental health benefits from creating a sense of achievement

Marlborough Downs Driving for the Disabled (DDA) project is carrying out surface improvements along 5.6kms of public byway to enable access for horse drawn carriages driven by disabled people including servicemen and women injured during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The NIA partnership has a key role in working with local land-owners to create a circular course that is challenging but enjoyable.



Cross-country driving. Photo credit: Nick Upton

The health benefits from this are numerous as

carriage driving can help improve balance, co-ordination and muscle tone. The activity is reported to create a sense of achievement in the drivers who also appreciate the chance to enjoy the scenery. One group that visited provided the following feedback:

“these visits provide...so much more than such as social interactions, confidence in a public place, or just taking their minds away from their troubles for a while”.

Source: NIA Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports, annual summaries, case studies and interviews

In addition, the NIA partnerships have worked to improve access to and enhance people's experiences of the natural environment; for example four NIA partnerships have reported that a total length of 10.5km of public rights of way and permissive paths have been improved or created, with access being improved to a further 532km⁴⁷. Box 2.5 presents examples of NIA partnership activities to improve access to and the experience of the natural environment.

Box 2.5: Selected examples of activities to improve access to and experience of the natural environment

- Bridleway restoration including improvements to an eroded path, route improvements and measures taken to discourage off-roaders from damaging heathland. **Improvements to bridleway infrastructure for better connectivity of access** across the moors (Dark Peak).
- Upgrading of existing public rights of ways and furniture, **identifying a suite of high quality access routes (footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths) and undertaking improvements works** to enable people to enjoy the Downs to the full and see some of the things the NIA partnership is doing to support local wildlife (Marlborough Downs).
- **Improving access to six sites, including disabled access** (Meres and Mosses).
- **Access improvements to an underused local open space**, resulting in the site being accessible and usable. A family event was held on the site for local people and the site was also used for an alternative

⁴⁷ These figures are based on reporting through the online reporting tool by Dark Peak, Dearne Valley, Meres and Mosses and Marlborough Downs. The length of public rights of way and permissive paths with improved accessibility includes 514.94km reported by Meres and Mosses and this is likely to represent the length of paths made accessible through improvements to smaller lengths. The narrative entered by Meres and Mosses NIA partnership for these data notes: *A key project within our programme of works is to create, or improve, access trails enabling a wider community of people to access special sites within the Meres & Mosses. We have created a new route at Bickley Hall Farm, Cheshire - giving greater access to Bar Mere. We also made improvements at Brown Moss, Prees Heath, Wem Moss, Bettisfield Moss and Whixall Moss.*

education activity with young people with behavioural issues or learning disabilities (Birmingham and Black Country).

- A **Visitor Management Strategy** has been produced based on 676 completed visitor questionnaires with around 80% of these capturing the routes of visits. Locations for delivery of suitable recreation opportunities are to be identified (Wild Purbeck).

2.3.2 Education and learning

All the NIA partnerships have designed and delivered activities with the explicit objective of providing education and learning benefits for children and adults. This is in addition to other NIA partnership activities relating to biodiversity and volunteering which often have an educational or learning component. The benefits of these activities include better understanding of the environment, using the environment as a forum for enhanced learning about other subjects, and accrediting individuals with formal qualifications.

Three NIA partnerships (Dearne Valley, Morecambe Bay and North Devon) reported against the optional indicator '*number of educational visits*'⁴⁸. At the end of Year 2 a total of 11,739 people had participated in educational visits within these NIAs. Other data⁴⁹ indicates that all the NIA partnerships have engaged with schools and further education colleges. The majority of these activities involve schools visiting NIA sites and visitor centres to learn about the environment, to undertake cross-curriculum activities (such as art) or to support volunteering via surveys and practical activities.

The NIA partnerships are also visiting schools to talk about their work and how school groups can get involved. For example, Birmingham and Black Country and Wild Purbeck are working with schools to look at possibilities for improving on-site biodiversity linked to educational outcomes, and Nene Valley attended the Royal Agricultural College to talk about the work and objectives of the NIA partnership and to teach the students about the concepts behind the NIA programme.

The provision of adult training particularly for teachers, such as a grassland flower identification course for teachers (Morecambe Bay) or the development of primary school curriculum materials related to ecosystem services (Northern Devon), means that educational and learning benefits could potentially multiply and be sustained beyond the NIA grant funding period.

The NIA partnerships are also working with volunteers, contractors and students to provide training and / or capacity building. Much of this work relates to developing the surveying and practical land management skills of those involved. These activities provide the individuals with new skills and confidence whilst also supporting the NIA partnerships' work.

2.3.3 Symbolic, spiritual and aesthetic benefits

Much of the work of the NIA partnerships is contributing to symbolic, spiritual, and aesthetic benefits, as well as wider cultural ecosystem services. Some partnerships have developed projects and initiatives explicitly seeking to enhance these benefits⁵⁰. Box 2.6 presents the case study *Down to Earth* in Meres and Mosses NIA. Other examples include:

⁴⁸ Educational visits are calculated as being the number of participants in educational visits organised by the NIA partnership. An educational visit is defined as any organised visit to an NIA site or centre (e.g. visitor centre) which has an explicit educational objective. They also include visits to schools by NIA partner staff with an educational objective.

⁴⁹ I.e. the NIA quarterly Progress Reports and interviews with NIAs in May – June 2014.

⁵⁰ Note that progress and achievements related to cultural ecosystem services may overlap with other benefits such as those described under health and wellbeing and education and learning, as well as uniting communities. For example, improving access to and enhancing people's experience of the natural environment will have health and wellbeing benefits and also represent an enhancement of cultural ecosystem services.

- Commissioning of a **sculpture** in Hadleigh Country Park (Greater Thames Marshes) by the NIA partnership (with the Arts Council). This is intended to enhance individuals' understanding of the environment along this section of the Essex coast. A '**Big Picture photography competition**' has also been organised in Greater Thames Marshes, with the aim of generating photographs that "celebrate our magnificently diverse landscape". During early 2014 a series of photography workshops were hosted and a panel of judges chosen. The winner will be chosen in Year 3.
- Work with local community groups in Northern Devon to **identify and create community wildlife spaces**. It is intended that these areas will be managed by these groups with the aim of achieving Local Nature Reserves / Community Woodland designation.
- The **Hidden Gems** and '**Discover your Dearne Valley**' projects involve engaging local communities through a series of walks and explorations around the local landscape, supported by traditional stories and using local knowledge for discussions around past uses of the land.

Box 2.6: Summary of project delivering spiritual, cultural and aesthetic benefits

Meres and Mosses NIA - *Down to earth*

The project hoped to encourage a wider range of people to explore and enjoy the Meres and Mosses landscape and to create opportunities for people to become practically involved. It also hoped to restore historical features, such as artefacts from the peat cutting heritage of the area, by working with multiple stakeholders such as Natural England and local community members.

The project used substantial community engagement. This helped understand what people knew of their area and to introduce individuals who had knowledge about its history and environment. Activities included local history days and bus tours with groups of interested individuals.



Bill Almark old peat worker talks. Photo credit: Luke Neal

The project also consulted with the local community to increase understanding of what they valued about their landscape, what issues affect it and how they might develop projects to improve it. This brought together people who have always lived in the area and newcomers. It also led to the formation of a local history group who meet to share information about the history of the area and also to record and archive this information. The project is ongoing and is directly influencing NIA partnership decision-making.

2.3.4 Supporting ecosystem services

The main supporting ecosystem services reported on by NIA partnerships relates to pollinators. Three NIA partnerships provided information on their achievements in supporting pollinators. Box 2.7 presents examples of NIA partnership activities and achievements in this area.

Box 2.7: Selected examples of activities to enhance supporting ecosystem services

- Birmingham and Black Country reported on the **area of habitat identified (by the partnership) as being particularly important for pollinators**, and recorded an increase of 156ha from baseline (3,656ha) to the end of Year 2 (3,812ha).
- To support bumble bees, Dark Peak has sought to enhance pollen and nectar availability through the introduction of a **“bumble bee” mix of wild seed** on selected plots. This comprised a mix of red clover, birds-foot trefoil, musk mallow and black knapweed.
- A University of Northampton **PhD student in the Nene Valley has been collecting data that will be used to model habitat predictors for pollinators**. The project is looking at how the lowland British countryside supports major groups of wild pollinators.

2.3.5 Regulating ecosystem services

NIA partnership progress and achievements in relation to regulating ecosystem services include: managing habitat for improved water quality; projects to increase carbon sequestration in NIAs; and activities seeking to enhance flood prevention. Box 2.8 presents examples of NIA partnerships' activities and achievements to enhance regulating services.

Box 2.8: Selected examples of activities to enhance regulating ecosystem services

- Three NIA partnerships (Dark Peak, Northern Devon and South Downs) recorded the **area of habitat managed to improve water quality**, with a total of 10,046.4ha reported at the end of Year 2. This includes actions such as: improving blanked bog conditions (Dark Peak); land managed with soil aerators (Northern Devon); and land considered to be having a 'significant' contribution to water quality (South Downs).
- Three NIA partnerships reported on **watercourse management**: Birmingham and Black Country recorded an increase in length of watercourse managed to improve its condition from 2.1km at baseline to 3.5km in Year 2; and Dark Peak recorded 2.5km of gullies blocked (to reduce sediment loss), from a baseline of 0.35km. Nene Valley reported on the creation of two-stage channels to manage flood risk.
- Dearne Valley reported on **carbon storage and sequestration** associated with tree whip planting. They calculated that resultant woodland creation will lead to sequestration of approximately 2,660 tCO₂e⁵¹ over 100 years based on planting to the end of Year 2.
- Morecambe Bay reported on tonnes of **carbon stored and sequestered** per unit area of land managed for carbon benefits. Raised bog restoration work and woodland management activity was reported to have secured carbon storage and sequestration of 2,511tCO₂e⁵² per year based on 10 years of habitat management (from 2012/13).
- **Restoration of floodplain habitat through direct land management** targeting over 88ha to provide flood



Creating a two-stage channel for improved flood management, September 2013 (Nene Valley). Photo credit: Simon Whitton

⁵¹ tCO₂e means tonnes of CO₂ equivalents. Based on the average CO₂ emissions per household (excluding transport) in the UK was 5.6 tonnes in 2010 (Palmer & Cooper, 2012). Thus a calculated saving of the equivalent of 2,660 tonnes of CO₂ equates to the average annual emissions of 475 households.

⁵² Morecambe Bay NIA partnership reported that this relates to 93ha LRB (Lowland Raised Bog) restoration (allowing for 1ha of Ireland Moss) (231.6t CO₂/yr. rising to 614t CO₂/yr. after 10 years) and 292ha of woodland under woodfuel management (1,898t CO₂/yr. or 23,360t CO₂/ coppice cycle). Note metric should be saving per year 10 years after restoration. Based on the average annual CO₂ emissions per household (2010) of 5.6 tonnes (excluding transport) the total of 2,511 tCO₂e equates to the average annual emissions of 448 households.

storage, wetland creation, including installation of water control structures and river restoration works (Dearne Valley).

2.3.6 Provisioning ecosystem services

The NIAs already generate a large amount of provisioning ecosystem services, for example through food production from agriculture, raw materials from woodlands and the fresh water provided by rivers and aquifers. NIA partnerships are also seeking to enhance provisioning services, for example: by encouraging sustainable agricultural production; managing woodlands sustainably; and generating opportunities from natural products, such as woodland products⁵³. Box 2.9 presents examples of NIA partnership activities and achievements to enhance provisioning ecosystem services.

Box 2.9: Selected examples of activities to enhance provisioning ecosystem services

- In Nene Valley an **NIA Land Adviser has been visiting landowners**, to encourage and provide advice on the implementation of sustainable land management practices, including delivery of Higher Level Stewardship (HLS).
- In Morecambe Bay, two **sustainable community woodfuel projects** are in progress with trained volunteer groups working with landowners and contractors to manage networks of woodland sites. In addition, 12 **community woodfuel groups** have been established to develop the woodfuel chain.
- NIA partnerships have **developed marketable, naturally sourced products**, such as: briquettes developed from harvested reed (Humberhead Levels); and the sale of local venison (Wild Purbeck). Investigations are being made to develop products such as biofuel from material derived from hedgerow management (Northern Devon) and heathland management (Wild Purbeck).

2.3.7 Contribution to the local economy

This sub-section focuses on NIA partnerships' activities explicitly seeking to deliver local economic benefits. Based on NIA partnership reporting, at least six⁵⁴ are explicitly seeking to deliver economic benefits. These NIA partnerships use two main approaches to deliver these benefits: supporting the production and exchange of natural products - particularly woodfuel; and place based marketing (i.e. promoting the NIA and the importance of the natural environment). Selected examples from two NIA partnerships are presented in Boxes 2.10 and 2.11.

Box 2.10: Production and exchange of natural products in Wild Purbeck

- The Wild Purbeck NIA has appointed a **Woodland Apprentice** who has been delivering a project managed by one of the NIA partners (Dorset Wildlife Trust) as part of the NIA business plan. This coppicing work has created workplace opportunities for the individual. The NIA partnership has also supported practitioner training for A Level 4 BASIS Foundation Award in Agronomy.
- Wild Purbeck has been reviewing **biomass arising from heathland management**. A commissioned report suggested that from good management and the application of appropriate technology, the Purbeck heathlands could yield 2,000MWh⁵⁵; comparable with the annual output of a 1MW wind turbine, or six hectares of solar panels. There remain challenges as heathland biomass production is low grade, variable, and logistically expensive-to-harvest by-product. The NIA partnership is continuing to explore the feasibility of this project.

Source: NIA Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports, summaries, case studies and interviews.

⁵³ Note that there are potential overlaps between enhancing provisioning ecosystem services with some of the other topics considered under the benefits that nature provides, notably the contribution to the local economy (see section 2.3.7).

⁵⁴ Birmingham and Black Country, North Devon, Morecambe Bay, Marlborough Downs, South Downs and Wild Purbeck.

⁵⁵ MWh = megawatt hours, or the equivalent of one million watts of energy generation per hour.

Box 2.11: Woodfuel Project and place based marketing in Morecambe Bay

- The **Morecambe Bay Woodfuel Project** is an NIA funded project which is improving the extent of, and management of woodlands within the NIA. As part of this the NIA partnership sought to develop commercial and community capacity in the use of woodfuel products. The project is reported to have led to economic benefits, including:
 - Approximately 187ha of woodland is being managed for woodfuel and biodiversity benefit. This will give a minimum of 11,000 tons of timber and firewood entering the local woodfuel market.
 - £444,000 in Woodland Improvement Grants received.
 - Work for 52 local woodland management contractors (often small businesses).
 - 12 community woodfuel groups continue to be developed and supported.
 - A directory of local business that provide woodfuel and/or wood management services.
- Morecambe Bay NIA has also been looking at how the natural environment can be used to **enhance the attractiveness of the area to visitors and investors**. Specifically, Morecambe Bay NIA has been exploring the possibilities of working with businesses to identify opportunities for place based marketing. For example, they have been developing a nature tourism business network with over 110 local business participating. The network has helped the NIA partnership produce a Sense of Place Toolkit including 10 'Nature on Your Doorstep' Guides to help develop the area as a top destination to experience wildlife. They have also undertaken tourist surveys and other work to better understand what visitors most enjoy about the Morecambe Bay NIA with a focus on the natural environment. Other non-NIA initiatives relate to this work, such as efforts to develop a new destination brand for the Morecambe Bay area.

Source: NIA Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports, summaries, case studies and interviews.

2.4 Uniting local communities, land managers and businesses

Examples of progress and achievements relating to collaborative working with local communities, land managers and businesses are explored in this section. These are grouped under the following topics: community engagement and empowerment; creating and strengthening social networks; and working with landowners. NIA partnerships are also bringing different types of organisation together, with businesses involved as partners in 10 of the NIA partnerships.

2.4.1 Community engagement and empowerment

All the NIA partnerships have engaged with their local communities, through activities such as: organising and participating in events; engaging local people as volunteers; reaching out to schools and community groups to provide education and hands-on learning opportunities; and encouraging community involvement in decision-making. Some examples of community engagement include:

- The **Birmingham Open Spaces Forum** (Birmingham and Black Country) has worked to raise the profile of the NIA partnership, with the aim of helping community groups become more involved in NIA projects. The forum has also encouraged groups to network with each other.
- In Dearne Valley a **community group workshop** was held to agree on a mutually acceptable habitat / flood water design for a project related to dyke restoration.
- Nene Valley established a pilot **Community Panel** that met three times in Year 2. Given the success of the pilot, two more panels are to be set up in Year 3 of the project. Similarly Northern Devon has established a Community Forum to encourage community input to decision-making.
- In Morecambe Bay a **community engagement programme** has developed a community engagement plan and established six community liaison/action groups.

Box 2.12 presents two examples of community empowerment resulting from the NIA partnerships' activities.

Box 2.12: Examples of community empowerment

Nene Valley – Community Panel Public Dialogue Project

This project, part funded by Sciencewise⁵⁶, sought to bring together members of the public to engage with the technical and scientific issues relating the management of the Northampton Washlands.

The NIA partnership identified and worked with members of the public to create a 'Community Panel'. The individuals involved were chosen to represent a spread of interests relevant to the site, including: bird watchers; recreation enthusiasts; and dog walkers. Ensuring that the group was representative of the site's users and made up of members of the public was a priority for the NIA partnership.

The Panel talked with key stakeholders such as the RSPB, farmers, Natural England and Wildlife Trust to understand the disturbance issues experienced on the site.

The Panel developed a management plan for the site with the aim of ensuring that the range of existing users will all still be able to enjoy the site. The Panel has expressed an interest in developing a 'friends' group so that they can continue to work with the public to implement the management plan. NIA partners are working with them to create this.

Birmingham and the Black Country – Castle Vale Meadows

The NIA partnership is creating new and restoring old meadows across the NIA. One example is Castle Vale Meadows in Birmingham where over 5 hectares of new meadow were created on a capped landfill site which was once part of a Spitfire testing airfield. Here two separate meadows were created by adding green hay from two different SSSI donor sites. Much of the physical work was undertaken with volunteers.

The Community Environmental Trust used the project to bring local residents and community groups together to make improvements to their local green space by spreading the hay across the site. The site will be managed with an annual cut and collect – it is hoped that volunteers will assist with this.

Source: NIA Case Studies.

2.4.2 Creating and strengthening social networks

The NIA partnerships are helping to create and strengthen social networks by bringing groups together under common areas of interest and providing opportunities for people to volunteer and socialise together and connect with their natural environment. Examples of contributions to local social networks include:

- The **Hidden Gems project** in the Dearne Valley which brings together individuals from across the community to talk to farmers and local residents about the history and environment of the area.
- **Open Farm Sundays** (Marlborough Downs) hosted by local farmers and organised by the NIA Community & Outreach delivery group. One such event attracted almost 1,000 people, including stall holders, volunteers and members of the public.

2.4.3 Working with land managers

Based on the outcomes of interviews with the NIA partnerships in May – June 2014, the work of NIA partnerships in advising landowners appears to have been a success. The NIA grant funding has ensured the availability of farm or land management advisers to raise awareness of environmental practices, encourage joint-working and provide advice on funding opportunities. One NIA partnership, for example, said that while it may be *"... impossible to deliver a step change in conservation in three years [it] is possible to change attitudes ... Cannot underestimate this step change"*.

Other NIA partnerships expressed that the establishment of the partnership has allowed people working across their areas to have *"shared ideas, shared discussions all helping to deliver"* and that

⁵⁶ See: <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

“lots of interesting conversations [between conservation groups and landowners] taking place that probably would not have happened without the NIA”.

Examples of engagement with landowners and land managers include:

- In Northern Devon, **NIA advisers have been working with landowners and managers** from initial visits through to grant applications, and supporting practical work to deliver ongoing environmental outcomes through improved land management.
- The **farm conservation advice project** in Greater Thames Marshes, which undertook introductory farms visits to meet farmers and to discuss follow up visits for breeding bird surveys and care and maintenance advice. Farmer discussion group meetings have also been held with local farmers.
- South Downs have established a **farm conservation advice service**, which lead to participation in five conservation advice events attended by approximately 80 farmers in total.

2.5 Becoming places of inspiration and innovation

2.5.1 Research and innovation

The NIA programme is itself experimental. The initial NIA partnerships are testing the approach of partnership-led landscape-scale intervention. An outcome of the initial NIA partnerships will be learning lessons on the successes and challenges. In addition, specific activities are being coordinated or initiated by all NIA partnerships that are either contributing to research or are innovative. Four of the NIA partnerships include universities among their partners⁵⁷, and 11 of the 12 initial NIA partnerships have reported on research being undertaken in collaboration with universities or research institutes. There is evidence of research and innovation across many of the types of activity the NIA partnerships are engaged in.

Examples of NIA partnerships working with universities include:

- **Involving university researchers in specific aspects of work in the NIA partnership**, such as a study in Birmingham and Black Country by Wolverhampton University that has helped to develop restoration techniques for grasslands / meadow; and
- **Involving students in research activities**, such as a PhD student from Sheffield University undertaking research in Humberhead Levels looking at ecosystem services in the context of the NIA; in particular carbon analysis, water management, water quality and connectivity and socio-economic services.

Innovation and research activities are also related to practical habitat restoration or creation and land-management techniques. Examples include:

- trialling grassland plots for invertebrates, wildflowers and house sparrows in Dearne Valley; and
- a restoration and research facility in the Dark Peak mapping peat depth to assess carbon storage and support habitat restoration.

Research studies have also sought to understand and contribute to the practical delivery of landscape scale conservation / nature improvement, for example Meres and Mosses are preparing a

⁵⁷ Birmingham and Black Country, Nene Valley, South Downs Way Ahead and Wild Purbeck.

research paper on the practical application of the Lawton Principles (Lawton *et al.*, 2010)⁵⁸ with a focus on connectivity within the NIA.

Innovation is demonstrated in relation to engaging with the public and stakeholders, such as farmers and land managers, often in the context of changes to land-use associated with restoration or habitat creation. One example is the farm focus group and a farm advice project in Greater Thames Marshes.

Research is also being conducted in other areas of study, for example work initiated on a Climate Change Adaptation Plan in Wild Purbeck, and climate modelling in Northern Devon (with the Met Office).

2.5.2 Learning and sharing

The NIA partnerships are implementing locally specific business plans and objectives, but working towards the same overall objectives. A key aspect of the NIA programme is to encourage knowledge exchange and learning between NIA partnerships (and between individual partners within NIA partnerships). A dedicated knowledge exchange web-tool (Huddle) has been used by NIA partnerships.

In the first two years of the funding period, four NIA Best Practise Network events (Natural England, 2014a) have been organised and hosted by NIA partnerships: grasslands and landscape delivery (hosted by Northern Devon, September 2012); NIAs and planning (hosted by Dearne Valley, March 2013); ecosystem approach and ecosystem services (hosted by South Downs, September 2013); and people, place and economy (hosted by Nene Valley, February 2014). In addition, ten climate adaptation workshops (Atkins, 2013) have taken place (led by Natural England) and three NIAs are participating in a Sciencewise project to enhance public dialogue⁵⁹.

NIA partnerships' community engagement and volunteering activities (see sub-section 2.3) have provided opportunities for learning and education as well as knowledge exchange. All NIA partnerships have held events, created websites and developed publicity materials such as newsletters. For example, Marlborough Downs has a dedicated website, and has produced quarterly newsletters and other communication materials⁶⁰.

2.5.3 Surveying and monitoring

Surveying and monitoring encompasses the NIA partnerships' work to monitor progress against their funding agreement objectives using the NIA M&E Framework and indicators (CEP, 2014a), as well as the surveying and monitoring by partnerships to collect and collate data on, for example, locally important habitats and species. The efforts of NIA partnerships in completing their M&E obligations are reported in Section 6.

Box 2.13 presents selected examples of surveying and monitoring activities undertaken by the NIA partnerships.

⁵⁸ The Making Space for Nature review chaired by Professor John Lawton set out what needed to be done to ensure that England has a robust ecological network that is capable of responding to the challenges of climate change and other pressures. Making Space for Nature, included guiding principles and 24 specific recommendations, and summed up what needs to be done in four words: more, bigger, better and joined.

⁵⁹ See: <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

⁶⁰ See: <http://www.mdnia.org.uk/index.html>

Box 2.13: Selected examples of surveying and monitoring activities

- **Monitoring of a project to increase the number of species inhabiting grasslands** through the creation of meadows on former industrial sites (Birmingham and Black Country) by a PhD student from the University of Wolverhampton.
- **Surveys have been used to explore the potential to reconnect lowland calcareous grassland parcels** through management, restoration and creation of grasslands (Marlborough Downs).
- **Species surveying** including:
 - Water vole surveying (including training of volunteers) in Dearne Valley and Meres and Mosses.
 - Surveys and surveyor training for butterflies and farmland birds surveys (Marlborough Downs).
 - Engagement of volunteers in butterfly monitoring (Morecambe Bay).
 - Breeding bird survey and ongoing wetland bird monitoring (Nene Valley).

Source: NIA Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports and annual summaries.

3. Evaluation of Biodiversity Outcomes and Impacts

Key messages from Year 2: Biodiversity at the end of year 2

- NIA partnerships' self-assessment of progress against funding agreement objectives related to biodiversity outcomes, indicate that at the end of Year 2 they are making good progress: **73% of objectives were assessed as being on, or ahead of, schedule**; 24% were assessed as not in line with original milestones but where satisfactory or good progress had been made; and only one objective across all the NIA partnerships was assessed as having no, little or only some progress.
- Just **over 10% of the total extent of priority habitat within all NIAs is subject to new management actions** by NIA partners under the NIA programme.
- The reported extent of land managed by NIA partners under the NIA programme to **restore or create priority habitat at the end of Year 2 was 7,451ha** and the area managed to **maintain or enhance priority habitat was 11,342ha**.
- **Lowland Grassland and Heath** is the dominant habitat grouping where new management actions by NIA partners under the NIA programme are underway or complete, with **nearly 18% of the total area of these habitats in the NIAs being subject to management**.
- NIA partnerships are actively **improving data and knowledge of species status in their areas through species surveys**, and there are numerous examples where NIA partnerships have initiated habitat management to meet the needs of species.
- Discussion and sharing of experience among the NIA partnerships of the **comparative indicator of connectivity and its use in the consideration of conservation actions appears to have been a useful outcome**. NIA partnerships have also undertaken research and tested approaches and shared experiences in delivering and measuring habitat connectivity on a landscape scale.

3.1 Introduction

This part of the evaluation considers the extent to which NIA partnerships have contributed to biodiversity outcomes and impacts across the NIAs. In particular, it evaluates NIA partnership contributions within the NIA programme to: priority habitats; focal and widespread species; the management of invasive and non-native species; and improved habitat connectivity.

3.1.1 Data sources used in this section

The interim evaluation of biodiversity outcomes and impacts is based on analysis of information and data from the following sources:

- the M&E indicators under the Biodiversity theme, as entered into the online reporting tool:
 - Habitat sub-theme: *Extent of existing priority habitat managed to maintain / improve its condition (core); Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat (core); Proportion of SSSIs in favourable or recovering condition (optional); Total extent of habitat (core).*
 - Species sub-theme: *Extent of habitat managed to secure species-specific needs (optional); Status of widespread species (optional); Status of focal species (optional); Control of invasive non-native species (optional).*
 - Habitat connectivity sub-theme: *Optional indicator of habitat connectivity (optional); Comparative indicator of habitat connectivity (core).*

Note: a table summarising the NIA partnerships' M&E indicator selection and data entry (using the online reporting tool) is included in Appendix 1.

- NIA partnership self-reporting on progress through quarterly Progress Reports and annual Progress Summaries as submitted to Natural England.
- Other NIA partnership generated documents and information such as: NIA partnership websites; and supporting documentation uploaded to the online reporting tool.
- Data provided by Natural England: nationally-derived data relevant to biodiversity and related ecosystem service proxies (e.g. priority habitat information). These have been used as indicators by some NIA partnerships, but are derived across all NIAs.

3.1.2 Summary of the interim evaluation of biodiversity outcomes and impacts

This section considers the evaluation questions set out in Table 3.1. This also presents headlines from the interim evaluation against each evaluation question. Further detail to support the interim evaluation headlines in Table 3.1 is provided in the key messages at the start of this section and the following sub-sections.

As the evaluation is at an interim stage there was no expectation that NIA partnerships would have completed delivery or achieved all expected outcomes. Many outcomes and impacts of the NIA partnerships' activities and the wider NIA programme will not be seen until after the end of the NIA grant funded period (after 2015).

In evaluating biodiversity outcomes and impacts, it is important to recognise some caveats in interpreting the available data:

- Given the short timescale since the NIA partnerships were established, it is generally not yet possible to evaluate biodiversity impacts. This is due to time lags between action and impact. For example, even where habitat management may have been put in place, it may take some years before the full effect of that action (i.e. impact) becomes apparent, such as improved habitat condition, or improved status of key species.
- The NIA partnerships reporting via the online tool records activities as underway, complete or planned. The term 'completed' means the action to initiate the management activity has been completed, rather than the management activity itself having been completed which may need ongoing activity to be effective.
- The nature of some of the data and/or the way in which some indicators are reported by NIA partnerships present some challenges to aggregating data across NIAs; for example, the way in which habitat types are assigned, and the consistency with which habitat/species management actions undertaken by partners are recorded as part of the NIA programme.
- Similar challenges exist in determining the extent to which NIA partnership activity itself has contributed to improvements or changes in habitats, species or connectivity, as opposed to management activity that may have already been underway prior to the NIAs being established, or other activity that is ongoing in the NIA, which may or may not be recorded as occurring under the NIA programme.

3.1.3 Progress against NIA partnership objectives relevant to biodiversity

NIA partnership funding agreement objectives are more related to biodiversity outcomes than any other theme. Of the total number of NIA partnership objectives (60), 42% (41 objectives) concern biodiversity. In analysing the NIA partnership objectives, these have been grouped as being primarily focussed on: *habitats*; *species*; or *connectivity*. In practice, most objectives will be delivering multiple benefits.

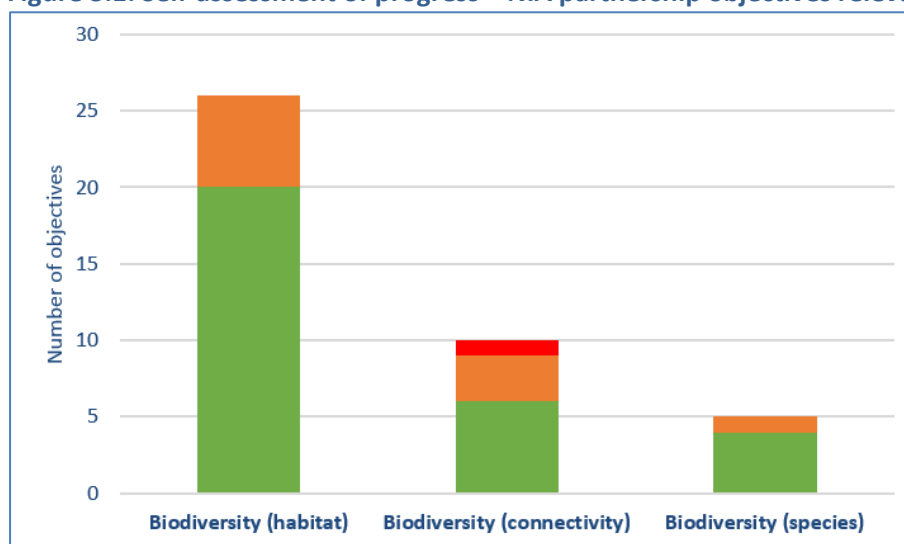
Table 3.1: Biodiversity evaluation questions and interim evaluation headlines

Questions To what extent have NIAs contributed to...	Sub-questions	Interim evaluation headlines
Improved, restored or created habitats?	1) What improvements have been made to the area of priority habitats through restoration or creation in NIAs; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIA partnerships have been delivering actions to restore or create a total of 7,451ha of priority habitats. 15% of these activities are reported as completed (the rest underway) at the end of Year 2. [Sub-section 3.2.1]
	2) What improvements have been made to the maintenance of priority habitats in NIAs; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIA partnerships have been delivering actions to maintain and improve a total of 11,342ha of priority habitats. Approximately 10% of the total area of priority habitat across all NIAs is subject to NIA partnership activity under the NIA programme. [Sub-section 3.2.1]
	3) What improvements have there been in the condition of existing designated wildlife sites (SSSIs) within NIAs; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The data suggest a <i>decline</i> in 'Favourable' status across the NIAs, but an increase in 'Unfavourable recovering'. This is likely to reflect SSSI re-assessment survey effort rather than actual change – except those examples where the NIA partnerships have reported specific programme delivery on SSSIs. [Sub-section 3.2.3]
	4) How much has the total extent of habitat changed (increased/decreased) within the NIAs; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these changes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See sub-questions 1 and 2. The dataset used is not sufficiently sensitive to monitor year on year change, hence there is no effective baseline total extent recorded against which to compare Year 2 totals. [Sub-section 3.2.2]
Improved species status?	5) What improvements have been made to the status of widespread or focal species or species groups in NIAs; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIA partnerships are delivering habitat activities targeting specific species needs. Species' status data suggest fluctuations which may or may not be related to NIA partnership activity – except in those examples where the NIA partnerships have reported specific programme delivery targeting species. [Sub-section 3.3.1]
	6) What improvements been made to habitats to support specific species' needs; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIA partnerships are delivering habitat activities supporting specific species needs, though the extent to which these activities are affecting species status cannot be judged after only two years. [Sub-section 3.3.2]
	7) What improvements have been made to the control of invasive or non-native species; and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only one NIA partnership provided data on the optional indicator 'control of invasive non-native species'. [Sub-section 3.3.3]
Improved connectivity?	8) What improvement has been made to ecological connectivity and reduced habitat vulnerability to future change (e.g. creating or restoring areas of habitat or other activities); and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIA partnerships have undertaken research and tested approaches to delivering and measuring habitat connectivity. The habitat connectivity indicator remains a challenge and open to debate. It is therefore difficult to judge the effect of NIA partnership actions on connectivity at this stage. [Sub-section 3.4]

An analysis has been undertaken under each of their objectives of the NIA partnerships' self-assessment of the level of progress they have made towards project outcomes, and whether progress is in line with the original milestones⁶¹. Figure 3.1 illustrates progress under each of their objectives judged to be relevant to biodiversity using a traffic light system. Figure 3.1 shows that at the end of Year 2 the NIA partnerships are making good progress in delivering against objectives relevant to biodiversity outcomes and impacts: 30 of the 41 objectives (73%) related to biodiversity outcomes were assessed as on, or ahead of, target; 10 objectives were assessed as not in line with original milestones, but where satisfactory or good progress had been made; and only one objective⁶² across all the NIA partnerships was assessed as including outcomes with none or only some progress.

NIA partnerships have indicated why certain objectives are not in-line with original milestones, for example: delays associated with land acquisition; a change of focus towards other objectives following feasibility assessment of initial milestones; and, adverse weather conditions causing delays in project commencement.

Figure 3.1: Self-assessment of progress – NIA partnership objectives relevant to biodiversity



Source: NIA self-assessment of progress as reported in the 4th quarterly Progress Reports

Note: The method used to generate this figure is explained in Appendix 2

Key to shading: Green - on or ahead of schedule; Amber - not in line with original schedule but where satisfactory or good progress has been made; and Red - Little or no progress made and behind schedule.

3.2 Habitats

3.2.1 Area of habitat managed

Within the NIAs as a whole, the total area of land managed by NIA partnerships under the NIA programme to restore or create priority habitat, and the total area of existing priority habitats managed in order to maintain or improve its condition amount to 7,451ha and 11,342ha respectively. By the end of Year 2, only a small proportion of these totals represent completed action; most of the actions are reported by the NIA partnerships as being underway (85% and 89% respectively). The NIA partnerships have planned actions on a further 2,889ha for maintenance and

⁶¹ Based on the information in the NIA partnerships' Year 2 4th Quarter Progress Reports and analysis by the M&E Phase 2 team – see Appendix 2.

⁶² Meres and Mosses' objective to improve management of buffers and development a network of corridors; establishing priority habitat corridors between hydrological isolated water bodies as intended proved not to be feasible and the focus is instead now on the bigger and better themes, and using stepping stones rather than corridors.

condition improvement of priority habitat and planned actions across 2,518ha for the creation and restoration of priority habitat.

The NIA partnerships have reported on linear habitat actions (for example hedgerows, rivers and riparian buffers, canals and wood margin habitats), with, to the end of Year 2, 87km of boundary and linear priority habitat restored or created, 183km managed to maintain or improve condition; with work recorded as planned on a further 18km of habitat.

To what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?

The indicator protocols for the two core indicators⁶³ required NIA partnerships to report against a zero baseline (i.e. no NIA partnership actions before the NIA programme commenced in April 2012). In practice, 10 of the 12 initial NIA partnerships⁶⁴ reported a baseline of zero, while the remaining two NIA partnerships reported existing areas of managed habitat as their baseline⁶⁵. These non-zero baselines have been reported in error in the Online Reporting Tool and the full extent of the habitat actions reported therefore can be attributed to NIA partnership activities under the NIA programme.

The data on priority habitat management indicates that all of the NIA partnerships have been involved in the coordination and delivery of habitat management activity under the NIA programme within their areas. From the current data, it was not possible to determine whether some or all of this activity might have taken place in the absence of the NIA partnerships. Interviews with the NIA partnerships completed in May-June 2014⁶⁶ suggest that they have been instrumental in much of this activity: 50% of the NIA partnerships interviewed were of the view that without being part of the NIA programme, the essential partnership and collaborative activities that were fundamental to delivery of the proposed objectives would not have been established, while 70% suggested that the investment by the NIA programme had allowed them to introduce and galvanise activities towards project outcomes that would not have occurred in the absence of such financial assistance.

Habitat creation, restoration and maintenance projects that may be underway or completed do not in themselves provide evidence of positive impacts, only that the measures have been put in place that are intended to deliver biodiversity impact; it may take many years for that impact to be realised.

3.2.2 Total extent of habitat

Natural England data on total extent of priority habitats within the NIAs (Priority Habitats Inventory, April 2014), compared to the NIA partnerships' reported habitat maintenance or improvement activity (underway or completed) indicates that: by the end of Year 2 the total extent of existing priority habitat actions across the NIAs amounted to 10,070ha underway and 1,272ha completed. This equates to 10.25% of the total estimated extent of priority habitat of 110,623ha across all NIAs.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the priority habitat types (grouped for ease of presentation) that are the focus of management across the NIAs through activities underway or completed as part of the NIA programme. This is compared to the total extent of these priority habitat types within the NIAs as a whole.

Lowland Grassland and Heath is the grouping of priority habitat types where there is most activity underway or complete in NIAs, with nearly 18% of the total area of this habitat group in the NIAs being subject to NIA maintenance/improvement actions. The dominance of this habitat group in these activities may reflect the nature and location of the NIAs and the dominance of this habitat

⁶³ Extent of existing priority habitat managed to maintain / improve its condition; Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat.

⁶⁴ Birmingham and Black Country; Dark Peak; Greater Thames Marshes; Humberhead Levels; Marlborough Downs; Morecambe Bay; Nene Valley; Northern Devon; South Downs; Wild Purbeck.

⁶⁵ Dearne Valley and Meres and Mosses

⁶⁶ Representatives from 10 NIA partnerships were interviewed: Birmingham and Black Country; Greater Thames Marshes; Humberhead Levels; Marlborough Downs; Meres and Mosses; Morecambe Bay; Nene Valley; Northern Devon; South Downs; Wild Purbeck

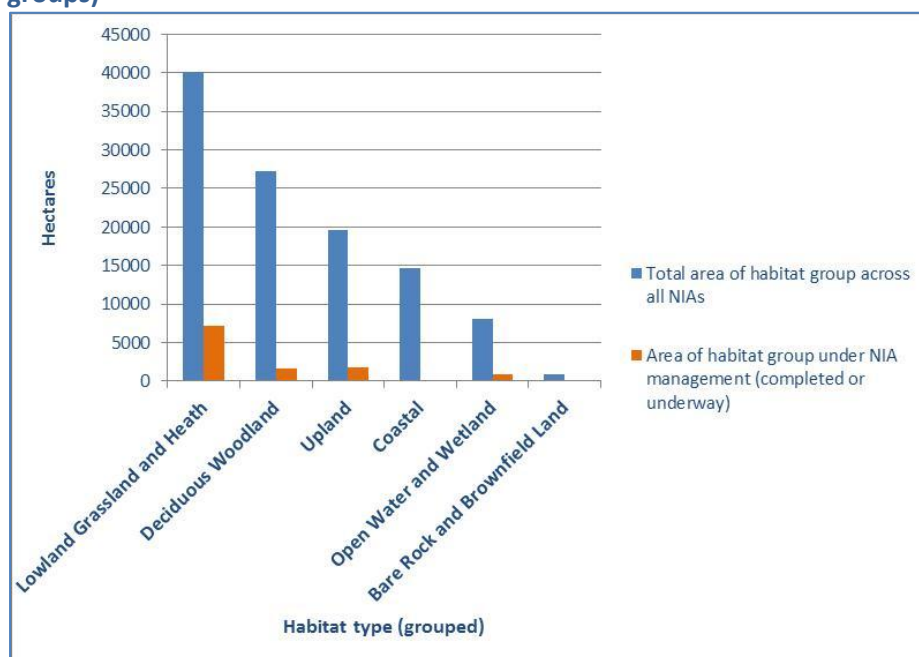
type. This category includes purple moor grass and rush pasture for which 76% (1,220ha) of the total area across the NIAs (1,601ha) for this specific priority habitat type is subject to NIA habitat maintenance/improvement activity. There is 9ha of coastal habitat (all saltmarsh in Greater Thames Marshes) subject to NIA partnership maintenance or improvement activity (0.06% of the total area of coastal habitat in all NIAs). A further 4.44ha of saltmarsh in the Greater Thames Marshes is the subject of NIA restoration/creation action.

Many of these management actions represented in Figure 3.2 are applied over small sites, but collectively contribute to a substantial proportion of certain priority habitat types across the NIAs (see Table 3.2).

These data reflect the status at the end of Year 2. The picture of activity completed or underway may change by the end of Year 3 for these broad habitat groupings.

It was not possible to judge whether there has been any increase or decrease in total extent of priority habitat, and therefore the extent to which the NIA partnerships have contributed to any change in total extent of priority habitats through Years 1 and 2.

Figure 3.2: Summary of extent of habitat maintained or improved by NIA partnerships under the NIA programme compared to total priority habitat extent across all NIAs (based on broad habitat groups)



Source: Data recorded by NIA partnerships in the online reporting tool.

Note: The habitat types have been aggregated according to Natural England broad habitat groups⁶⁷, to simplify the presentation, but also to accommodate the use of slightly different descriptors for certain habitat types by the different NIA partnerships.

⁶⁷ **Deciduous Woodland** includes: Upland Oakwood; Wet Woodland; Woodland; Wood-Pasture and Parkland; Traditional Orchards; Upland Birchwoods; and Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland

Lowland Grassland and Heath includes: Coastal and Floodplain Grazing Marsh; Lowland Calcareous Grassland; Lowland Heathland; Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture; Lowland Meadows; BAP Grassland; and Lowland Dry Acid Grassland.

Upland includes: Blanket Bog; Upland Heathland; Upland Fens Flushes and Swamps; Upland Calcareous Grassland; and Upland Hay Meadows.

Coastal includes: Maritime Cliffs and Slope; Saline Lagoons; Coastal Sand Dunes; Coastal Vegetated Shingle; Saltmarsh; and Mudflats.

Open Water and Wetland includes: Lowland Raised Bog; Lowland Fens; Eutrophic Standing Waters; Fen, Marsh and Swamp, Ponds; Standing Open Water and Canals; and Wetland.

Bare Rock and Brownfield Land includes: Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land; Limestone Pavements; and Inland Rock Outcrop and Scree Habitats.

Table 3.2: Proportion of priority habitat groups across all NIAs subject to NIA partnership activity

Habitat group	Total extent of priority habitat in all NIAs (ha)	NIA maintenance/improvement activity (underway and complete) (ha)	% of total NIA priority habitat with NIA maintenance/improvement activities
Lowland Grassland and Heath	40,123	7,157	17.84
Deciduous Woodland	27,239	1,557	5.72
Upland	19,630	1,710	8.71
Coastal	14,620	9	0.06
Open Water and Wetland	8,105	857	10.57
Bare Rock and Brownfield Land	906	52	5.72
Total	11,0623	11,342	10.25%

Source: Data recorded by NIA partnerships in the online reporting tool

3.2.3 Improvements to SSSIs⁶⁸

Condition assessments of SSSIs in the NIAs provide the basis for the optional indicator *proportion of SSSIs in favourable or recovering condition*. Humberhead Levels and Nene Valley were the two NIA partnerships to select this optional indicator for reporting. As shown in the Year 1 Progress Report (CEP, 2013), the extent of SSSI within NIA boundaries is very variable. Humberhead Levels has 7,276ha of SSSI within the NIA boundary (15% of the NIA) and Nene Valley has 1,965ha of SSSI within the NIA (4.7% of the NIA). In contrast, almost all of the actions within the Dark Peak are on SSSI or multiple designations, covering 23,568ha (or 83% of the NIA). Most of the actions are on protected sites, which are subject to condition monitoring.

Figure 3.3 presents the condition data for SSSIs in all NIAs for the baseline (March 2012), Year 1 and Year 2. The data indicate little change over the first two years of the NIA programme compared to the baseline. Habitat management activities are mostly underway rather than completed (see subsection 3.2.1) and would not yet be expected to have had much impact on the condition of these SSSIs. Except in circumstances where the condition is assessed as unfavourable, the initiation of the management activity might lead to a short term change in the assessment to recovering status.

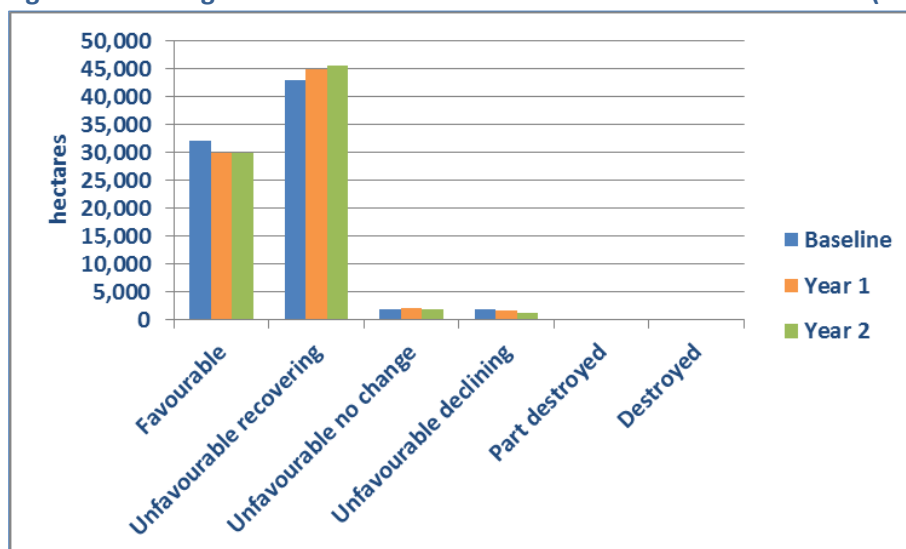
The main differences the data shows are: a slight fall in SSSIs reported to be in a favourable condition; and a slight increase in those reported to be in unfavourable recovering condition. This result is likely to primarily reflect the share of SSSIs that are re-assessed annually on a rolling programme that will vary from SSSI to SSSI (and from NIA to NIA) as a site specific risk based approach is used. The observed change may be a consequence of survey effort rather than necessarily reporting real change in status.

Conclusions on the influence of NIA partnership activity on SSSI condition status should not be drawn from these aggregated data over the first two years of the NIA programme. This data will be reviewed again at the end of Year 3, along with a comparison with national status. This will be used to determine if it is useful to analyse as part of the evaluation or if the same issue applies due to the influence of re-assessment survey frequency over observed change.

In the future, over a longer timescale, the data may be useful at the individual NIA level, but caution is needed when looking at aggregated data. A major shift in status of all SSSIs in NIAs as a result of NIA partnership action would not be expected. This is because of the relatively small proportion of total area of priority habitat that is under NIA partnership activity.

⁶⁸ Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Figure 3.3: Change in SSSI condition assessment in all NIAs for baseline (2012), Year 1 and Year 2



Source: SSSI condition assessment data for NIAs, as collated by Natural England

3.3 Species status

Nine⁶⁹ NIA partnerships have selected to report on the optional indicator: *status of focal species* and four⁷⁰ on the optional indicator: *status of widespread species*⁷¹. Some caveats on the use and interpretation of species' status data are presented in Box 3.1.

3.3.1 Status of widespread or focal species in NIAs

It is difficult to report conclusively on changes in the status of focal or widespread species: the data available do not provide a robust indication that the status of widespread or focal species in NIAs is improving, although in many cases it is also not possible to say that it is not (see Box 3.1). With these caveats in mind, this sub-section presents some headlines based on the available species' data.

Box 3.1: Caveats relating to species status data

The status of many species remains unclear, as many of species are not systematically recorded on an annual basis. Bird and butterfly counts, based on national recording schemes (e.g. farmland bird, wetland bird counts, butterfly transects) are likely to provide the most robust baseline data and trend figures over time, but caution is needed in interpreting species status data over short timescales. The indicator protocols developed for the focal and widespread species indicators recognise that it is not feasible to fully attribute change in status over the life of the NIA programme directly to NIA partnership activity. Changes in status may be subject to many other influences and are subject to lags and external factors outside the influence of the NIA partnership, such as weather, disease, recruitment, dispersal or predation.

Both the focal and widespread species indicators are optional and while 10 out of 12 NIA partnerships have reported on species, the number and type of species reported on varies, for example from a few bird species to tens of plant species. The difference in the number of species reported on, and differences in survey frequencies, make it difficult to aggregate NIA partnerships' data. For some species and in some NIAs no surveys will have been completed since baseline (or even before) and so statuses of species are reported as unknown. If surveying is only undertaken on a three or five year cycle, or ad-hoc, there may be no reporting

⁶⁹ Birmingham and Black Country; Dearne Valley; Humberhead Levels; Meres and Mosses; Morecambe Bay; Nene Valley; Northern Devon; South Downs; Wild Purbeck

⁷⁰ Humberhead Levels; Marlborough Downs; Meres and Mosses; Dark Peak

⁷¹ Note: status is a function of abundance and distribution, thus a species with an increasing status is considered to be more abundant and established over a larger area.

during the NIA programme timescale; this is dependent on the area and species selected.

Over a longer timescale, species status reporting may be meaningful at the individual NIA level, although it takes at least three data points to assess a trend. Even if NIA partnerships carry out species surveys annually they still would not be able to identify a trend until Year 3. Where surveying is ongoing/annual, as it may be for some species, variations over 2-3 years can be quite misleading since they may be highly dependent on annual variation in weather and environmental conditions.

Widespread species

81 widespread species⁷² have been reported across the four NIA partnerships that chose this indicator. Based on data recorded by NIA partnerships in the online reporting tool:

- At **baseline**: 59 of these species (73% of the total number of widespread species reported) had a known status at baseline: 14 species (17% of the total) with an increasing status; 19 species (23% of total) with a decreasing status; and 26 species (33% of total) with a stable status. The remaining 22 species (27% of total) had unknown status at baseline.
- At the end of **Year 1**: NIA partnerships reported that 79 species (98% of total) had unknown status and only two species (2% of total) had a known status (increasing).
- At the end of **Year 2**: 63 species (78% of the total number of widespread species reported) had unknown status. Of those with known status: seven species (9% of the total reported) had increasing status; 10 species (12% of the total) had decreasing status; and one species (<1% of the total) had stable status.

Box 3.2 gives further detail on the widespread species data, for example by focusing on some of the species where the condition status was known at the start of the NIA programme (baseline) and how their status has changed.

Box 3.2: Considering the widespread species data in more detail

- Of those species with a known status at baseline⁷³ and in Year 2 (18 species):
 - All were bird species (two species in Humberhead Levels; 15 species in Marlborough Downs).
 - Only one species (reed warbler, in Humberhead Levels) was reported as stable at baseline and in Year 2.
 - Two other species that were reported as stable at baseline were both reported as decreasing in Year 2 (sedge warbler in Humberhead Levels, and stock dove in Marlborough Downs). Nationally, stock dove has increased steadily from the mid-1970s to 2004, although numbers have shown some fluctuation since 2004 (BTO, 2010a). Nationally, sedge warbler has shown moderate decline, although with shorter term fluctuations (BTO, 2010b).
- Of nine species reported at baseline as decreasing, five were still decreasing at Year 2, while four were increasing.
- Of five species reported at baseline as increasing, two were reported as increasing at Year 2, while three were reported as decreasing.
- The above data suggest a very mixed picture for those species that had known status at baseline and in Year 2.
- Of those species that had a known baseline status, but unknown status through Year 1 and Year 2 (41):
 - 31 were butterflies and were all widespread species selected by Marlborough Downs. At baseline, 24 of these were reported as stable, six as decreasing and one as increasing. Since they continued to have unknown status into Year 2 it is not possible to report on any change in status to these species. It was not possible to answer the evaluation question for these species: "To

⁷² The widespread species indicator aims to represent the status of individual widespread species used by relevant England Biodiversity 2020 Indicators, where NIA partnerships identify that suitable data exists and on-going data collection is feasible.

⁷³ Note: NIA partnership reporting does not indicate the source of information relating to species' status at baseline.

what extent have NIAs contributed to these improvements?”

- Similarly for Dark Peak (seven) and Marlborough Downs (three) widespread bird species were reported as having known baseline status, but unknown status in the first two years of the NIA programme.
- Yellow wagtail and turtle dove in Marlborough Downs were decreasing at baseline as was skylark in Dark Peak. The remaining seven species were reported as increasing at baseline.

Focal species

117 focal species⁷⁴ have been reported across the nine NIA partnerships that chose this indicator. Based on data recorded by NIA partnerships in the online reporting tool:

- At **baseline**: 66 of these species (56% of the total of focal species reported) had a known status at baseline: 17 species (57% of total) with an increasing status; 30 species (26% of the total) with a decreasing status; and 19 species (16% of the total) with a stable status. The remaining 51 species (44% of the total) had unknown status at baseline.
- At the end of **Year 1**: NIA partnerships reported an increase in the number to 59 species (50% of total) with unknown status. Of the 58 species (50% of total) with known status, it was reported that: 22 species (19% of total) had an increasing status; 18 species (15% of total) had a decreasing status; and 18 species (15% of total) had a stable status. It is assumed that surveys within the NIAs were introduced but not completed at the end of Year 1.
- At the end of **Year 2**: the number of species with known status was 87 (74% of the total), and of these: 46 species (39% of total) had increasing status; 21 species (18% of the total) had decreasing status; and 20 species (17% of the total) stable status. The remaining 30 species (26% of the total) had unknown status.

Box 3.3 shows more detail of the focal species data, for example, by focusing on some of the species where the condition status was known at the start of the NIA programme (baseline) and how their status has changed.

Box 3.3: Considering the focal species data in more detail

- Those focal species with unknown baseline status (51 species):
 - All 51 species continued to have unknown status in Year 1, and 20 of these continued to have unknown status in Year 2.
 - Of the remaining 31 species with reported status only in Year 2, two bird species – snipe and golden plover – were reported in Dearne Valley as decreasing in Year 2 while 28 species were reported as increasing in Year 2; 23 species in Dearne Valley and five species in Humberhead Levels and one species – hedgehog – was reported as stable in Year 2 (Dearne Valley).
 - The 31 species with unknown status at baseline and reported status only in Year 2 means that Year 2 becomes the baseline reference point for future comparison.
- Of those 66 focal species with known status at baseline:
 - 52 species (44% of the total reported focal species) had known status reported in Year 1 and Year 2: 17 species were reported as stable at baseline, and all except one continued to have stable status in Year 1 and Year 2 (the only exception was a bird species – nightjar – which was reported as increasing in both Year 1 and Year 2).
 - 16 species reported as increasing at baseline all continued to be reported as increasing in both

⁷⁴ The focal species indicator aims to show the trend in species of high conservation status that are the focus of actions or sensitive to drivers of change that are a specific concern within the NIA.

- Year 1 and Year 2.
 - 17 species reported as decreasing at baseline all continued to be reported as decreasing in both Year 1 and Year 2.
 - three species reported as decreasing at baseline were reported by Year 2 as stable: least water lily, white faced darter, and high-brown fritillary (butterfly).
- Overall therefore 33 species (22% of the total focal species) that were reported as stable or increasing at baseline continued to be stable or increasing over Year 1 and Year 2 or in the case of the nightjar improved from stable to increasing. All but five of these species were reported by Birmingham and Black Country NIA (24 plant and four bat species, with four bird species reported by Humberhead Levels and one bird species, corn bunting was reported by the South Downs).

Conclusion

Over a timescale of two years, it was not possible from these data to identify a trend in the status of species. The increases in the proportion of known species' status between Year 1 and Year 2 are likely to indicate the results of survey activity by NIA partnerships or the outcomes of national surveys.

Data reported by NIA partnerships at the end Year 3 should enable further reflection on the changes observed in widespread and focal species' status. Species status reporting put in place by NIA partnerships is likely to help establish longer term monitoring activity beyond the three years of grant funded NIA programme and improve the data base.

3.3.2 Habitats to support specific species' needs

Sub-section 2.2.3 sets out NIA partnerships progress and achievements in supporting the needs of species. This includes habitat management activities targeted at species, (among many others) such as: restoration of woodland and farmland habitats to support focal species (Dearne Valley); activities focussing on conditions for invertebrates in the Thames estuary (Greater Thames Marshes); breeding wader and tern habitat enhancements (Humberhead Levels); and grassland management for short-eared owls (Marlborough Downs).

It was not possible to identify trends in species status from these NIA partnership activities (see example in Box 3.4). The nature and scale of habitat interventions (see sub-section 3.2) together with activities and application of best practice that seeks to support target species are likely to have beneficial impacts on species status, especially in the longer term.

Box 3.4: Habitat management to support nightjar populations in Humberhead Levels

Humberhead Levels have undertaken riparian habitat enhancement activity in part to help manage habitat to support nightjar populations. It was not possible to infer causality to any increases in nightjar populations over the timescale of the NIA programme. This is partly because the species was reported as already increasing at the end of Year 1, and there may be many other reasons for the change or local fluctuations. Populations will need to be monitored over a longer period of time before any conclusion can be drawn. It is worth noting that nationally, the nightjar has been increasing with some regional declines (BTO, 2010c).

3.3.3 Control of invasive or non-native species

Although only one NIA partnership (Dark Peak) selected the optional indicator: *control of invasive non-native species*, other NIA partnerships are engaged in activities focused on non-native species control (e.g. scrub and invasive tree removal in South Downs).

Reporting from Year 1 for Dark Peak showed 0.5ha of control of *Rhododendron* against a target of 1.2ha. In Year 2, 2.43ha had been controlled, indicating that more than the target area had been achieved (restoration of native woodland at Blacka Moor by *Rhododendron* removal).

There are no data to provide further evidence of the influence NIA partnerships have had on the control of invasive and non-native species.

3.4 Connectivity

3.4.1 Ecological connectivity and increased resilience to future change

This section considers the extent to which NIA partnership activities and outputs have improved habitat connectivity. The principles behind the establishment of NIAs advocated a landscape-scale approach to conservation action (Lawton *et al.*, 2010), and this is reflected in the objectives, Business Plans and implementation of activities within the NIA partnerships.

Development of a meaningful indicator of connectivity is ongoing while the NIA partnerships are contributing to the understanding of connectivity by actively testing and developing approaches to its delivery and measurement. Connectivity is difficult to measure, but it does not mean that improvements are not being made to connectivity through the habitat creation and management activity that is being delivered (see Section 2, and sub-section 3.2).

A new core indicator - *comparative indicator of habitat connectivity* - was developed and added to the M&E framework. The protocol suggests an approach, but also encourages the NIA partnerships to develop locally appropriate approaches. It has been used in a variety of different ways, consistent with the principle of NIA partnerships testing approaches, sharing knowledge and learning. This indicator sought to capture those actions that are considered by each NIA partnership, to be making a contribution to connectivity in their local context.

The suggested approach, which has generally been adopted by NIA partnerships, is the selection of priority habitats where actions have been undertaken through maintenance, restoration or creation. The extent of these actions have then been weighted on the basis of the scale of intervention or the potential impact of the action on landscape scale habitat connectivity within the NIA landscape. There is some logic as to why different NIA partnerships may take different approaches, since connectivity will depend on the habitat types and species of a particular landscape.

Each NIA partnership has used their own, locally determined weighting to report on contributions of their actions to connectivity, so it is difficult to make a quantitative aggregation of these data to report on the extent of NIA partnerships' contribution to connectivity.

As reported in sub-section 2.2.2, many of the NIA partnerships habitat activities have focused on improving connectivity, and habitat connectivity has been an area of considerable research and innovation by the NIA partnerships themselves, and through joint-working with research and academic institutions (see sub-section 2.5). While a headline figure of 'connectivity' is not possible at this time, the NIA partnerships' activities to the end of Year 2 have most likely contributed to less fragmented places for wildlife, and increased the level of understanding of how to deliver, and measure, improvements to connectivity.

The habitat connectivity indicator remains a challenge and it is difficult to answer the evaluation questions meaningfully as to whether actions have had a significant effect on improving the habitat connectivity within the NIAs. It has allowed wide debate on the role and nature of connectivity within the NIAs, how connectivity should be interpreted and whether connectivity is always the right conservation strategy – e.g. positive and negative impacts on different target species. These discussions and their translation into the considerations of conservation actions appear to be a useful outcome.

In addition to the optional and comparative indicator protocols, additional locally derived connectivity indicators have been developed such as the measure of river habitat connectivity devised by Dearne Valley (Box 3.5). This is an example of the development of new and locally specific approaches.

Box 3.5: Measure of river habitat connectivity, Dearne Valley

The approach to monitoring and reporting on this indicator of river habitat connectivity was based on the number of weirs removed or lowered along the Don that increase the connection for anadromous fish⁷⁵. The more barriers removed, the better the connectivity for migrating fish. Data were provided by the Don Catchment Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency. The Dearne Valley NIA partnership are working to survey more of the water courses within the NIA for man-made features and barriers, and further data will be mapped and used for future reporting.

The data reflect small changes in number of features (fish and eel passes), that may have a positive impact on connecting lengths of the river systems and smaller tributaries. The Houghton eel pass was lost in floods, indicating that there may be both gains and losses of connectivity.

⁷⁵ Anadromous fish are those that migrate from the sea into fresh water to spawn, such as salmon.

4. Evaluation of Ecosystem Services Outcomes and Impacts

Key messages from Year 2: Ecosystem services outcomes and impacts

- The NIA partnerships' self-assessment of **progress against funding agreement objectives related to ecosystem services delivery indicate that the NIA partnerships are making reasonable progress: 55% of relevant objectives were assessed as being on, or ahead of schedule**; the remaining 45% were behind schedule but there has been 'satisfactory or good' progress.
- All the **NIA partnerships have contributed to improved delivery of ecosystem services**. This has been achieved through activities explicitly seeking to achieve this outcome (e.g. increased carbon storage / sequestration) as well as an outcome of other activities, such as habitat creation and improvement which also affect ecosystem service provision. NIA partnership activities and projects have improved a range of:
 - **cultural services**, by: managing land for enhanced landscape character; increasing access to greenspace by creating and improving public rights of way and permissive paths; improving the quality of greenspace for enhanced visitor experience; and facilitating improved understanding of the natural environment;
 - **supporting services**, for example by improving conditions for pollinators. Three NIA partnerships have reported on specific projects, and wider habitat outcomes (see Section 3) are also likely to be improving conditions and providing additional habitat for pollinators; and
 - **regulating services**, through projects that have changed land management, such as those seeking to improve water quality, increase carbon storage and sequestration and provide improved flood storage capacity and river flow management.
- **More sustainable agriculture and woodland management practices have delivered provisioning services** (e.g. food, timber). This has been achieved by contributing to an increase in the proportion of land under Environmental Stewardship and the proportion of woodland in active management:
 - Land under **Environmental Stewardship has increased by 10.3% across NIAs**, compared to 7.8% across the whole of England over the period 2012 to 2014; and
 - across the seven NIA partnerships that reported it the **proportion of woodlands in active management increased by 3%** (compared to 2% nationally over the same period). Note that these outcomes cannot be solely attributed to the work of NIA partnerships.

4.1 Introduction

This part of the evaluation considers the ecosystem services outcomes and impacts achieved by the NIA partnerships. It uses the available evidence to provide an interim evaluation, of the extent to which cultural, supporting, regulating and provisioning ecosystem services have improved or increased in the NIAs and the NIA partnerships' contributions to these improvements.

4.1.1 Data sources used in this section

The interim evaluation of ecosystem services outcomes and impacts is based on analysis of information and data from the following sources:

- NIA data entry in the online reporting tool for the M&E indicators under the ecosystem services theme:
 - *access to natural greenspace and/or woodland* (optional); *area of habitat supporting pollinators* (optional); *area of more-sustainable agricultural production* (optional); *contribution to water quality* (optional); *contribution to carbon storage and sequestration* (optional); *length of accessible PROW (public rights of way) and permissive paths created and/or improved* (optional); and *percentage of woodland in active management* (optional).

Note: a table summarising the NIA partnerships' M&E indicator selection and data entry (using the online reporting tool) is included in Appendix 1.

- NIA partnership self-reporting on progress through quarterly Progress Reports and annual Progress Summaries as submitted to Natural England.
- National data sources: Natural England supplied data on Environmental Stewardship schemes; Forestry Commission National Forest Inventory; Forestry Commission Woodland in Management indicator; Forestry Commission Corporate Plan Performance Indicators and Woodland Indicators 2014

4.1.2 Summary of the evaluation of ecosystem services outcomes and impacts

Table 4.1 sets out the evaluation questions and sub-questions considered in this section and presents headlines from the interim evaluation against each evaluation question.

As the evaluation is at an interim stage, there was no expectation that NIA partnerships would have completed delivery or achieved all expected outcomes. Many outcomes and impacts of the NIA partnerships' activities and wider NIA programme will not be seen until after the end of the NIA grant funded period (after 2015).

Further detail to support the interim evaluation headlines in Table 4.1 is provided in this section.

Table 4.1: Ecosystem services evaluation questions and interim evaluation headlines

Questions To what extent have NIAs contributed to...	Sub-questions	Interim evaluation headlines
Improved cultural services?	1. What improvement has been made to the extent of land managed to maintain and / or enhance landscape character in NIAs and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three NIA partnerships reported on land managed to maintain / improve landscape character. • At the end of Year 2, a total of 8,968ha was being managed for landscape character across these three NIAs; about 6.6% of their total area. • The area reported is a small fraction of the total area of the NIAs, but other NIA partnership activities are also likely to be contributing to landscape enhancement. [Sub-section 4.2.1]
	2. What improvements have been made to the length or accessibility of public rights of way (PROW) and permissive paths in NIAs, and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four NIA partnerships reported on improvements to and improved accessibility of public rights of way and permissive paths. • In these four NIAs, a total length of 30km of public rights of way and permissive paths have been improved or created, with access improved to a further 532km. [Sub-section 4.2.2]
	3. What improvements have been made to access to natural greenspace and / or woodland in NIAs, and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited change has been reported in relation to the accessibility of greenspace, although one NIA partnership opened up access to a nature reserve, and activities

Questions To what extent have NIAs contributed to...	Sub-questions	Interim evaluation headlines
	improvements?	<p>such as improving paths are likely to be improving access more generally. [Sub-section 4.2.3]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to physical measures of accessibility (which are generally based on proximity), NIA partnership activities to mobilise volunteers, and engage local communities are also providing more people with access to the natural environment (see Sections 2 and 5). At least six NIA partnerships have undertaken surveys of local people / visitors which will inform future improvements to access to green space. [Sub-section 4.2.3]
Improved supporting services?	4. To what extent have conditions for pollinators been improved in NIAs, and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One NIA partnership reported on the area of habitats supporting pollinators. Their data shows an increase of approximately 4% (156ha) between baseline (2012) and Year 2. [Sub-section 4.3.1] Specific activities (see sub-section 2.3.4) and wider habitat improvements across all NIA partnerships (see Section 3) are likely to be improving conditions for pollinators.
Improved regulating services?	5. What improvements (e.g. to habitats) have been made that enhance water quality in NIAs and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to these improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five NIA partnerships reported on land management or watercourse improvement activities to improve water quality. 10,046ha were being managed to improve water quality (end of Year 2), across the three NIA partnerships that reported on this. A total length of 6.35km of linear (river / watercourse) habitat was being managed for improved quality (end of Year 2) in the two NIAs that reported this. Evidence is not available on the scale of improvements to water quality. [Sub-section 4.4.1]
	6. How much has carbon sequestration been increased in NIAs, and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to this increase?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NIA partnerships reported in different ways on works undertaken for carbon storage and sequestration: Dark Peak managed 265ha of land for carbon benefits; Dearne Valley calculated that 2,660tCO₂e would be sequestered over 100 years from whip planting; Humberhead Levels recorded that 950ha of land had been re-wetted to increase carbon storage; and Morecambe Bay estimated future carbon storage and sequestration to be 2,511tCO₂e per year (as estimated after 10 years post restoration) for raised bog restoration work and woodland management. [Sub-section 4.4.2]
Improved provisioning services?	7. What improvement has been made to sustainable agricultural production in NIAs and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to this improvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land under Environmental Stewardship increased by 10.3% across NIAs compared to 7.8% across the whole of England from 2012 to 2014. It was not possible to attribute all of this change to NIA partnership activities. [Sub-section 4.5.1]
	8. What improvement has been made to the area of forest under active management in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Across the seven NIA partnerships that reported it, the proportion of woodlands in

Questions To what extent have NIAs contributed to...	Sub-questions	Interim evaluation headlines
	NIAs and to what extent have NIA partnerships contributed to this improvement?	active management increased by 3% between baseline (2012) and the end of Year 2, although it is not possible to attribute all of the change observed to NIA partnership activities. [Sub-section 4.5.2]

4.1.3 Progress against NIA partnership objectives relevant to ecosystem services

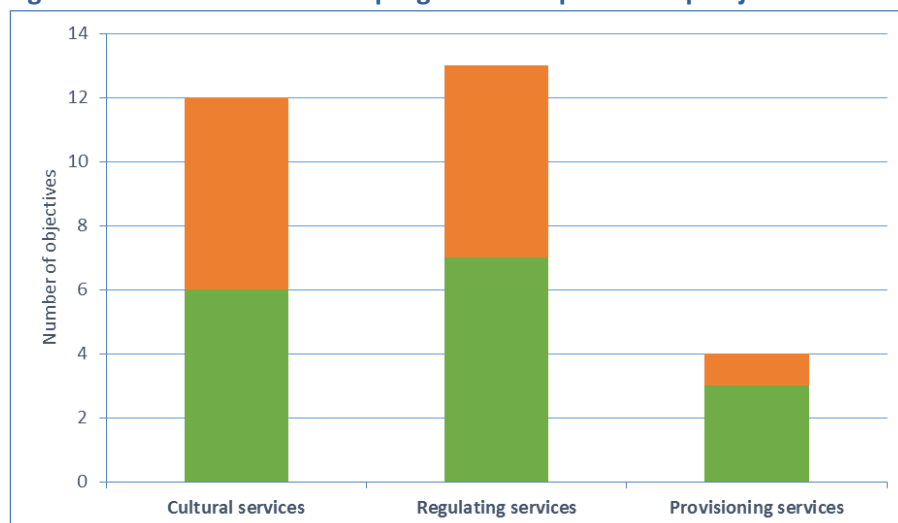
The individual NIA partnerships have various objectives focussed on ecosystem service provision, including the restoration and enhancement of the different services, better provision of public access to services, as well as the assessment and demonstration of the benefits of ecosystem services to urban populations. In total, eight NIA partnerships have objectives for ecosystem services (29 objectives in total; 12 relevant to cultural services, 13 to regulating services, four to provisioning services and none to supporting services).

NIA partnerships' objectives do not always specify outcomes for ecosystem services, for example, Birmingham and Black Country have reported on improvement of conditions for pollinators (a supporting service) although this is not specified in their funding agreement objectives.

Analysis of progress against these objectives is presented in Figure 4.1 using a traffic light system. This is based on the NIA partnerships' self-assessment⁷⁶ of the level of progress they have made towards project outcomes, and whether progress is in line with the original milestones. Figure 4.1 shows progress under their ecosystem services objectives at the end of Year 2: 16 of the 29 relevant objectives (55%) were assessed as on, or ahead of, target; and 13 (45%) were assessed as not in line with original milestones but where satisfactory or good progress had been made. No relevant objectives were categorised as having little or no progress.

The reasons stated for not being in line with the original milestones, include delays resulting from: land acquisition; technical challenges; adverse weather conditions; illness and data licensing issues; and undertaking additional consultation and engagement.

Figure 4.1: Self-assessment of progress – NIA partnership objectives relevant to ecosystem services



Source: NIA self-assessment of progress as reported in the 4th quarterly Progress Reports

Note: The method used to generate this figure is explained in Appendix 2

⁷⁶ The self-assessment is included in the NIA partnerships' Year 2 4th Quarter Progress Reports and analysis by the M&E Phase 2 team – see Appendix 2.

Key to shading: **Green** - on or ahead of schedule; **Amber** - not in line with original schedule, but where satisfactory or good progress has been made; and **Red** - Little or no progress made and behind schedule.

4.2 Cultural services

This section considers the extent to which NIA partnerships have contributed to cultural services.

NIA partnerships have contributed to cultural services through activities such as improvements to people's experience of natural places and their understanding of the natural environment, as well as increased engagement in the natural environment, such as through volunteering. There are three cultural services M&E indicators: *improvements to landscape character, length and accessibility of public rights of way and permissive paths, and accessibility to natural greenspace and / or woodland*).

4.2.1 Improvements to landscape

Three NIA partnerships⁷⁷ provided data for the optional indicator *extent of land managed to maintain and / or enhance landscape character*.

At the end of Year 2, a total of 8,968ha was reported as being managed for landscape character across these three NIA partnerships. This area represents about 6.6% of the total area of these three NIAs (136,823ha), and includes 1,153ha in Morecambe Bay, 7,126ha in the South Downs and 689ha in Wild Purbeck. The types of habitats enhanced in these three NIAs included woodland, wetland, grassland and heathland. All of these improvements were undertaken by the NIA partnerships, based on their entries in the online reporting tool.

This is a comparatively small area, but it is from the reporting of only three NIA partnerships, and other NIA partnership activities (e.g. habitat improvements) are also likely to be contributing to landscape enhancements.

4.2.2 Improvements to public rights of way (PROW) and permissive paths

Four NIAs reported on the optional indicator *length of public rights of way (PROW) and permissive paths created and / or improved*. These data are summarised in Table 4.2. NIA partnership activities have improved or created a total length of 30km of public rights of way and permissive paths, with access improved to a further 532km⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ Morecambe Bay, South Downs and Wild Purbeck.

⁷⁸ These figures are based on reporting through the online tool by Dark Peak, Dearne Valley, Meres and Mosses and Marlborough Downs. The length of public rights of way and permissive paths with improved accessibility includes 514.94km reported by Meres and Mosses and this is likely to represent the length of paths made accessible through improvements to smaller lengths. The narrative entered by Meres and Mosses for these data notes: *A key project within our programme of works is to create, or improve, access trails enabling a wider community of people to access special sites within the Meres & Mosses. We have created a new route at Bickley Hall Farm, Cheshire - giving greater access to Bar Mere. We also made improvements at Brown Moss, Prees Heath, Wem Moss, Bettisfield Moss and Whixall Moss.*

Table 4.2: Length of Public Rights of Way (PROW) and permissive paths created and /or improved to the end of Year 2

NIA	Length of new PROW created (km)	Length of footpath upgraded to bridleway (km)	Length of permissive route created (km)	Length of improved accessibility of PROW (km)	Length of improved accessibility of permissive paths (km)
Dark Peak	0	0	0	12.5	0
Dearne Valley	4.36	1.73	0	6.74	0.5
Meres and Mosses	15.45	0	6.5	467	17
Marlborough Downs	0	0	2.33	28.7	0
Total	19.81	1.73	8.83	514.94	17.5

Source: Data from NIA partnership reporting in online tool

4.2.3 Access to and quality of greenspace / woodland

Four NIA partnerships⁷⁹ reported on the optional indicator *access to natural greenspace and / or woodland*. These data were recorded under different features, including area (ha) of accessible greenspace / woodland, population (%) with access to greenspace / woodland, and population (%) against selected Access to Natural Greenspace Standards (ANGSt).

Across the NIA partnerships who reported on this indicator, most data showed little or no change between baseline and the end of Year 2. The only changes reported were:

- In Northern Devon, the area of accessible natural greenspace increased due to the opening of a nature reserve (from 3,311ha at baseline to 3,461ha at end of Year 2) and this resulted in an increase in the percentage of the population in the NIA with access to natural greenspace from 47% at baseline to 55% at the end of Year 2.
- In Nene Valley, an increase in the percentage of population in the NIA with access to natural greenspace was reported from 43% at baseline to 45% in Year 2⁸⁰.

Based on information available from quarterly Progress Reports and NIA partnership M&E supporting documents, NIA partnerships have also all sought to improve the quality and use of greenspace. At least six NIA partnerships⁸¹ have carried out surveys of visitors' or local peoples' experiences of or attitudes towards the natural environment in their areas.

4.2.4 Improved understanding of the natural environment

NIA partnerships are seeking to facilitate an improved understanding of the natural environment by engaging local people and groups in their work and by organising events, such as festivals, workshops, guided walks, talks, training events and learning activities with school groups (examples of such activities and events are included in sub-section 2.3.2 relating to progress and achievements).

With the evidence available, it was not possible to know whether people in the NIAs are gaining an improved understanding of the natural environment from such interventions. It seems likely that these events are contributing to the participants' knowledge and awareness.

⁷⁹ Birmingham and Black Country, Nene Valley, Northern Devon and Greater Thames Marshes

⁸⁰ The area of recorded accessible natural greenspace in fact fell by 50ha from baseline to Year 2. This was a result of improved information and refinements to boundaries and not due to any loss of greenspace.

⁸¹ The following NIA partnerships are known to have completed surveys: Dearne Valley; Greater Thames Marshes; Humberhead Levels; Marlborough Downs; Nene Valley; Wild Purbeck. It is very likely that all other NIA partnerships have also sought to understand community and visitor experiences / attitudes, for example through meetings and workshops.

4.3 Supporting services

4.3.1 Area of habitat supporting pollinators

Birmingham and Black Country was the only NIA partnership⁸² to record the *area of habitat supporting pollinators*. Their data show an increase of approximately 4% (156ha) between baseline (2012) and Year 2 (from 3,656ha at baseline to 3,812ha at the end of Year 2).

Habitat improvements reported in sub-section 2.2, as well as specific activities within NIAs seeking to improve conditions for pollinators (reported in sub-section 2.4.4) will also be helping to support pollinators.

4.4 Regulating services

This section considers the extent to which NIA partnerships have improved regulating services. Through their activities, NIA partnerships have: made improvements to water quality; increased carbon storage and sequestration; made improvements to flood storage potential; and taken action for climate change adaptation.

Examples of activities of NIA partnerships to improve regulating services are presented in Box 2.8 in sub-section 2.3.5.

4.4.1 Improvements to water quality

NIA partnerships' activities to improve water quality have been recorded under the optional indicator *contribution to water quality*. Under this indicator, three NIA partnerships⁸³ reported on different types of land management undertaken to improve water quality, and two NIA partnerships⁸⁴ reported on the length of habitat managed for improved water quality⁸⁵.

10,046ha were recorded as being managed to improve water quality by the end of Year 2, across the three NIA partnerships that reported on it (approximately 7% of their total area). In the two NIAs that reported length of habitat managed for improved quality a total of 6.35km was recorded by the end of Year 2.

4.4.2 Climate change mitigation and adaptation and water management

This sub-section reports on NIA partnership outcomes and impacts in relation to carbon storage and sequestration, flood-risk management and adaptation to climate change.

NIA partnerships recorded data on **carbon storage and sequestration** in different ways in the online reporting tool. At the end of Year 2 the data indicates that:

- Dark Peak had managed 265ha of land for carbon benefits.
- Dearne Valley estimated that 2,660tCO₂e⁸⁶ would be sequestered over 100 years from whip planting.
- Humberhead Levels recorded that 950ha of land had been re-wetted to increase carbon storage.

⁸² Marlborough Downs also selected this indicator but have not entered data.

⁸³ Dark Peak, Northern Devon, South Downs

⁸⁴ Birmingham and Black Country, Dark Peak

⁸⁵ In addition Dearne Valley provided data collated by the Environment Agency to show the chemical and biological quality of the water at five key sample points in the NIA. These data cover baseline and Year 1 only and are difficult to interpret for monitoring purposes.

⁸⁶ tCO₂e means tonnes of CO₂ equivalents. Based on the United Kingdom housing energy fact file 2012 (DECC, 2012) the average CO₂ emissions per household (excluding transport) in the UK was 5.6 tonnes in 2010. Thus a calculated saving of the equivalent of 2,660 tonnes of CO₂ equates to the average annual emissions of 475 households.

- Morecambe Bay estimated future carbon storage and sequestration to be 2,511tCO₂e per year (after 10 years post restoration) for raised bog restoration work and woodland management.

Although activities to increase and improve habitats across all NIAs are likely to be improving the natural management of water and flooding, six NIA partnerships⁸⁷ have reported on specific work to **improve water management or flood storage potential**.

Seven⁸⁸ of the 12 initial NIA partnerships included objectives within their funding agreements that relate directly to **climate change adaptation or improved resilience** (of habitats, ecosystems etc.) and 10 were involved in the project: '*Assessing and enabling climate change adaptation in Nature Improvement Areas*' (Atkins, 2013). As part of this project, NIA partnerships have been making use of the National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability Model (NBCCVM) (Taylor *et al.*, 2014), and examples of this work are presented in Box 4.1.

Such activities in the NIAs are likely to be contributing to improved flood storage potential, reduced flood risk and increased resilience to climate change.

Box 4.1: Examples of NIA use of the National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability Model (NBCCVM)

- Greater Thames Marshes NIA has used NBCCVM to support habitat vulnerability mapping for the NIA which has developed understanding of critical habitat areas (e.g. riparian habitats in industrialised areas of the Thames estuary).
- Morecambe Bay NIA has used the NBCCVM to prioritise action for wetland sites.
- Nene Valley NIA has been using outputs from the NBCCVM to target management of areas (e.g. woodland planting and wetland creation) to help mitigate carbon emissions.
- Northern Devon NIA has been developing an ecological network map using the NBCCVM in conjunction with other models and tools.
- Wild Purbeck NIA has added vulnerability information (from the NBCCVM) to existing data to demonstrate multiple benefits of habitat creation to landowners and to target areas for land use change in the Frome and Piddle Catchment.

Source: Natural England Commissioned Report NECR119 (Atkins, 2013)

4.5 Provisioning services

This section considers the extent to which NIA partnership activities and outputs have contributed to increased provisioning services. NIA partnerships have reported through the online reporting tool on the optional indicators: *area of more sustainable agricultural production* and the *percentage of woodland in active management*.

More sustainable agriculture and woodland management practices have delivered provisioning services. The NIA partnerships have developed a range of marketable products from natural products or by-products of site management. Sub-sections 2.3.7 and 5.6 present NIA partnership achievements and outcomes related to how this has contributed to the local economy. These include the development and marketing of natural products. Most projects use harvested material (such as wood or reed) and investigations are also being made into using by-products from site management for biofuel. Two projects market food produce (local venison and meat derived from traditional breeds used in conservation grazing).

⁸⁷ Birmingham and Black Country; Dark Peak; Dearne Valley; Humberhead Levels; Nene Valley; Northern Devon.

⁸⁸ Dark Peak; Dearne Valley; Greater Thames Marshes; Humberhead Levels; Morecambe Bay; Northern Devon; Wild Purbeck

4.5.1 Area of more-sustainable agricultural production

Seven NIA partnerships provided data on the area of land under priority options within Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) and Entry-Level Stewardship (ELS) agreements, based on information supplied by Natural England (see Table 4.3). These NIA partnerships reported on individual options of local priority. The data in Table 4.3 does not include point (e.g. ponds) and linear scheme options (e.g. metres of hedgerows), which some NIA partnerships have also reported on.

Table 4.3 shows the area under both HLS and ELS across those NIA partnerships that have reported these data. At the end of Year 2 the area under HLS in these NIAs was 74,711ha (22% of the area of these seven NIAs) and the area under ELS was 102,730ha⁸⁹ (31% of the area). In all NIAs where data were available the area under Environmental Stewardship has increased between baseline (2012) and Year 2 (2013-14).

Compared to the whole of England, the proportion of land under Environmental Stewardship within NIAs is slightly below the national figure (see Table 4.4). This may be due to the lack of suitability of some options and that not all NIAs are within HLS target areas (e.g. Dearne Valley). The proportion of land under Environmental Stewardship has increased more in NIAs than England as a whole over the period 2012 to 2014: an increase of 10.3% across NIAs compared to 7.8% across the whole of England (see Table 4.4). This increase cannot all be attributed to the work of NIA partnerships, although NIA partnerships may have made a contribution to this increase through the work of their advisers with farmers and land managers on Environmental Stewardship⁹⁰.

Table 4.3: Area of priority options within Higher (HLS) and Entry (ELS) Level Stewardship schemes

NIA partnership	Higher-level/targeted schemes (ha)		Entry-level type schemes (ha)	
	Baseline (2012)	Year 2 (2013-14)	Baseline (2012)	Year 2 (2013-14)
Dark Peak	7,708	45,581	18,127	93,128
Dearne Valley	292	386	122	166
Greater Thames Marshes	4,995	6,840	926	1,252
Humberhead Levels	-	67	-	400
Marlborough Downs	601	1,140	258	335
Meres and Mosses	1,391	2,055	1,751	2,129
Nene Valley	849	1,298	2,661	2,791
South Downs	-	7,954	-	-
Wild Purbeck	-	9,390	-	2,529
Total	-	74,711	-	102,730⁹¹

Source: Analysis based on data recorded by NIA partnerships on coverage of priority options within HLS and ELS schemes recorded in the online reporting tool.

Note: '-' means no data were entered by NIA. Due to missing data values, total area has not been calculated for baseline.

⁸⁹ Note that more than one option may apply to the same area of land.

⁹⁰ For example training / recruitment of farm advisers were reported by Nene Valley, Northern Devon and South Downs to encourage sustainable farming practices, and application for Environmental Stewardship grants.

⁹¹ It is not known if South Downs have zero (0) land under ELS or if this represents missing data. Total calculated on assumption area is zero.

Table 4.4: Proportion of land in Environmental Stewardship within NIAs compared to the whole of England (2012-14)

Area	Percentage of land in Environmental Stewardship			Increase 2012 - 2014
	March 2012	March 2013	March 2014	
All NIAs	32.6	36.6	42.9	10.3%
England	40.2	44.8	48.0	7.8%

Source: Analysis based on data supplied by Natural England on Environmental Stewardship scheme coverage. Land area of England used for the calculation taken as 13,348,000ha (the total land area above MHW as used in the Lawton report).

4.5.2 Percentage of woodland in active management

Seven NIA partnerships reported on the optional indicator *percentage of woodland in active management* (see Table 4.5)⁹². At the end of Year 2, the area of woodland in active management across these seven NIAs was reported to have increased by 3% (527ha), from 17,138ha to 17,665ha compared to the baseline (2012) (see Table 4.6).

The total area and the proportion of woodland in active management⁹³ across all NIAs is illustrated in Table 4.7. The area of woodland in active management across all 12 initial NIAs has increased from a baseline figure of 23,675ha to 24,414ha at the end of Year 2. This increase of 739ha represents a 1.5% increase in the proportion of woodland in active management.

Over the same period (March 2012 – March 2014), the national (England) indicator for woodland in active management (Forestry Commission, 2014) shows an increase in the percentage of woodland in active management of 2%, from 53% to 55%.

As national datasets are used for this indicator, even where recorded by NIA partnerships in the online reporting tool, this increase cannot be directly attributed to NIA partnership led activity, unless this has been clearly stated (as is the case for Humberhead Levels, who reported that 206.35ha - 8.4% of total area - of woodland in agreements was achieved through the work of the NIA partnerships).

Table 4.5: Percentage of NIA woodland in active management at the end of Year 2

NIA partnership	Total area of woodland in NIA (ha)	Percentage of woodland area in active management	Area of woodland under active management
Birmingham and Black Country	3,760	32%	1,203
Dark Peak	1,585	85%	1,347
Dearne Valley	1,666	40%	666
Humberhead Levels	2,456	17% ⁹⁴	418
Morecambe Bay	7,906	60%	4,744
Northern Devon	10,333	47%	4,857
South Downs	7,911	56% ⁹⁵	4,430
Total / overall % under management	35,617	50%	17,665

Source: Analysis based on data recorded by NIAs in the online tool and data provided by Natural England on the Forestry Commission National Forest Inventory and the Woodland in Management indicator⁹⁶.

⁹² All but two NIA partnerships (Humberhead Levels and South Downs) used data supplied by Natural England from the Forestry Commission National Forest Inventory. Woodland in Management Performance Indicator.

⁹³ Based on Forestry Commission National Forestry Inventory data

⁹⁴ 206.35 ha (8.4%) of woodland in agreements achieved through the work of the NIA

⁹⁵ The NIA recorded 59% of woodland to be in active management based on analysis of data from the Rural Land Register in combination with OS Survey MasterMap.

Note: The overall percentage under management calculated by summing individual areas of woodland under active management (17,663.78ha) and dividing by the total area of woodland across the seven NIAs (35,615.53ha).

Table 4.6: Area of woodland in active management at the end of Year 2 in the seven NIA partnerships⁹⁷ that reported on this indicator

Area of NIA woodland in active management (ha)		
Baseline (2012)	End of Year 2 (2014)	Change (baseline – 2014)
17,138	17,665	+527

Source: Analysis based on data recorded by NIAs in the online tool and data provided by Natural England on the Forestry Commission National Forest Inventory and the Woodland in Management indicator.

Table 4.7: Woodland cover and extent of managed woodland across *all* NIAs at the end of Year 2

Total NIA area (ha)	Total woodland (ha)	% of NIAs that is woodland	Area of actively managed woodland (ha)	% of woodland actively managed across all NIAs	% of woodland in active management, England (March 2014)
513,144	50,871	9.9%	24,414	48%	55%

Source: Data supplied by Natural England in 2014 based on the Forestry Commission National Forest Inventory and the Woodland in Management indicator. England level indicator from Forestry Commission Corporate Plan Performance Indicators and Woodland Indicators 2014 (Forestry Commission, 2014).

⁹⁶ For comparative purposes, data supplied by Natural England on the percentage of the NIA woodland area in active management has been used, rather than data in the online tool, as NIAs had entered data in different formats.

⁹⁷ Birmingham and Black Country, Dark Peak, Dearne Valley, Humberhead Levels, Morecambe Bay, Northern Devon, South Downs.

5. Evaluation of Social and Economic Wellbeing Outcomes and Impacts

Key messages from Year 2: Social and Economic Wellbeing

- The NIA partnerships' self-assessment of progress against funding agreement objectives considered to relate to social and economic wellbeing indicate that: **50% of relevant objectives were assessed as being on, or ahead of schedule**; the remaining 50% were behind schedule but there has been 'satisfactory or good' progress.
- In all NIAs **activities are resulting in social, economic and wellbeing benefits**. Challenges remain to the effective monitoring and evaluation of these impacts meaning it was not possible to provide a detailed assessment of the scale of these benefits or their social distribution.
- For most NIA partnerships **social and economic wellbeing benefits are considered welcome additions to the NIA partnerships' work restoring and creating habitats**. The lack of explicit consideration or reporting of these benefits means that there are likely to be unrealised opportunities and/or under-reporting of these benefits.
- All NIA partnerships are **designing and delivering activities that will result in education and learning opportunities for children and adults**. The benefits of these activities include better understanding of the environment, using the environment as a forum for enhanced cross-curricular learning and accrediting individuals with formal qualifications.
- **Community engagement activities have led to the development of new social networks, or the strengthening of existing ones**. This is mostly occurring as a benefit of volunteering. It was not possible to measure this fully or to understand the social distribution of these benefits.
- The NIA partnerships are undertaking **activities that delivering spiritual, cultural and aesthetic benefits**, for example related to enhancing a sense of place within the NIA or artistic enhancements / representations of local places. The NIA partnerships don't tend to refer explicitly to activities considering spiritual, cultural and aesthetic benefits.
- **Six NIA partnerships reported on economic benefits**. Much of this work relates to promoting bio-fuel markets. One NIA partnership has been exploring how the natural environment can be used to enhance the attractiveness of the area to visitors and investors.

5.1 Introduction

This part of the evaluation considers the extent to which NIA partnerships have contributed to social and economic wellbeing outcomes and impacts in their areas. It evaluates NIA partnership contributions to: the physical and mental health of local people; education and learning; symbolic, spiritual and aesthetic benefits; social development and connections; and contributions to the local economy.

5.1.1 Data sources used in this section

The interim evaluation of inputs and process is based on analysis of information and data from the following sources:

- NIA data entry in the online reporting tool for M&E indicators:
 - Social and economic theme: *number of volunteer hours on NIA activities* (core); *Number of educational visits* (optional).

Note: a table summarising the NIA partnerships' M&E indicator selection and data entry (using the online reporting tool) is included in Appendix 1.

- NIA partnership self-reporting on progress through quarterly Progress Reports and annual Progress Summaries as submitted to Natural England.
- NIA Quarterly Progress reports and annual Progress Summaries.
- Case studies co-developed by the M&E team and the NIA partnerships.
- NIA visitor surveys (provided via the online tool document upload facility).
- Outcomes of interviews with NIA partnerships held in December 2013 – January 2014 related to research and innovation and in May – June 2014⁹⁸ related to social and economic wellbeing and partnership working.

Note that this theme was supported by a literature review on the social and economic benefits associated with natural environment initiatives and their contribution to wellbeing undertaken as part of the second phase of the NIA M&E project (see the separate annex to this report). The value of this review to the project overall has included:

- Enabling a greater understanding of the potential wellbeing benefits that might accrue from the NIA partnerships' activities.
- Showing how wellbeing benefits can be described and measured.
- Providing evidence to input into a common framework for the articulation of benefits associated with NIA partnerships and their activities that are open enough to ensure that the full range of benefits can be included.

The literature review formed the basis for other work within a Work Package within the project focussing on social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing which included developing, consulting on and delivering additional data collection to support the existing M&E framework and the evaluations presented in the progress reports in Years 1 and 2.

5.1.2 Summary of the interim evaluation of social and economic wellbeing outcomes and impacts

This section considers the evaluation questions set out Table 5.1 which also gives the headlines from the interim evaluation against each evaluation question.

As the evaluation is at an interim stage there was no expectation that NIA partnerships would have completed delivery or achieved all expected outcomes at this stage. Many outcomes and impacts of the NIA partnerships' activities and wider NIA programme will not be seen until after the end of the NIA grant funded period (after 2015).

Further detail to support the interim evaluation headlines in Table 5.1 is provided in the key messages and the following sub-sections.

⁹⁸ Note that the interviewees agreed that quotes could be used from the interviews, but this was on the understanding that they would be anonymised. Therefore, where quotes are used in this report an NIA code is used to identify them rather than the name of the interviewee or NIA partnership.

Table 5.1: Social and economic wellbeing evaluation questions and interim evaluation headlines

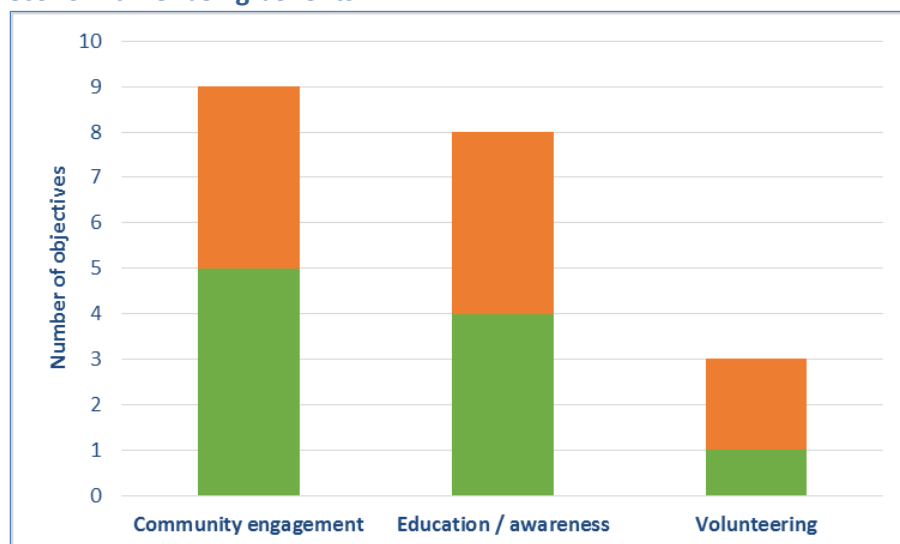
Questions To what extent have NIAs...	Sub-questions	Interim headlines
Contributed to the physical and mental health of local people?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent have NIAs helped improve the physical fitness of local people? 2. To what extent have NIAs helped improve the mental health of local people? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of NIA partnership activities are likely to be leading to physical and mental health benefits, including volunteering, improved access to and engagement in the natural environment, and projects specifically targeting improved health as an outcome. [Sub-section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2] • By the end of Year 2, 23,791 volunteer days were reported under volunteering categories that are likely to deliver some health benefits. [Sub-section 5.2.2] • From the available information, it was not possible to provide a detailed assessment of the scale and type of these benefits.
Contributed to education and learning?	No sub-questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All NIA partnerships are designing and delivering activities that will result in education and learning benefits for children and adults. • At the end Year 2, a total of 11,739 people had participated in educational visits in the three NIA partnerships that reported on this. [Sub-Section 5.3.1] • NIA partnerships are also working with volunteers, contractors and students to provide specific training and / or undertake capacity building e.g. related to developing surveying and practical land management skills. [Sub-section 5.3.3]
Contributed to symbolic, spiritual and aesthetic benefits?	No sub-questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIA partnership activities explicitly considering these benefits are seeking to enhance the sense of place within NIAs as well as undertaking artistic enhancements / representations of local places. [Sub-section 5.4]
Contributed to social development and connections?	No sub-questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evidence provided by the NIA partnerships indicates that new networks have been developed or existing ones strengthened. This is mostly being achieved through volunteering. [Sub-section 5.5.2] • While NIA partnerships are seeking to engage with all social and economic groups, current evidence is not sufficient to understand if the diversity of people involved in and visiting the NIAs has widened. [Sub-section 5.5.1]
Contributed to the local economy?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. To what extent have the NIAs generated economic benefits, e.g. through: recreation and tourism activities, regeneration, increased land/property values, increased ecosystem services? 4. To what extent have the NIAs supported particular sectors and economic activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six NIA partnerships have been focussing on local economic benefits, in particular promoting bio-fuel markets, for example building capacity of local land managers relating to woodfuel opportunities arising from woodland management. • One NIA partnership has been looking at how the natural environment can be used to enhance the attractiveness of the area to visitors and investors. [Sub-section 5.6]

5.1.3 Progress against NIA partnership objectives relevant to social and economic wellbeing

Although most NIA partnership objectives could be considered to impact on social, economic and wellbeing outcomes, 20 objectives across the NIA partnership funding agreements are considered specifically relevant. NIA partnership objectives fall under three sub-categories: *community engagement*, *education/awareness*; and *volunteering*. In practice most objectives will be delivering multiple benefits.

Analysis of progress against these objectives is presented in Figure 5.1. This is based on the NIA partnerships' self-assessment⁹⁹ of the level of progress they have made towards project outcomes, and whether progress is in line with the original milestones. Figure 5.1 shows that at the end of Year 2, 10 of the 20 objectives (50%) were assessed as on, or ahead of, target; and 10 (50%) were assessed as not in line with original milestones but where satisfactory or good progress had been made. NIA partnerships have indicated why certain objectives are not in-line with original milestones, for example: problems or delays in securing financial contributions to projects; delays associated with land acquisition; and, revision to originally planned completion dates to ensure effective delivery.

Figure 5.1: Self-assessment of progress – NIA partnership objectives relevant to social and economic wellbeing benefits



Source: NIA self-assessment of progress as reported in the 4th quarterly Progress Reports

Note: The method used to generate this figure is explained in Appendix 2

Key to shading: **Green** - on or ahead of schedule; **Amber** - not in line with original schedule, but where satisfactory or good progress has been made; and **Red** – Little or no progress made and behind schedule.

5.2 Health

Numerous studies identified by the literature review completed as part of the M&E Phase 2 Project demonstrate that contact with the natural environment has benefits for the physical and mental health of individuals and communities (CEP, 2014b - see Annex). The association between these factors, in simple terms, is that: spending time in open green space is related to increased physical activity and / or relaxation which in turn is related to delay or prevention of onset of medical conditions.

⁹⁹ Based on the information in the NIA partnerships' Year 2 4th Quarter Progress Reports and analysis by the M&E Phase 2 team – see Appendix 2.

This simplified understanding of the natural environment and health benefits has been used by the M&E Phase 2 project team to identify NIA projects that were either explicitly aimed at delivering health benefits, or which through their design and delivery were likely to deliver health benefits to individuals.

5.2.1 NIA partnerships' consideration of health benefits

A review of NIA quarterly Progress Reports showed that only a small number of NIA partnerships' projects are explicitly targeting improved health as an outcome¹⁰⁰. This finding was supported by the interviews held with NIA partnerships in May-June 2014¹⁰¹ which indicated that in most instances health benefits were considered positive secondary outcomes from the NIA partnerships' biodiversity and community engagement work. For example, one NIA partnership stated that health benefits were "certainly" delivered but *"not intentionally ... [rather they are] a by-product of some activities"* [NIA 3]. Another NIA partnership noted that delivering these sorts of benefits was *"not written into business plan and difficult to quantify"* [NIA 2].

NIA partnerships stated that they might start to prioritise health benefits in the future, for example one stated that they were *"looking to tie up with organisations that look after adults with special education needs to allow these vulnerable people to access both mentally and physically the local environment. Trying to drive the whole health and symbolic aspect more"* [NIA 3]. Another said that although they *"haven't tapped into this agenda yet [and] projects [have] not done with this a primary objective [they will consider it] for the next phase of NIA work"* [NIA 1].

5.2.2 Have the NIA partnerships enhanced the physical fitness of local people?

Evidence from NIA partnerships' quarterly Progress Reports and the interviews in May-June 2014 supports the assumption that most NIA partnership volunteering activities are resulting in people being outside (in the environment) and often undertaking physical work, and that these activities lead to health benefits. The relationship was expressed by one of the interviewees who felt that: *"volunteers' involvement in physical tasks will benefit both mental and physical health"* [NIA 10].

Wider evidence (CEP, 2014b - see Annex) of health benefits from physical work in the environment is very strong, but the NIA partnership reporting alone does not provide sufficient detail as it is not clear what sort of work the volunteers were undertaking. Interviews with NIA partnerships in May-June 2014 identified two main volunteer activities: undertaking physical works; and supporting ecological surveys. Within Year 2, there was a substantial increase in volunteer days for the three volunteer categories that are likely to deliver some health benefits; from 9,978.5 days in Year 1 to 13,813 days in Year 2, with a total of 23,791.5 days to the end of Year 2. More detail on volunteering can be found in sub-section 2.3.

Noting the limitations of the evidence, the NIA partnerships have potentially led to substantial health benefits for their volunteers.

Volunteering is not the only way that the NIA partnerships are delivering health benefits. Some NIA partnership projects seek to encourage individuals to experience and engage with the natural environment (see sub-section 2.4.1 and Box 2.4).

NIA partnerships are also seeking to improve access to the natural environment, for example by improving public footpaths. It is possible that this may lead to increased visitors who may experience related health benefits, but the nature of the available information (length of paths

¹⁰⁰ A review of the progress reports for quarter 2 of Year by the M&E team identified 23 projects which could be considered to be indirectly considering health benefits.

¹⁰¹ Note that the interviewees agreed that quotes could be used from the interviews; but this was on the understanding that they would be anonymised. Therefore, where quotes are used in this report an NIA code [e.g. NIA 1] is used to identify them rather than the name of the interviewee or NIA partnership. The numbers allocated are arbitrary.

created and/or improved) means it is not possible to assess this. Box 2.5 summarises relevant activities.

5.3 Education and learning

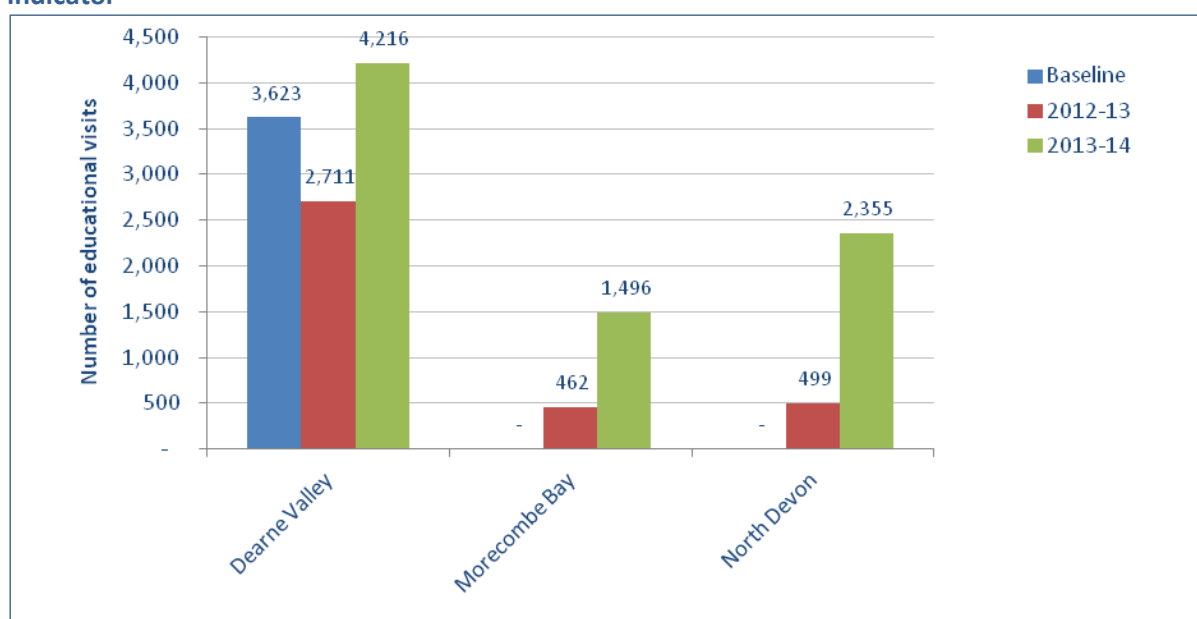
This section considers the benefits to people from interacting with natural environments and as a result increasing knowledge, learning and skills. This does not refer solely to learning about the natural environment, but also how learning in nature can be used to enhance other skills and capacities (e.g. language and communications, art and science).

5.3.1 Number of educational visits within the NIAs

Three NIA partnerships (Dearne Valley, Morecambe Bay and North Devon) provided information, via the online reporting tool, against the optional indicator *number of educational visits* (see Figure 5.2).

These data show that the scale of educational visits between different NIAs varies, but that there were increases between Years 1 and 2: an increasing number of individuals are engaging with NIA partnerships around education. At the end Year 2, a total of 11,739 people had participated in educational visits. The mix of adult (over 16) and child visits varies within these three NIAs. For example, over the two years 90% of Dearne Valley's educational visits have been with adults visiting the NIA. In Marlborough Downs (44% adult) and North Devon (52% adult) the composition is more equal between adult and child visits.

Figure 5.2: Number of individual's attending educational visits in NIAs who reported on this indicator



Notes: Educational visits are defined as any organised visit to an NIA site or centre (e.g. visitor centre) which has an explicit educational objective or if an NIA arranges a visit to a school by NIA partners.

5.3.2 Working with schools

NIA partnership Progress Reports and the interviews held in May-June 2014 show that all of the NIA partnerships have engaged with schools and further education colleges. The majority of these activities include schools visiting the NIA to learn about the environment, to undertake cross-curriculum activities (such as art) or to support volunteering via surveys and practical activities. Box 5.1 includes an example that combines all the elements of this work.

Box 5.1: Wild Purbeck – Getting wild about Purbeck in your school

The project provides a service which offers free teacher training to schools in the NIA and strategic education advice to Wild Purbeck NIA Partners.

Teaching training is undertaken through targeted free ‘twilight training sessions’. These sessions involve the NIA partnerships and partners helping teachers to understand the Jurassic Coast, the local geology in Purbeck and how this underpins and supports the area’s natural environment. The NIA partnership is selecting a number of schools to achieve Level 1 Forest School training (four to date). This is a national qualification and by securing teachers’ accreditation, it is hoped that the project will become self-sustaining and more and more schools will engage with the natural environment across their curriculum.

NIA partners have also visited four schools and provided advice and support on how to maximise the biodiversity benefits of their schools grounds. This work is ongoing. The following feedback has been received from some of the 52 teachers who have received training:

“Brilliant! I’m sure many of the great ideas will easily translate into the classroom.”

“Very useful session prompting us to review our topic cycle.”

Wareham St Mary Primary School

“Useful links to the Dorset Wildlife Trust that can be linked to Bug Hotel in EYFS.”

“Good reminder of science and history links and how to bring our local environment alive.”

Sylvan Infant School, Poole

“I loved the enquiry aspect and all the ideas for questions for children.”

“Great links to forest schools and eco-schools. Good ideas for EYFS and KS1.”

“Very passionate and enthusiastic presentation on subject knowledge that is needed for teaching on our doorstep.”

St Marks Primary School, Swanage

Source: NIA social and economic wellbeing case studies developed by NIA partnerships in Year 2.

5.3.3 Adult training and education

NIA partnerships are working with volunteers, contractors and students to provide training and / or undertake capacity building. Much of this work relates to developing surveying and practical land management skills. These activities provide the individuals involved with new skills and confidence whilst also supporting the NIA partnerships’ work. There are three identified objectives to this work:

- Sustaining NIA partnership project delivery and raising interest.
- Providing best practice examples.
- Getting individuals qualified.

The interviews held with NIA partnerships in May-June 2014 and the social and economic wellbeing case studies¹⁰² indicate that these aspects of the NIA partnerships’ work are having positive outcomes concerning meeting funding agreement objectives and for those members of the community who are engaged. Example impacts include increasing volunteers’ skills so that they might contribute more to NIA partnership projects (for example via ecological surveys or physical works). Evidence from the interviews also indicates that NIA partnerships are hoping that creating exemplar projects will lead to increased take-up of their initiatives – particularly in relation to sustainable management of woodlands.

5.4 Symbolic, spiritual and aesthetic benefits

The literature on green spaces provides many examples of how experiencing the symbolic, spiritual and cultural aspects of nature and natural environments, enhances human wellbeing. These benefits are described as being co-delivered by the individuals’ ‘cultural practices’ and the ‘environmental space’ they are in (Church *et al.*, 2014). They are therefore very context specific and there are limits to the evaluation and reporting possible in this area. As one NIA project manager

¹⁰² NIA social and economic wellbeing case studies developed by NIA partnerships in Year 2.

commented: “[we] *have worked a lot with artists [including the] poet in residence at [a local] Nature Reserve and story tellers. [We] recorded [these activities] but evaluating impact has been difficult*” [NIA 1].

The review of NIA quarterly Progress Reports identified a small number of projects that explicitly consider spiritual, cultural and aesthetic benefits. The interviews held in May-June 2014 with the NIA partnerships showed that in most instances any such benefits were additional outcomes from improvements to the quality of the environment. It was possible to identify some projects which might result in this sort of benefit, but there was limited available information to evidence this. Box 2.6 in Section 2 summarises a relevant project.

5.5 Social development and connections

5.5.1 Number and social mix of visitors to NIA sites

Social development and connection benefits are those which bring people together and strengthen or increase connections across social groups. Activities and experiences related to the natural environment and recreation have been identified as ‘neutral spaces’ where different communities come together and interact (New Economics Foundation, 2012; Ockenden, 2007).

NIA partnership activities have the potential to lead to social development and connections including supporting community cohesion. One recognised issue is that generally, people engaging with the natural environment tend to be from relatively narrow socio-economic and ethnic groups (tending to be richer, more able and white) (Natural England, 2013)¹⁰³. Understanding the types of people engaging with NIA partnerships is important for setting the baseline and to encourage wider engagement.

There is limited relevant evidence provided in the NIA partnerships’ reporting via the online reporting tool. Additional evidence from NIA partnerships¹⁰⁴, indicates that while they are seeking to engage with all social and economic groups, there is no evidence that the diversity of people involved in and visiting the NIAs has widened over the two years.

5.5.2 NIA partnership actions to enhance social development and connections

This theme focuses on the extent to which activities promote social bonds between people and connectedness between people and nature. A review of NIA quarterly Progress Reports indicated that a limited number of projects were explicitly aiming to deliver social development and connections benefits. The interviews with NIA partnerships in May-June 2014 suggested that in practice most of the activities which involve working with communities are delivering these benefits. Examples of these activities are presented in sub-section 2.4.1.

The interviews with NIA partnerships identified that they feel that their work was making contributions to social connections:

- Allowing individuals to create or develop social relationships, by creating volunteering and partnership working opportunities.
- Expanding social networks which leads to access to wider pools of resources, by focusing on partnership based delivery of projects.
- Increasing trust between individuals and organisations, by bringing individuals and organisations together around a common objective.

¹⁰³ See page 15

¹⁰⁴ Such as: survey results from Dark Peak and Humberhead Levels; NIA quarterly Progress Reports; and the interviews with NIA partnerships in May-June 2014.

From the available information it was not possible to provide an assessment of the scale of these positive impacts.

5.6 Local economy

A review of NIA quarterly Progress Reports indicated that at least six NIA partnerships¹⁰⁵ are explicitly seeking to deliver economic benefits. NIA partnerships have sought to deliver economic benefits through two main activities:

- Supporting the production and exchange of natural products - particularly woodfuel.
- Place based marketing – i.e. promoting the NIA and the importance of the natural environment.

5.6.1 Natural products

Wild Purbeck, Northern Devon and Morecambe Bay NIA partnerships are developing commercial opportunities to sell wood for fuel. This is being undertaken by simultaneously creating the product through habitat management activities, such as coppicing and felling, and also building the capacity of local volunteers, students and contractors so they can sell the products.

NIA partnerships are undertaking training and capacity building, for example Northern Devon has delivered six woodland management and woodfuel events for land managers – with more planned. Wild Purbeck have appointed a Woodland Apprentice, who has been delivering a project managed by Dorset Wildlife Trust as part of their work as an NIA partner. This coppicing work has created workplace opportunities for the individual. The NIA partnership have also launched practitioner training for A Level 4 BASIS Foundation Award in Agronomy (more information is presented in Box 2.10).

Wild Purbeck have been working to understand the scale of the biomass resource within their area with the intention of, if feasible, starting biomass collection for energy production in Year 3.

5.6.2 Place based marketing

Research shows that green spaces contribute to the attractiveness of a local area and may help to attract businesses and people to the area (Sunderland, 2012), for example it was found that environmental attractiveness was a key reason for over 35% of companies relocating to the south west of England (Land Use Consultants, 2006). There was also evidence that the creation of parks and green spaces can influence decisions in locating businesses and new homes (Forest Research, 2010; New Economics Foundation, 2012). Using these phenomena to improve the image and reality of a location is often referred to as place based marketing.

Morecambe Bay NIA partnership, and others organisations in the area, have been exploring the possibilities of working with businesses to identify opportunities for place based marketing.

It is hoped that these initiatives will increase the attractiveness of the area and also make clear to local businesses the important role the natural environment has in creating visitor demand for the area. More information on their progress is presented in Section 2 and Box 2.11.

¹⁰⁵ Birmingham and Black Country, North Devon, Morecambe Bay, Marlborough Downs, South Downs and Wild Purbeck

6. Evaluation of Inputs and Process

Key messages from Year 2: Inputs and process

- NIA partnerships' self-assessment of progress against funding agreement objectives related to inputs and process indicate that the NIA partnerships' delivery is generally on track: **83% of relevant objectives were assessed as being on, or ahead of schedule**; the remaining 17% were behind schedule but there has been 'satisfactory or good' progress.
- NIA partnerships have effectively generated added value¹⁰⁶: the original NIA government grant over the first two years was just over £4.5 million. Over the same period NIA partnerships have reported a **total added value of £15.7 million**. The ratio of added value to the grant funding is approximately 3.5, i.e. across the NIA partnerships on average **£3.50 of additional value of which £2.26 was from non-public sources was generated for each £1.00 of the original NIA government grant from Defra and Natural England**.
- The **largest contribution to added value came from NGOs / non-profit organisations (50% - £7.8 million)**. Public sector organisations (national and local) have contributed a combined total of **£5.6 million (36%)**, while the private sector has contributed **£732,090 (4%)**. The remaining contribution was the value of volunteers' time (9%) and the academic sector (1%).
- The number of staff employed directly by NIA partnerships is relatively small¹⁰⁷, but **staff time and help in-kind made up 30% of total added value (equivalent to £4.7million)**. Assuming indicative direct staff costs of £30,000 per full-time equivalent (FTE) per annum, staff time and help in-kind equates to approximately 150 FTEs across all NIA partnerships over the two years.
- The **total amount of volunteering reported to the end of Year 2 was 24,326 days**. Of this total **88% (21,371 days) was under the general unskilled labour category**, 8% (1,921 days) was specialist skilled trained labour and 2% was specialist services and professional volunteering (approximately 500 days in each category).
- Based on interviews with NIA partnerships, **the partnerships were assessed as functioning well**, with clear organisational and management structures in place, working and steering groups established (often with specific implementation responsibilities) and effectively managing challenges that have arisen.
- Key benefits of partnership working reported by NIA partnerships include: **agreed priorities across organisations who may not have coordinated activities before; sharing of data and knowledge; and the ability to reach-out to and involve local communities**.
- **NIA partnerships have reported on benefits of a structured monitoring framework**, such as improved understanding and communication, availability, management and sharing of data, and opportunities to engage partners and communities, despite some challenges of the monitoring and evaluation process.
- **Across all the NIA partnerships, there is evidence of research activity and innovation**, with specific research, often in partnership with local universities, for example on ecosystem services and practical habitat restoration or creation and/or land-management techniques. Examples of innovation include the ways NIA partnerships are engaging with the public and stakeholders, such as farmers and landowners.

¹⁰⁶ Added value is defined here as any additional financial support over and above that provided by Defra and Natural England in the initial NIA scheme grant, and is based on financial information supplied by Natural England. It is likely that some of the financial support included as 'added value' will come from other public sector initiatives, including from within the Defra family.

¹⁰⁷ Most NIA partnerships have reported only on direct employment and thus these data do not consistently include contractors, sub-contractors or consultants.

6.1 Introduction

This section evaluates at this interim stage the inputs and processes supporting delivery in the NIA partnerships. This includes the financial resources invested in and spent by NIA partnerships, the human resources, available to them, and the extent to which they have generated added value. It also includes the processes supporting NIA implementation, including how NIA partnerships are working, their management and planning processes, the role of monitoring and evaluation and the extent to which NIA partnerships are generating and sharing knowledge and information. Finally, this section considers the support that NIA partnerships have received from Natural England, Defra and other government agencies, and the role of this support in the work of NIA partnerships.

6.1.1 Data sources used in this section

The interim evaluation of inputs and process is based on analysis of information and data from these sources:

- NIA data entry in the online reporting tool for M&E indicators:
 - Social and economic theme: *number of volunteer hours on NIA activities* (core); *number of people employed in NIA activities* (optional).
 - Partnership working theme: *project income and expenditure* (core); *financial value of help in-kind* (core); *audience reach* (optional); *number of enquiries* (optional).

Note: a table summarising the NIA partnerships' M&E indicator selection and data entry (using the online reporting tool) is included in Appendix 1.

- Financial analysis collated and provided by Natural England based on NIA partnership financial claim forms.
- NIA partnership self-reporting on progress through quarterly Progress Reports and annual Progress Summaries as submitted to Natural England.
- Other NIA partnership generated documents and information such as: NIA partnership websites; supporting documentation uploaded to the online reporting tool.
- Outcomes of interviews with NIA partnerships held in December 2013 – January 2014 related to research and innovation and in May – June 2014¹⁰⁸ related to social and economic wellbeing and partnership working.
- Outcomes of the Year 2 M&E workshop, July 2014.
- National information sources: English Biodiversity Strategy Indicator 14a – conservation volunteering; Community Life Survey (2013-14).

6.1.2 Summary of the interim evaluation of inputs and process

This section considers the evaluation questions set out Table 6.1. Table 6.1 also presents headlines from the interim evaluation against each evaluation question.

As the evaluation is at an interim stage there was no expectation that NIA partnerships would have completed delivery or achieved all expected outcomes. Many outcomes and impacts of the NIA partnerships' activities and wider NIA programme will not be seen until after the end of the NIA grant funded period (after 2015).

Further detail to support the interim evaluation headlines in Table 6.1, is provided in the key messages and the following sub-sections.

¹⁰⁸ Note that the interviewees agreed that quotes could be used from the interviews, but this was on the understanding that they would be anonymised. Therefore, where quotes are used in this report an NIA code is used to identify them rather than the name of the interviewee or NIA partnership.

Table 6.1: Inputs and process evaluation questions and interim evaluation headlines

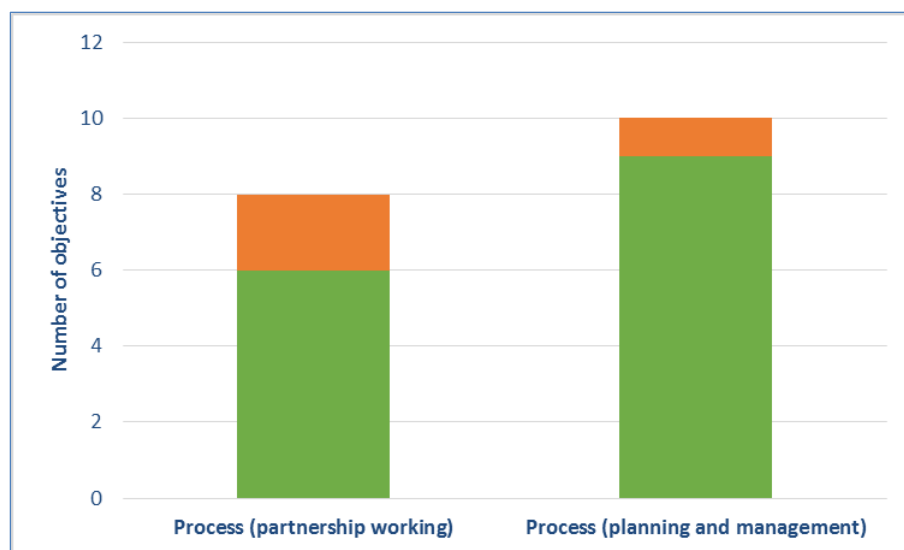
Questions	Sub-questions	Interim evaluation headlines
What is the nature and scale of inputs to the NIAs?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How much have the NIAs spent and what has expenditure related to? 2. What human resources have the NIAs had at their disposal? 3. How much added-value have NIAs been able to generate, and how have additional resources been mobilised? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIA partnerships have been successful in mobilising added value to support their work: across the NIA partnerships on average £3.50 was generated for each £1.00 of the original NIA government grant from Defra and Natural England, of which £2.26 was from non-public sources. [Sub-section 6.2.1] • Across contracted staff, volunteers and help in-kind NIA partnerships have mobilised hundreds of people: • An accurate figure is not possible, but based on indicator data on the number of people employed and the financial value of help in-kind it is estimated that employment equivalent to at least 150 FTEs has been generated and the actual figure is probably much larger. [Sub-section 6.2.3] • A total of 24,326 days of volunteering was reported in Year 1 and 2 across all NIA partnerships.
How are partnerships, management and planning supporting NIA implementation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How are NIA partnerships structured and how are decisions made? 5. How is partnership working supporting NIA implementation? 6. What management and planning processes are the NIAs using? 7. To what extent are NIAs planning for the future? 8. What influence to NIA partnerships have in NIAs or beyond? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIA partnerships are all working effectively to deliver their business plans. [Sub-section 6.3.1] • Each partnership has a different structure, but the use of steering and working / delivery groups is common. [Sub-section 6.3.1] • Bringing different organisations and people together under shared project objectives is a key benefit of the partnership approach. [Sub-section 6.3.2] • Based on available information, five NIA partnerships have indicated that they are planning to continue their work beyond the three-year grant funding period. [Box 6.7]
To what extent is monitoring and evaluation supporting NIA implementation?	No sub-questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIA partnerships have also reported on benefits of a structured monitoring framework and approach. [Sub-section 6.4] • Use of the NIA M&E framework indicators and online reporting tool have also presented some challenges to the NIA partnerships. [Box 6.11]
How has learning, research and innovation helped support NIA implementation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. How are NIAs sharing information and knowledge (both between partners within NIAs, and between NIAs)? 10. To what extent is information and knowledge sharing supporting NIA implementation? 11. What contribution are NIAs making to research and innovation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIA partnerships are sharing knowledge at events (such as best practise events) and informally within partnerships. [Sub-section 6.5.1] • NIA partnerships report that the sharing of knowledge and data is a beneficial outcome of the approach. [Box 6.8] • All NIA partnerships are engaged in research and innovation. [Sub-section 6.5.2]
How has support from Natural England, Defra and other agencies supported NIA implementation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. What support have the NIAs been receiving from Natural England, Defra and other agencies? 13. Has this support led to improved NIA implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government agencies have provided direct support to NIA partnerships (e.g. training and data provision / collation) and organisational / structural (e.g. access to the Huddle web-space). [Sub-section 6.6]

6.1.3 Progress against NIA partnership objectives relevant to inputs and process

The individual NIA partnerships have various objectives linked to inputs and process. These can be categorised as: *partnership working*; or *planning and management*. The focus of the objectives under partnership working is on the collaboration with partners and the focus of the objectives under planning and management is on the delivery of best practise in wildlife management through strategic planning, research and management.

Analysis of progress against these objectives is presented in Figure 6.1. This is based on the NIA partnerships' self-assessment¹⁰⁹ of the level of progress they have made towards project outcomes, and whether progress is in line with the original milestones. Figure 6.1 shows that at the end of Year 2, the NIA partnerships are making good progress under their objectives judged to be relevant to process and inputs: 15 of the 18 objectives (83%) considered to be relevant were assessed to be on or ahead of target and three were assessed to be not in line with original milestones, but where satisfactory or good progress had been made. There were no relevant objectives categorised as having little or no progress.

Figure 6.1: Self-assessment of progress – NIA partnership objectives relevant to process and inputs



Source: NIA self-assessment of progress as reported in the 4th quarterly Progress Reports

Note: The method used to generate this figure is explained in Appendix 2

Key to shading: **Green** - on or ahead of schedule; and **Amber** - not in line with original schedule, but where satisfactory or good progress has been made. None were categorised as having little or no progress made and behind schedule.

6.2 Nature and scale of inputs

6.2.1 Financial resources and added value

The 12 initial NIA partnerships were awarded grant funding, but were also expected to make use of non-public sector resources (e.g. volunteers, landowners and private sector investment) as well as engage communities and civil society in delivery of proposed activities. Additional resources mobilised by NIA partnerships include financial support, help in-kind, and the time of volunteers.

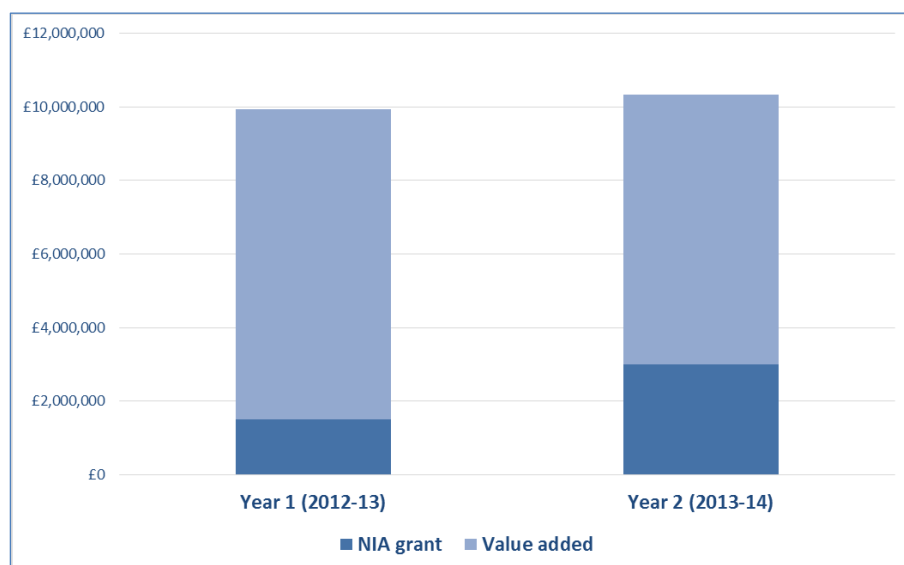
¹⁰⁹ The self-assessment is included in the NIA partnerships' Year 2 4th Quarter Progress Reports and analysis by the M&E Phase 2 team – see Appendix 2.

Figure 6.2 presents the total amount of grant funding and added value¹¹⁰ across the 12 initial NIA partnerships in Years 1 and 2, indicating the proportion of total income which is added value over and above the government grant. The total government grant over the first two years was just over £4.5 million. Over the same period, NIA partnerships have reported a total added value of £15.7 million. The ratio of added value to original NIA government grant funding is approximately 3.5, meaning that across the NIA partnerships on average £3.50 was generated for each £1.00 of the original NIA government grant from Defra and Natural England. Box 6.1 presents examples of how the NIA partnerships have mobilised additional resources.

Figure 6.2 also shows that the total added value in Year 2 (£8.4 million) decreased slightly compared to Year 1 (£7.3 million). The reason for this decrease is not known. It may reflect the end of funding cycles for sources of additional support that were available in Year 1, or be a result of a generally narrower interpretation of what is considered added value by NIA partnerships (based on feedback provided by one NIA partnership on an earlier draft of this report). This may have resulted in more cautious reporting of contributions to added value, in particular the value of in-kind support. The indicator protocol for the *financial value of help in-kind* was updated in Year 2 and required NIA partnerships to *only consider in-kind support that is contributing to NIA objectives*, rather than wider in-kind support to NIA partner organisations.

In Year 3, as part of the work to understand the difference the NIA partnerships have made over and above what would have happened anyway, information will be sought on how much of the added value generated by NIA partnerships represents new financial support to the natural environment as opposed to funding that would have been spent on similar priorities anyway.

Figure 6.2: Total NIA grant and added value in Years 1 and 2



Source: Based on financial summary of spend spreadsheets, collated by Natural England (dated 9 September 2014).

¹¹⁰ Added value is defined here as any additional financial support over and above that provided by Defra and Natural England in the initial NIA scheme grant, and is based on financial information supplied by Natural England. It is likely that some of the financial support included as 'added value' will come from other public sector initiatives, including from within the Defra family.

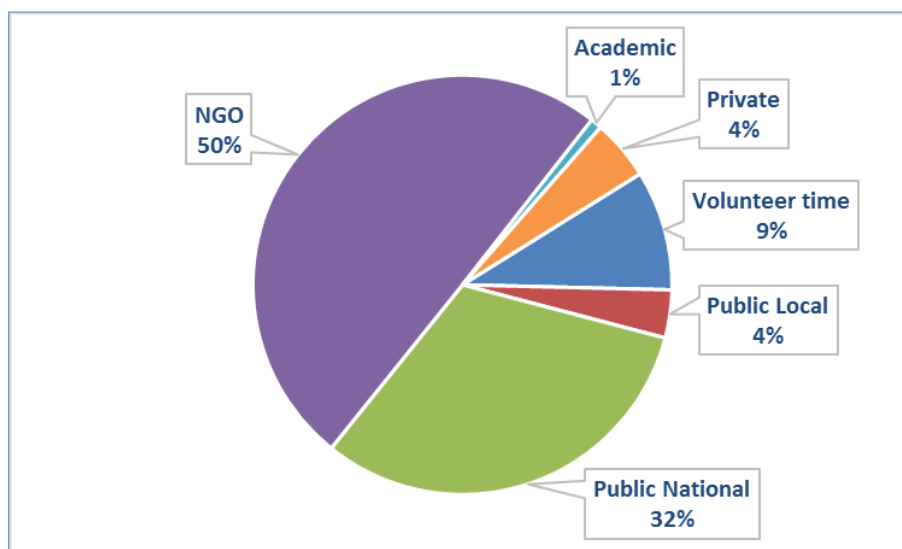
Box 6.1: Examples of how NIA partnerships have mobilised additional resources

- Greater Thames Marshes partnership is **working with major retailers by providing conservation advice and support in relation to “green” supply chains**.
- **Pooling resources from multiple sources to achieve economies of scale in project delivery**, for example combining NIA grant with Environment Agency Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM)¹¹¹ grant to ‘increase the hydrological integrity of England’s largest lowland mire system’ (Humberhead Levels).
- NIA partnerships have used grant funding to create land-management advisor posts / farm liaison to communicate and work with farmers and land managers, both to improve practice and **increase access to HLS funding applications**.
- Developing and delivering projects that can ‘tap-in’ to existing funding streams and initiatives, such as **securing additional funding for the restoration of meadows in Nene Valley NIA as part of the Coronation Meadows project**¹¹².
- The opportunities for research and innovation (see sub-sections 2.6 and 6.4) have enabled NIA partnerships to develop **relationships with universities and research initiatives, which have provided surveying and monitoring capacity and contributed to research**. For example, in Northern Devon NIA the University of Exeter has contributed to cultural ecosystem services research, including a survey, and three workshops.

Source: Interviews with NIA partnerships, case studies and NIA quarterly Progress Reports

Figure 6.3 shows the percentage contribution to overall added value across the NIA partnerships to the end of Year 2 from the following sectors: public local; public national; NGO / non-profit; academic; and private. The largest contribution has come from NGOs / non-profit organisations (50% - £7,840,569) and is likely to represent a combination of in-kind contributions, staff time and on-costs¹¹³ as well as cash contributions to particular projects. Public sector organisations (national¹¹⁴ and local) have contributed a combined total of £5,571,106 (36%), while the private sector has contributed £732,090 (4%).

Figure 6.3: Percentage sector share of total added value to end of Year 2



¹¹¹ See: <http://www.fcerm.net/> [accessed 10/10/2014]

¹¹² See: <http://www.nenevalleynia.org/news/coronation-meadows/> [accessed 10/10/2014]

¹¹³ On-costs are the costs associated with employing somebody over and above their salary.

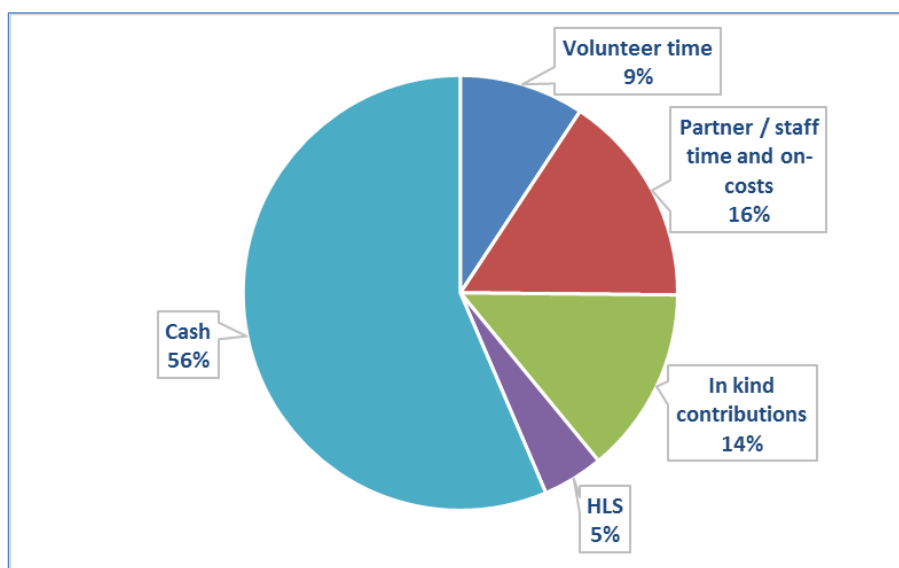
¹¹⁴ Note: public national added value include HLS funding. The contribution of HLS funding may be an underestimation, as not all NIA partnerships reported fully on HLS funding as added value.

Source: Based on financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England (dated 9 September 2014), based on quarterly progress reports submitted to Natural England

Note: Public National includes HLS funding. The contribution of HLS funding may be an underestimation, as not all NIA partnerships reported fully on HLS funding as added value.

Figure 6.4 shows breakdown by type of reported total added value to end of Year 2, including cash-contributions, volunteering, help in-kind, HLS funding¹¹⁵, staff time / on-costs. This shows that cash contributions (either from partners or other organisations) was the largest element of added value (56% - £8,864,012), with partner / staff time and on-costs being the next largest (16% -£2,499,244). In-kind contributions represented a total of £2,186,063¹¹⁶ (14%) and the financial value of volunteering accounted for 9% of added value (£1,460,900)¹¹⁷.

Figure 6.4: Percentage of total added value by category to end of Year 2



Source: Based on financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England (dated 9 September 2014).

Notes:

- Volunteer time calculated at rates provided by Natural England in original guidance to NIA partnerships. These rates were agreed in 2011 (based on Big Lottery Fund approved rates), and the financial value of volunteer time may be even greater at current rates.
- Partner/staff time and on-costs includes salary costs, on-costs i.e. overheads and also staff/partner time working on NIA activities and/or management and time at meetings/workshops, etc.
- In-kind delivery contributions include costs for carrying out projects within the NIA (e.g. farm advice).
- HLS is as reported by NIA partnerships in Natural England claims, note this is likely to be under reported as not all NIAs included HLS in their added value figures.
- Cash refers to non- HLS cash received either from partners or other external funding sources.

6.2.2 NIA partnerships' expenditure

The Year 1 Progress Report included information on the expenditure plans of NIA partnerships, based on their funding agreements across the 3 years of the programme.

¹¹⁵ The contribution of HLS funding may be an underestimation, as not all NIA partnerships reported fully on HLS funding as added value.

¹¹⁶ The interviews with NIA partnerships in May – June 2014 identified that the recording of help in-kind may be variable, with NIA partnerships reporting that extracting information from partners about in-kind contributions can prove 'difficult' or 'it is not being captured' with the main reason cited being that project delivery often takes precedence over M&E activities. This means that the help in-kind contribution to added-value may represent an underestimation of the actual total.

¹¹⁷ The financial value of volunteering was calculated using rates provided by Natural England in original guidance to NIA partnerships. These rates were agreed in 2011 (based on Big Lottery Fund approved rates), so the financial value of volunteer time may be even greater at current rates.

NIA partnerships have reported on their planned and actual annual expenditure through the online reporting tool. These data showed some discrepancy compared to claims submitted to Natural England, and data providing a detailed breakdown of actual expenditure by different categories (e.g. administration / management, monitoring and evaluation etc.) are not currently available.

The M&E Phase 2 project will be working with Natural England to provide an analysis of NIA partnerships' expenditure in the Year 3 Progress Report (2015).

6.2.3 Human resources and volunteering

Eight NIA partnerships¹¹⁸ reported on the optional indicator: *number of people employed in NIA activities*. This shows that, at the end of Year 2 across the NIA partnerships that reported the number of people employed ranges from approximately 0.89 FTE (Marlborough Downs) to more than 19 FTEs (Northern Devon), with the average (mean) number of people employed across the eight NIAs being 5.7 FTEs.

The large difference in these figures is likely to have resulted from different interpretations of the protocol for this indicator. Although the protocol required NIA partnerships to record all employment resulting from NIA funding, including contractors, sub-contractors and consultants, some NIA partnerships have only recorded direct employment and in other cases the overall total is not known by the partnership (e.g. Marlborough Downs noted that *"A lot more people are paid for services from the NIA fund ... However, these are all paid 'by job' rather than on an hourly or daily rate and we could only guess at the time each spends delivering their piece of the project"*).

Box 6.2 presents selected examples of NIA partnership staffing changes and challenges.

In addition, as illustrated by the analysis of added value in sub-section 6.2.1, 16% of total added value across the NIA partnerships is attributed to *partner / staff-time and on costs*, with a value of over £2.5million to the end of Year 2, with a further £2.2million associated with *help in-kind*. If an illustrative average staff and on-costs of £30,000 per FTE per annum is assumed¹¹⁹, the *partner / staff time and on costs* added value equates to approximately 40 FTEs per year, with *help in-kind* equating to an additional 35 FTEs per year¹²⁰.

Box 6.2: Examples of NIA partnerships' staffing changes and challenges

- Due to the large amount of projects that NIA partnership staff in Birmingham and Black Country have been delivering on behalf of other partners, it was decided to bring in additional staff to help with this. The **partnership contracted a community education and engagement officer** to ensure delivery.
- In Dark Peak, the Project Manager since May 2012 left the post in March 2014, and was replaced from within the NIA team. The **change of Project Manager was noted to have 'left a vacuum', but co-operation between partners and staff from the RSPB has meant the overall programme has kept on track** in the interim.
- A manager, Connect Officer and Wetland Advisor left the Humberhead Levels NIA partnership during Year 2. The change in staff meant that **new relationships had to be built and the temporary capacity gap was covered by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust**.
- In Year 2, Meres and Mosses **recruited a Survey and Monitoring Officer using a mix of NIA partnership funds and funding from a utilities developer**. They also reached an agreement with the Heritage Lottery Fund to use some of their funding to recruit a part time Communications Officer.

Source: Based on information included in NIA partnership Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports

¹¹⁸ Dark Peak; Dearne Valley; Greater Thames Marshes; Marlborough Downs; Meres and Mosses; Morecambe Bay; Northern Devon; Wild Purbeck.

¹¹⁹ Note: this is a purely indicative figure for the assumed total cost of a FTE within an NIA partnership to illustrate the scale of help in-kind being provided within NIAs.

¹²⁰ 2,500,000 / 30,000 = 83.3 (total over 2 years) and 2,200,000 / 30,000 = 73.3 (total over 2 years).

Volunteering is another important resource for NIA partnerships. As reported in sub-section 2.3.1 the NIA partnerships have mobilised a large number of volunteers to contribute to their work. All NIA partnerships reported on the core indicator: *number of volunteer hours on NIA activities*. NIA partnerships also included volunteering within their financial claim forms to Natural England, and the data presented in this report is based on this reporting, as collated by Natural England. Volunteering has been reported under four categories, see Box 6.3.

Box 6.3: Categories of volunteering used for monitoring purposes

- **General, unskilled labour:** e.g. supervised scrub clearance, ditch-digging, planting, basic administrative support.
- **Specialist, skilled, trained labour:** e.g. operations for which certificated training is required, such as operating dangerous equipment, driving off-road vehicles, using chemicals.
- **Specialist services:** e.g. supervising, training labour teams, surveys, counts, trapping, ringing, diving, printing, designing, photography.
- **Professional services:** e.g. consultants, lawyers, planners, engineers, accountants, auditors.

Table 6.2 provides an overview of the amount of volunteering by category in Year 1 and Year 2 across the 12 initial NIA partnerships¹²¹. The total amount of volunteering reported was 24,326 days. Of this total 88% (21,371 days) was under the *general unskilled labour* category, corresponding with the types of activity that volunteers have been involved in (see sub-section 2.3.1), such as scrub-clearance and seeding meadows. Of the other categories, 8% (1,921 days) of volunteering was *specialist skilled trained labour* and 2% was *specialist services* and *professional* volunteering (approximately 500 days).

There has been an increase of 39% in the total number of days volunteering in Year 2 (14,177 days) compared to Year 1 (10,149 days). With the exception of specialist services, where the number of days was reduced, a general increase is seen across all the other categories of volunteering. Box 6.4 shows data from NIA partnerships compared with national volunteering trends.

Table 6.2: Total number of days volunteering by category in Year 1 and Year 2

Category	Days Year 1	Days Year 2	Total
General unskilled labour	9,174	12,196	21,371
Specialist skilled trained labour	434	1,487	1,487
Specialist services	370	130	500
Professional	170	364	534
Total	10,149	14,177	24,326

Source: NIA financial claim forms collated and analysed by Natural England

Box 6.4: How do levels of volunteering on NIA activities compare with national trends?

Across the NIA partnerships, an increase of approximately 39% has been reported between the years April 2012 – March 2013, and April 2013 – March 2014.

Indicator 14a in the report on indicators for the English Biodiversity Strategy (Biodiversity 2020) (Defra, 2013) presents an *index of volunteer time spent on the natural environment for selected organisations in England* for the period 2000 - 2012. This national indicator shows that “Between 2000 and 2012 the amount of time contributed by volunteers increased by 36 per cent but in the five years to 2012 it decreased by 7 per cent. It

¹²¹ For ease of reporting, volunteering was recorded by NIA partnerships as number of hours. The number of days volunteering is calculated based on an assumed 7 hour working day.

has remained unchanged between 2011 and 2012”.

The English Community Life Survey 2013-14 (HM Government, 2014) reports that although an increase in volunteering was seen between 2008-09 and 2012-13, no statistically significant increase was seen between 2012-13 and 2013-14.

While the English Community Life Survey and English Biodiversity Indicator 14a do not offer a direct comparison, and great care must be taken in drawing any conclusions on a trend based on two data points, these data perhaps suggest that NIA partnerships may be reversing the recent national trend related to volunteering (including on the natural environment).

6.3 Partnerships, management and planning

6.3.1 Management and planning in NIA partnerships

This sub-section explores the management, planning and decision-making processes of the NIA partnerships from a strategic perspective, for example in relation to business planning, adaptive management and the identification of constraints and opportunities.

The Year 1 Progress Report considered the NIA partnerships as an input. In 10 out of the 12 (83%) NIA partnerships, the partnership which formed the NIA partnership existed prior to the NIA programme, with only two (17%) being considered as new partnerships established specifically for the purposes of applying for and implementing the NIA (Marlborough Downs and South Downs).

The Year 1 Progress Report also provided context on the NIA partnerships, including:

- The number of partners in each NIA partnership.
- The types of organisation that are involved in each NIA partnership.
- An analysis of each NIA partnership Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) against Natural England's expectations.

This contextual information is largely unchanged, and has therefore not been reported again. Partnership building is an ongoing process, and based on NIA partnerships' reporting. New partners have joined nine out of 12 NIA partnerships since the beginning of the grant funding period. These changes are summarised in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Identified changes to NIA partnerships

NIA	Additional NIA partners reported	
Birmingham and Black Country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Staffordshire Water 	
Dark Peak	No changes noted	
Dearne Valley Green Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doncaster MBC • Yorkshire Wildlife Trust 	
Greater Thames Marshes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bumblebee Trust 	
Humberhead Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doncaster Council 	
Marlborough Downs	No changes noted	
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canal and Rivers Trust 	
Morecambe Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Cumbria Rivers Trust (noted they also became a major delivery partner) 	
Nene Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rockingham Forest Trust 	
Northern Devon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beaford Arts • Butterfly Conservation • Devon Biodiversity Records Centre • Exeter University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mole Valley Farmers • Plymouth University • Torridge District Council • Ward Forester (initiative)
South Downs Way Ahead	No changes noted	
Wild Purbeck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team 	

Source: Based on collated NIA information spreadsheet “NIA All Details FINAL June 2014” as provided by Natural England; interviews held with ten NIAs in May-June 2014, and a review of Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports.

Note: additional partners may include formal partners (i.e. those signing a memorandum of agreement) and informal partners agreeing to support NIA projects.

Telephone interviews were held with ten NIA partnerships in May – June 2014¹²². These included questions related to: NIA partnership organisation and decision-making; the roles different people play in NIA partnerships and how this contributes to delivery; and, who provides leadership within the NIA partnership. Headline findings about what had helped partnerships work well are presented in Box 6.5¹²³.

Box 6.5: What has helped partnerships and organisational structures to work?

- Having a clear Business Plan from the start of the project was identified by the majority of NIA partnership interviewees as being key to efficient and effective partnership working. With a strong plan in place, any need for amendments to organisational structures or project objectives have been reduced, resulting in stable partnerships that continue to work co-operatively and cohesively.
- Clear delegation and communication of tasks and roles across governance and delivery groups.
- NIA partnerships reported on the benefits of tiered or layered structures, for example, with responsibilities divided into financial, expert advice and project management, as one NIA partnership stated: *‘The three tier structure ensures consensus throughout the partners, removes uncertainty and ensures that everyone is informed and involved. It is hugely helpful having a Natural England liaison and it would be difficult to see how the NIA would work without this’* [NIA 3].
- Regular Steering Group meetings and creation of smaller working groups with proactive, supportive and committed members are also important. Positive aspects of steering groups / working groups identified by NIA partnerships included:
 - Providing an overview of work within the NIA;
 - Bringing a wide range of knowledge together;
 - Bringing different people and partners together to strengthen delivery;
 - Encouraging commitment from partners;
 - Ensuring consensus between partners as everyone is informed and involved;
 - Coordinating delivery; and,
 - Enabling delivery and progress to targets to be tracked effectively.

Source: Based on interviews held with NIAs in May-June 2014.

All of the initial NIA partnerships are required to complete quarterly Progress Reports which are submitted to Natural England. These set out: a progress summary and detailed reporting on outputs and outcomes under each NIA objective, including risks emerging; an overview of added value; progress checking against planned project milestones; reporting on conditions and permissions; overview of publicity and project materials generated; and summary reporting on project management, including challenges / risks, planning, staffing, engagement with local communities and finance.

¹²² Birmingham and Black Country; Greater Thames Marshes; Humberhead Levels; Marlborough Downs; Meres and Mosses; Morecambe Bay; Nene Valley; Northern Devon; South Downs; Wild Purbeck.

¹²³ Note that the interviewees agreed that quotes could be used from the interviews, however this was on the understanding that they would be anonymised. Therefore, where quotes are used in this report an NIA code is used to identify them rather than the name of the interviewee or NIA partnership.

Partnership management and planning challenges have generally been effectively managed, and appropriate mitigation put in place to address them, for example:

- Greater Thames Marshes reported that the accountable body (with financial management responsibility) was not able to continue in this role. While this presented a major challenge for the project, alternative organisations were approached, and a suitable replacement was identified (Thames Estuary Partnership) with robust in-house financial systems able to manage the NIA project finances.
- In Marlborough Downs, the NIA project management team have had to increase their project support to facilitate works and ensure delivery. Though such direct support was not originally foreseen, the provision of additional management intervention was considered necessary to ensure delivery objectives are met.
- Based on the interviews with NIA partnerships, two partnerships said that they have changed their governance structure. The reason cited by these two NIAs that decided to restructure was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of project delivery to meet project objectives by creating smaller working groups. In consequence, these NIAs report that partners are now better able to plan for the future, to look at risks in more detail and to discuss aspects (for example, organisational finances) that would not be possible in a larger forum.

Box 6.6 presents further examples of challenges identified by NIA partnerships in the interviews held in May-June 2014.

Box 6.6: What are the challenges to efficient and effective partnership working?

- Having sufficient time to effectively manage what are, in some cases, quite large partnerships was noted as a key challenge for partnership working, for example balancing time working on the NIA partnership with existing time commitment in the context of the amount of time required to plan and implement activities, and to build relationships and trust with new partners and networks within a three year programme.
- Collecting data from all partners by deadlines, especially for reporting and monitoring and evaluation purposes was seen as challenging by NIA partnerships.
- Differing or changing organisational priorities across partners and getting their buy-in, co-operation, support and engagement were raised as challenges by seven NIA partnership interviewees.
- It was also noted that the level of support required by smaller partner organisations has been higher and more time consuming than expected and this can lead to inefficiencies in project delivery. Examples of areas requiring support included designing and delivering projects, organising contractors, identifying seed sources and completing funding applications.
- The approach to understanding how partnership working is contributing towards efficient and effective delivery as an output or outcome will be explored further in Year 3.

Source: Based on interviews held with ten NIAs in May-June 2014.

The NIA grant provides financial support to the NIA partnerships for three years, April 2012 – March 2015. The NIA partnerships' Business Plans were required to consider their impact through to 2020. Box 6.7 presents examples of how NIA partnerships are planning for the future.

Box 6.7: To what extent are NIA partnerships planning for the future?

Planning for the future was in principle built into the NIA programme from the start, as all NIA partnerships were required to build into their Business Plans ambitions / visions to 2020. A review of the summary reporting by each NIA partnership on project management identified that four NIA partnerships have reported that they are *actively discussing and planning for funding and delivery after 2015* when the three

years of grant funding ends:

- Birmingham and Black Country have discussed their **post-2015 ambition and partners intentions to 2020, including options for funding**.
- One of Greater Thames Marshes headline objectives is 'Legacy and Resources' which is **explicitly seeking to identify sources of finance to ensure the work of the NIA partnership is sustainable** beyond the three years of grant funding (e.g. through external funding bids).
- Humberhead Levels are in the process of **developing an 'Ambition Report'**¹²⁴ **for the NIA, including planning for 2015 and beyond**.
- In Meres and Mosses the **strategic steering group has discussed and are considering options for post-2015 funding**.
- Northern Devon have held three **workshops early in 2014 bringing partners together to develop ideas for the next phase of NIA implementation (2015-2020)**.

It is considered very likely other NIA partnerships are also engaged in such planning and discussions, but have not explicitly reported on this through their Progress Reports.

Source: Based a review of Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports.

6.3.2 NIA partnership working supporting project implementation

An important consideration in evaluating the NIA partnerships is the extent to which the partnership working approach is supporting project implementation. This will be explored further through work in Year 3 to understand the difference the NIA partnerships have made, but for now, the interviews held with NIA partnerships in Year 2 provide some insights.

All interviewees reported that the greatest benefit of the NIA programme is that it enables a more inclusive collaborative approach, joining up a wider range of organisations under one banner, especially between smaller pre-existing partnerships or pairings, such as between NGOs and local authorities.

Box 6.8 presents selected examples of how partnerships are supporting project implementation in the NIAs.

Box 6.8: Examples of how NIA partnership working is supporting implementation

- Joint working between South Downs NIA partnership and land managers, even where they are not explicitly included in partnerships (i.e. through a MoU), **has brought consistency: shared ideas, shared discussions, all helping in delivery**.
- Many partners in Northern Devon NIA historically worked together on Culm grassland projects (in particular under the North Devon Biosphere reserve). Where the NIA partnership has added value has been in **bringing initiatives together in the same area, and enabling community outreach** over and above that possible in the Biosphere reserve project.
- NIA **partnerships are helping to encourage joint-working among groups who may not have previously worked together and to increase understanding between partners (for example, between farmers and environmental professionals)**, and to stimulate conversations and relationships. One NIA partnership stated: *'The link between farmers and conservation bodies is new and fabulous. At first, the large meeting tables of attendees were split by type.... However, now, meetings are genuinely mixed as people have worked together, they've got to know each other and are delivering benefits together'* [NIA 4].
- All NIA **partnerships interviewed attribute increased in-kind contributions to the partnership approach**. One reason given for this is that partners' sense of ownership of the NIA objectives increases willingness to contribute. One interviewee said that: *'[The NIA has] been so successful at attracting resources that*

¹²⁴ An outline draft of this Humberhead Levels NIA Ambition Report was uploaded as a supporting document to the online reporting tool during Year 2.

people can see that the partnership is very effective and see value in working together and are, therefore, more happy to invest time into the partnership' [NIA 10].

Source: Based on interviews with NIAs in May-June 2014, and Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports.

6.3.3 NIA partnerships' leadership and influence

This sub-section assesses the extent to which NIA partnerships have shown leadership and had influence within their areas and beyond, including through outreach and communication with local communities and stakeholders. Other sections of this report related to leadership and influence include sub-section 2.5 which summarises progress and achievements in becoming places of inspiration and innovation, and sub-section 6.5 which assesses NIA partnerships' research and innovation activities.

Examples of NIA partnership activities related to leadership and influence are presented in Box 6.9.

Box 6.9: Examples of NIA partnership activities related to leadership and influence

- **Making connections with existing community groups to help improve delivery and encourage engagement** in NIA partnership activities and objectives, for example the relationship between Birmingham and Black Country NIA partnership and the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum¹²⁵, a volunteer network organisation that aims to bring together people in Birmingham with an interest in open spaces.
- Dearne Valley NIA partnership have been undertaking **work with the local council promoting an innovative area for industry and wildlife using, for example, green roofs and SUDS¹²⁶; and developing good practice with the Environment Agency on the use of wash-land in flood control**, holding water further up the catchment. The partnership has also worked with the Landscape department at Sheffield University to develop communication materials, to raise the profile of the NIA and increase the number of volunteers.
- Developing **close working relationships (including through formal partnership) with organisations already active in the NIAs is a means of expanding influence**. For example Greater Thames Marshes reported that working closely with the Kent Wildlife Trust is expected to increase local community engagement. It will also strengthen partnership working with the Essex Wildlife Trust participation in the Greater Thames Marshes NIA projects.
- A talk about the work of Nene Valley NIA partnership given at a Bumblebee Working Group meeting held at the University of Northampton in May and **attracted over 70 specialists from Britain and Ireland**.

Source: Based on interviews with NIAs in May-June 2014, and a review of Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports.

Also relevant to leadership and influence are the ways in which NIA partnerships' reach out to and communicate with people, groups and organisations in their area. NIA partnership reporting provides evidence of activities in all NIAs relating to:

- **Community events and consultation** – social events that are open to all, or that target particular communities or groups. The most common community events identified were workshops, activity days such as combined 'walk & talk' events, forums, and consultation meetings.
- **Educational outreach** – engagement with local schools and other educational institutions. Examples of this type of engagement include field trips, field work and educational talks.
- **Media outreach** – disseminating information to local audiences. Activities include website articles, use of social media, newsletters and printed materials (posters, leaflets etc.).

¹²⁵ See: <http://bosf.org.uk/birmingham-open-spaces-forum/funding/nature-improvement-area-2/>

¹²⁶ SUDS: Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

Box 6.10 presents selected examples of outreach and communication by NIA partnerships.

Box 6.10: Examples of outreach and communication by NIA partnerships

- Media outreach has been an important type of engagement used by the NIA partnerships. Reported activities include: the **launch of dedicated NIA websites (e.g. Marlborough Downs¹²⁷, Nene Valley¹²⁸ and Northern Devon¹²⁹)**; **use of social media**; and **press releases**.
- Some NIA partnerships have recruited **staff or created roles with explicit responsibility to engage with communities and encourage participation in conservation work**, such as the recruitment of two 'community rangers' in the Dearne Valley.
- **Events have been organised by NIA partnerships which are intended to engage and inspire local people**, such as: film screenings (Wild Purbeck); festival planning (South Downs Way Ahead and Wild Purbeck); walk & talk events and workshops (Marlborough Downs; and a natural environment based quiz for schools (South Downs).
- Educational outreach has also been important, such as **engaging local children (and their teachers) in learning about the natural environment while working on NIA activities**. Examples include: the development of ecosystem services curriculum materials for local schools in Northern Devon; training for teachers in Wild Purbeck; and NIA site visits for local schools in, for example, Dearne Valley, Morecambe Bay and North Devon (see also section 2.3.2).

Source: Based on interviews with NIAs in May-June 2014, and a review of Year 2 quarterly Progress Reports.

Two M&E indicators provide potential measures of the leadership and influence NIA partnerships may have within their areas: *number of enquiries* (enquiries people make about the NIA and activities / events); and *audience reach* (the number of people visiting NIA websites).

Two NIA partnerships, Birmingham and Black Country and Wild Purbeck, recorded data under the *number of enquiries*¹³⁰ optional indicator in the online reporting tool. The total number of enquiries at the end of Year 2 was 124 in Birmingham and Black Country and the 145 in Wild Purbeck. In both cases, the number of enquiries recorded decreased between Years 1 and 2 (from 69 enquiries to 55 in Birmingham and Black Country, and from 115 enquiries to 30 in Wild Purbeck). Birmingham and Black Country note that the reduction in enquiries is perhaps a reflection that only new enquiries are recorded (i.e. only the first time an individual enquires about a specific topic is recorded), and that data is incomplete and likely to underestimate the true number of enquiries, as specific projects are the responsibility of a wide range of partners and not all enquiries across the partnership are recorded.

Table 6.4 presents data recorded by the four NIA partnerships who reported against the *audience reach* optional indicator. Three of the four partnerships entered data on the number of visits to their websites in both Years 1 and 2.

¹²⁷ See: <http://www.mdnia.org.uk/>

¹²⁸ See: <http://www.nenevalleynia.org/>

¹²⁹ See: <http://www.northerndevonniania.org/>

¹³⁰ 'Enquiries' are defined in this indicator as: those enquiries made to NIA partnership organisations specifically about the NIA, its activities or events (e.g. in person, and by phone, email or letter).

Table 6.4: Number of visits to NIA partnership websites

NIA	Year 1 (2012-13)	Year 2 (2013-14)	Change (Year 1 – 2)
Greater Thames Marshes	480	1,176	+696
Humberhead Levels	1,026	2,123	+1,097
Nene Valley	9,541	4,393	-5,148 ¹³¹
Northern Devon	1,448	8,967	+7,519
Total	12,495	16,659	+4,164

Source: Data recorded by NIAs in the online reporting tool for the indicator 'audience reach'

6.4 Monitoring and evaluation

This sub-section seeks to understand how effectively NIA partnerships are monitoring the implementation of their Business Plans, and the extent to which monitoring and evaluation is supporting implementation. Sub-section 1.4 provides an overview of the NIA partnerships' monitoring and evaluation process and requirements. A table summarising the NIA partnerships' M&E indicator selection and data entry (using the online reporting tool) is included in Appendix 1.

Monitoring of implementation against agreed project objectives is required to understand if project outcomes are being achieved as expected or whether implementation approaches need to be modified to improve outcomes, and to develop a record of and communicate the effectiveness of a particular intervention.

NIA partnerships experienced some challenges in completing monitoring using the M&E framework indicators and online reporting tool developed for this purpose (see Box 6.11). During the interviews in May – June 2014 and discussions at the Year 2 M&E workshop (July 2014), NIA partnerships also identified ways in which monitoring and evaluation is contributing to effective implementation and providing additional benefits.

- **Understanding and communicating:** A 'key-achievement' reported during the Year 2 M&E workshop was that due to the development of a rounded understanding of outcomes and impacts as a result of using the M&E framework and indicators, the values and figures collated (e.g. in relation to volunteering, or area of habitat managed) can be readily used elsewhere to communicate change, publicise achievements and as an input to decision-making.
- **Data availability and sharing:** In the interviews held in May-June 2014 one NIA partnership said that there are *"huge amounts of data available for sharing, especially from partners involved in the NIA"*, and that *"the local Biodiversity Record Centre have been very helpful in monitoring and evaluation work"* [NIA 8]. Another NIA partnership reported that the NIA partnership has been able to support the Local Record Centre and that this has improved data reporting and availability in the NIA [NIA 7].

Nene Valley also highlighted the value of monitoring as a basis for improved data sharing, and that the NIA partnership has brought a broad spectrum of partners' data together, often in one place. For example, local habitat opportunity mapping is now available to everyone within the partnership.

¹³¹ Nene Valley NIA partnership reported that the probable reasons for the fall in website visits were: due to problems with original hosting provider leading to the site being 'down' for up to 2 months in early spring 2014; and when re-launched the site was in a basic form a much content had been lost through the problems originally leading to its' closure. The site has since been refreshed and re-launched in August 2014.

- **Awareness and training:** Based on the interviews held in May-June 2014, one NIA partnership has trained partners in monitoring and using this as part of ongoing management of projects [NIA 6]. Although some partners required support in their monitoring work, the NIA partnership reported that they (partners) have been learning from each other, and that much more data is being generated, especially by groups who may not have done this before. The value of community involvement in monitoring and the increased awareness that this has generated, was reported as a key achievement during the Year 2 workshop.

The increased competency in monitoring and environmental record keeping was identified as a legacy of the NIA partnerships, and that links to the academic community have been enhanced by involving universities and researchers in NIA monitoring activities.

Box 6.11: Examples of challenges related to monitoring and evaluation

- The M&E framework and protocols were reviewed and updated during Year 2, and in some instances this required NIA partnerships to collate and/or report data in different ways, including revising baseline and Year 1 data where appropriate.
- There were some delays in the availability and processing of certain national datasets such as Environmental Stewardship data.
- NIA partnerships have reported on challenges related to data collection, particularly where there was a need for numerous partner organisations data recording and reporting. The interviews with NIA partnerships in May – June 2014 identified that the collecting information from partners about in-kind contributions proved ‘difficult’ or was ‘not being captured’. The main reason given for this with that project delivery often takes precedence over M&E activities.
- The online reporting tool developed to record data for NIA partnership monitoring presented some practical and technical issues requiring resolution during Year 2, including for example: certain pages not displaying correctly; narrative data entry character limits restricting complete entry; limitations on ability of NIA partners to add new ‘features’ in some cases where this was desired.
- All known and reported user issues with the online reporting tool are being resolved by the Phase 2 Project team although some additional data verification had to be completed by NIA partnerships following submission.

Source: Based on interviews with NIAs in May-June 2014, and record of the Year 2 M&E workshop.

Based on NIA partnerships’ planned expenditure over the first two years of the grant period, they expected to spend between 1% and 9% of their total expenditure on monitoring and evaluation, with the average (mean) overall planned expenditure across all NIAs being 5%, see Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Planned NIA expenditure on monitoring and evaluation to the end of Year 2

NIA	NIA grant (Year 1 and Year 2)	Planned M&E spending in Years 1 and 2	Percentage on M&E
Birmingham and Black Country	£356,464	£28,365	8%
Dark Peak	£459,812	£20,176	4%
Deerne Valley Green Heart	£308,549	£28,874	9%
Greater Thames Marshes	£336,981	£10,417	3%
Humberhead Levels	£363,381	£2,660	1%
Marlborough Downs	£332,954	£16,514	5%
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	£341,082	£7,399	2%
Morecambe Bay	£377,532	£3,288	1%
Nene Valley	£451,835	£40,585	9%
Northern Devon	£438,819	£38,569	9%
South Downs Way Ahead	£364,971	£22,440	6%
Wild Purbeck	£376,665	£13,824	4%
Totals	£4,509,045	£233,111	

Source: NIA grant based on financial summary spreadsheet collated by Natural England (date 9 September 2014) / planned M&E expenditure based on financial planning included in NIA partnership Business Plans as collated by Natural England.

Note: Nene Valley included planned expenditure only in Year 3 for M&E - staff time equal to £60,877.80 - this has been spread across the three years to arrive at a figure for each year, and a total for Year 1 and Year 2: £60,877.90 / 3 = £20,292.30 per year.

6.5 Research and innovation

6.5.1 Sharing information and knowledge

Sub-sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 summarise the Progress and Achievements in relation to NIA partnerships' research, innovation, learning and sharing activities. Information reported in sub-section 6.3.2 on how partnership working is supporting project implementation, 6.3.3 on NIA partnerships' leadership and influence, and 6.4 on monitoring and evaluation are also relevant to sharing information and knowledge.

Information exchange and learning has been ongoing in various ways within and between the NIA partnerships. As highlighted in sub-section 2.5.2, formal learning and knowledge exchange to date includes four NIA best practise events, as well as climate change adaptation workshops (led by Natural England). Four workshops have also been organised under the M&E Phase 2 project, including annual (Year 1 and Year 2) M&E workshops, and working meetings related to the updated M&E indicator protocols and the online reporting tool. The NERC Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Sustainability (BESS) Directorate at the University of York was also been involved in a workshop for the NIA partnerships on developing indicators for monitoring regulating ecosystem services. These events have provided opportunities for NIA partnerships to discuss and share experiences and establish connections between people, knowledge and practice.

Through the interviews held in May-June 2014, NIA partnerships have reported on examples of partners learning from each other and exchanging information and data. These findings are summarised in Box 6.12. Areas of information sharing and learning commonly seen include: data and mapping; sourcing funding; HLS options; monitoring and evaluation; technical knowledge; and sharing best practice.

Box 6.12: Examples of NIA partnerships sharing information and knowledge

- Birmingham and Black Country, held a funding workshop at the Growing Birmingham Conference in March 2014. **Information was disseminated on NIA partnership funding and other possible funding sources for natural environment groups in the area.**
- In Northern Devon, two **public shows on the natural environment of the NIA were staged by the Beaford Arts Theatre Company (a charity and partner within the NIA), to assist local parishes in understanding how to evaluate the environment.** There is a current funding bid to take the show to all NIAs.
- In the Meres and Mosses, the **wetland restoration officer has worked to share knowledge and encourage people to undertake work in different ways.** In addition, **working groups organised as an aspect of wider NIA partnership planning have provided valuable opportunities for information sharing between partners.**
- In Marlborough Downs, delivery group meetings are reported to have provided an opportunity for farmers to learn from conservation professionals, and vice-versa. **Knowledge sharing has been in relation to technical conservation management (e.g. ponds, grassland management) but also through less formal public events such as bat walks.**

Source: Based on interviews with NIAs in May-June 2014, and record of the Year 2 M&E workshop.

6.5.2 NIA partnerships' contribution to research and innovation

Sub-section 2.5.1 provides a summary of NIA partnerships progress and achievements in relation to research and innovation.

As part of the M&E Phase 2 project's work to support NIA partnerships and identify opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange, interviews were held with each partnership between December 2013 and January 2014. These interviews sought to identify research initiatives and other innovation activities that NIA partnerships have been or are involved in. A separate report summarising these interview outcomes was produced and shared with all NIA partnerships¹³². Headlines from these interviews include:

- Activities are being coordinated or initiated across all NIA partnerships that are considered to be either contributing to research or are innovative in nature.
- Research and innovation is seen across all the types of activity NIAs are engaged in, with specific research relating to ecosystem services and practical habitat restoration or creation and/or land-management techniques.
- Four of the NIA partnerships include universities among their partners¹³³ and 11 of the 12 initial NIA partnerships have reported on research related to the objectives of the NIA partnership being undertaken in collaboration with universities or research institutes.
- Innovation is also seen in relation to engaging with the public and stakeholders, such as farmers and landowners, often in the context of changes to land-use associated with restoration or habitat creation (e.g. farm focus group and a farm advisory project in Greater Thames Marshes).
- Three NIA partnerships¹³⁴ have been awarded funding to participate in a Sciencewise public dialogue project¹³⁵, with the objective of helping the NIA partnerships explore how to "embed public dialogue in the NIA local planning process". This work is ongoing but is intended to: *"enable NIA partnerships to take evidence-based local policy decisions, dealing with varied and novel scientific and technical information and associated complexity and uncertainty informed by public opinion; review best practice and core lessons about how to work with communities and the public in the planning of more integrated landscape, biodiversity and ecosystems policies and associated management strategies."*

Outcomes from this public dialogue work will be explored further in Year 3.

Box 6.13 presents examples of specific research and innovation activities being coordinated or led by NIA partnerships.

Box 6.13: Selected examples of NIA partnerships' research and innovation activities

- In Birmingham and Black Country a study by Wolverhampton University researchers working with the NIA partnership has helped to develop restoration techniques related to grasslands / meadow.
- Birmingham and Black Country are also completing a three year study exploring 'the value of green infrastructure in Birmingham and the Black Country' which is ongoing and will report at the end of Year 3 as an aspect of the NIA partnerships' monitoring and evaluation work.
- A PhD student from Sheffield University has undertaken research in Humberhead Levels looking at ecosystem services in the context of the NIA, and in particular carbon analysis, water management,

¹³² The report *NIA research initiatives interview outcomes summary* (15 April 2014) was shared with NIAs through the NIA workspace on Huddle, and is available on request. Huddle link (log-in required): <https://defra.huddle.net/workspace/16609188/files/#31402933>

¹³³ Birmingham and Black Country, Nene Valley, South Downs Way Ahead and Wild Purbeck.

¹³⁴ Meres and Mosses, Morecambe Bay, Nene Valley

¹³⁵ See: <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

water quality and connectivity and socio-economic services.

- Innovation and research activities are related to practical habitat restoration or creation and/or land-management techniques include **trialling grassland plots for invertebrates, wildflowers and house sparrows in Dearne Valley**, and a **restoration and research facility in the Dark Peak to map peat depth to assess carbon storage and support habitat restoration**.
- A study '*Evaluation of the NIA methods in the design of conservation actions and the corresponding associated ecosystem services value*' was conducted in Marlborough Downs NIA by researchers from Southampton University. **The NIA partnership has also been working to integrate ecosystem services into farm management, including practices to improve conditions for pollinators.**
- Northern Devon have worked with the University of Exeter in relation to: **a study on the Culm Grasslands looking at the value and role of grasslands in water flow management and flood water retention**; and a **mapping of attitudes to the natural environment community engagement with the natural environment**.

Source: Based on interviews with NIAs in December 2013 – January 2014

6.6 Support from Natural England, Defra and other agencies

The evaluation of the support provided to NIA partnerships by Natural England, Defra and other agencies, including the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission will be further developed in Year 3, using information and data to be provided by these agencies, and through discussions and interviews proposed as part of the ongoing work to develop an understanding of what difference the NIA partnerships have made.

Based on information available at the end of Year 2, the following support is known to have been provided:

- Part of the work of the M&E Phase 2 project team and Natural England has been supporting the NIAs in their monitoring and evaluation work, through: the provision of direct support for using the indicator protocols and online reporting tool including email exchanges, telephone discussions and visits to NIA partnerships; holding workshops to discuss and demonstrate the online reporting tool and indicators; development of FAQs and guidance documentation, with Natural England, for example related to the use of BARS and the online reporting tool.
- Information provided by Natural England in Year 1 indicates that the planned level of support for the NIA programme includes: the equivalent of approximately three full time employees within the Natural England NIA programme; and a local Natural England lead for each NIA intended to be equivalent to approximately 0.5 full time employee per NIA.
- The NIA programme is overseen by the NIA Steering Group (with representatives of Defra, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Department for Communities and Local Government) and has links to: a Biodiversity 2020 related Terrestrial Biodiversity Group; a NIA and Local Nature Partnership Stakeholder Group; the Natural England Biodiversity 2020 / Natural Environment White Paper Programme Board; and the Natural England NIA Operational Working Group.
- Natural England and JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) staff have also provided direct support to NIA partnerships for technical queries (e.g. BARS use) and in understanding and interpreting national data sets (e.g. Environmental Stewardship, Priority Habitats Inventory).

7. Conclusions and Future Work

This section draws out some key conclusions from the M&E of the NIA programme at the end of Year 2, and outlines some of the main next steps for the M&E planned for Year 3.

7.1 Conclusions

This report provides a preliminary evaluation of the NIA programme and progress at end of the second of the three year funded period. Any analysis of whether the programme is working well or not so well, and why can only be preliminary and more detail will be presented at the end of Year 3.

The key conclusions that are emerging are summarised here.

7.1.1 Progress against the NIA partnerships' objectives

- Generally the NIA partnerships have made 'good' or 'satisfactory' progress against their funding agreement milestones. Where milestones have not been achieved, delays have generally been related to unforeseen practical issues concerning individual projects. These have been overcome by rescheduling tasks or revising milestones for the third year as, in hindsight, original project targets were unrealistic. At the end of the three year grant period the evaluation will analyse the NIA partnership' Progress Reports and other sources to review delivery against their objectives.
- There has been some variation in progress across the objectives when categorised under certain M&E framework themes/sub-themes. This highlights some of the challenges encountered by the NIA partnerships in delivering, for example, habitat connectivity outcomes and the milestones set under the social and economic and ecosystem services objectives. At the end of the three year grant period, the evaluation will consider whether progress under these themes/sub-themes is more closely aligned to the original expectations.

7.1.2 Key cumulative progress and achievements

- The NIA partnerships' have delivered activities across all four main topics linked to their overall objectives: more, bigger, better and less fragmented places for wildlife; enhancing the benefits that nature provides for people; uniting local communities, land managers and businesses; and places of inspiration and innovation.
- The NIA partnerships' are also making a contribution to the Biodiversity 2020 outcomes. At the end of the three year grant period, the evaluation will report on the contribution made.
- The NIA partnerships are all very different and have locally specific objectives and work programmes which is a reflection of their original conception. This means that comparative and cumulative reporting is not always appropriate or possible. Where data is available, the Year 2 evaluation has indicated the scale of cumulative progress across common measures – for example at the end of Year 2 approximately 10% of the total area of priority habitat across all NIAs has been subject to NIA partnership activity under the NIA programme.
- Many of the NIA partnerships' activities will result in impacts that will only be fully realised in the long-term. It is a challenge for both existing monitoring systems and those developed specifically for the NIA programme to provide a direct measure of their outcomes and impacts during the three year funding period. The lessons from the NIA M&E Phase 2 project and dialogue between the NIA partnerships, Defra and Natural England will be used in considering the long term maintenance and uses of the M&E framework and online reporting tool.

7.1.3 Evaluation of the outcomes and impacts across the M&E framework themes and the extent to which any change can be attributed to NIA partnerships' activities

- The Year 2 Progress Report shows outcomes emerging across the biodiversity, ecosystem services and social and economic wellbeing themes. It is generally not yet possible to evaluate impacts due to time lags between action and impact. There are also some challenges for aggregating data across NIAs; and in determining the extent to which NIA partnership activity itself has contributed to improvements or changes.
- The evaluation has used some initial interviews with the NIA partnerships to investigate this further. This has provided some very useful initial evidence that being part of the NIA initiative, and the collaborative activities and financial assistance that has come with it, has been a key factor in delivering these outcomes and provides benefits greater than the sum of the individual parts. In Year 3 the evaluation team will be undertaking additional work to help determine whether some or all of the outcomes might have taken place in the absence of the NIA partnerships and the added value that the NIA partnerships have provided. This will use three agreed approaches: a counterfactual scenario based approach will focus on gathering a range of insights from practitioners and stakeholders into what would have happened without the NIAs; an approach based on NIA data to determine trajectories both before and after the NIAs were established, and an approach based on a comparison of the NIAs with similar non-NIA areas or landscapes.
- NIA partnerships have engaged in activities to test innovative approaches, research and share knowledge, including in developing and measuring habitat connectivity or ecosystem services. All the NIA partnerships are developing knowledge or skills in these rapidly developing areas and they are forging links with universities and research institutions that should provide long terms benefits. This knowledge and skills will be valuable for the future work of the NIA partnerships, and lessons will be useful to share amongst both the initial 12 NIA partnerships and in the longer term with any new NIAs.
- All of the initial NIA partnerships are involved in activities that are resulting in social, economic and wellbeing benefits. Challenges remain to the effective monitoring and evaluation of these impacts and benefits. The qualitative data from the interviews and case studies that have been undertaken in Year 2 have helped to identify emerging outcomes for social and economic wellbeing.
- At the end of Year 2, the evidence shows that all NIA partnerships are generally working well and have been effective mechanisms for coordinating activities, sharing data and knowledge and helping to reach-out to and involve local communities. The evaluation at the end of the three year grant period will consider the likely long-term benefits of the NIA programme and the NIA partnerships' plans for continuing their work to fund and deliver their visions to 2020.
- At the end of Year 2, the evidence shows that all NIA partnerships are working well and have been effective mechanisms for coordinating activities, sharing data and knowledge and helping to reach-out to and involve local communities. This provides some useful lessons for any future application of the approach by locally determined NIAs, as well as for other similar partnerships. The evaluation at the end of the three year grant period will consider the likely long-term benefits of the NIA programme and the NIA partnerships' plans for continuing their work to fund and deliver their visions to 2020.
- The benefits of the structured monitoring and evaluation framework reported, by the NIA partnerships, included: using the results of the M&E process to communicate change and achievements, as an input into decision-making; sharing data amongst partners and other organisations; and learning monitoring skills from other partners and building capacity, including within the local community. Challenges have occurred, such as the availability and

processing of certain national datasets and some data collection and recording by partners, but generally the M&E process has been seen as beneficial by the NIA partnerships and has been more efficient in Year 2 than in Year 1.

7.2 Next steps

The end of the third year reporting period for the NIA partnerships coincides with the end of the three year grant funding period at the end of March 2015. The final reporting deadline for the M&E Phase 2 project is November 2015.

There are several areas of further work to support the evaluation that that will be undertaken and reported in Year 3. This is in addition to the additional work on the counterfactual already described. These will include:

- Further reflection on what has worked well, and less well in the implementation of NIA programme;
- Lessons learnt for landscape scale intervention;
- Lessons learnt for monitoring and evaluation of natural environment / partnership led interventions / programmes; and
- Exploration of the extent to which it may be possible to ascertain an economic value of NIA outcomes, for example using valuation of ecosystem services.

The proposed timings for the key activities relevant to the M&E for Year 3 are:

- **Online reporting tool** available for Year 3 reporting by the NIA partnerships from the end of November 2014.
- NIA partnerships to commence Year 3 **data entry** - November 2014.
- M&E Phase 2 project contractors proceed with **counterfactual work** during last quarter of 2014 and first quarter of 2015.
- A Year 3 **M&E workshop** to discuss reporting and reflective consideration of the NIA partnerships work will potentially be held in early 2015.
- NIA **Best Practice event** on habitat connectivity likely to be held in February 2015.
- End of Year 3 **reporting period** 31 March 2015.
- Some **national data** (e.g. BARs bulk upload, Environmental Stewardship) likely to be supplied after March 2015 – Natural England and M&E Phase 2 project contractors to agree approach to data entry and verifying analysis if some NIA partnerships are not available to undertake these tasks.
- Depending on NIA partnerships availability post March 2015 to review / validate Year 3 reporting, possibly invite interested NIA partnerships to form a small **review group** for this purpose.
- Year 3 **data analysis and validation / quality assurance** - ongoing February – June 2015.
- Drafting of and feedback on **overall NIA evaluation report** and other deliverables – June–October 2015.
- **Final overall NIA evaluation report** and other project deliverables - November 2015.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BARS	Biodiversity Action Reporting System
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
CEP	Collingwood Environmental Planning Ltd
CO ₂	Carbon Dioxide
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DVGH	Dearne Valley Green Heart
ELS	Entry Level Stewardship
ES	Ecosystem Services
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
FTE	Full-time equivalent
ha	Hectare
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship
km	Kilometre
KS1	Key stage 1
LDF	Local Development Framework
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MBC	Metropolitan Borough Council
MENE	Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment
MHW	Mean High Water
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBCCVM	National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability Model
NBN	National Biodiversity Network
NERC	Natural England Commissioned Report
NEWP	Natural Environment White Paper
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIA	Nature Improvement Area
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PROW	Public Right of Way
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
tCO ₂ e	Tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents

Appendix 1: Indicators Selected and Completed by the NIA Partnerships

Notes:

- 'Data entered' does not necessarily mean that data entry was completed or correct, but that the online tool shows that some data were entered against the indicator.
- It is possible that some NIA partnerships have not entered data because they do not intend to proceed with a particular indicator and the 'no. selected' totals should be considered in this context. Such cases will be resolved in preparing the online tool for use in Year 3.
- The indicators below represent the core and optional M&E framework indicators. Locally developed indicators have not been included as these were not part of the original M&E framework. Local indicators are listed in Table A2.

■	Indicator selected and data entered
☒	Indicator selected but data not entered and/or deletion requested

Table A1: M&E framework indicators selected and completed by NIA partnerships

Theme and sub-theme	Indicator code	Indicator title	Status of indicator	Birmingham & Black Country	Dark Peak	Deerne Valley	Greater Thames Marshes	Humberhead Levels	Marlborough Downs	Meres & Mosses of the Marches	Morecambe Bay	Nene Valley	Northern Devon	South Downs Way Ahead	Wild Purbeck	No. Selected	No. Data entered	No. Selected but data not entered
Biodiversity																		
Habitat	B01_H	Extent of existing priority habitat managed to maintain / improve its condition	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
	B02_H	Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
	B03_H	Proportion of SSSIs in favourable or recovering condition	Optional					■				■	☒			3	2	1
	B04_H	Total extent of priority habitat	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
Species	B05_S	Extent of habitat managed to secure species-specific needs	Optional	■			■	■		■				■		5	5	0
	B06_S	Status of widespread species	Optional		■			■	■	■						4	4	0
	B07_S	Status of focal species	Optional	■		■		■		■	■	■	■	■	■	9	9	0
Invasive species	B08_S	Control of invasive non-native species	Optional		■											1	1	0
Habitat connectivity	B09_C	Optional indicator of habitat connectivity	Optional	■		■	☒	☒	☒	■	■	■		■		9	6	3
	B10_C	Comparative indicator of habitat connectivity	Core	■	■	☒	■	■	■	☒	■	■	■	■	■	12	10	2
Ecosystem Services																		
Cultural services	ES01_C	Measure of extent of land managed to enhance landscape character	Optional								■			■	■	3	3	0
	ES02_C	Length of accessible PROW and permissive paths created and/or improved	Optional		■	■		☒	■	■						5	4	1
	ES03_C	Condition of historic environment features	Optional			☒										1	0	1

Theme and sub-theme	Indicator code	Indicator title	Status of indicator	Birmingham & Black Country	Dark Peak	Dearne Valley	Greater Thames Marshes	Humberhead Levels	Marlborough Downs	Meres & Mosses of the Marches	Morecambe Bay	Nene Valley	Northern Devon	South Downs Way Ahead	Wild Purbeck	No. Selected	No. Data entered	No. Selected but data not entered
	ES04_C	Access to natural greenspace and/or woodland	Optional	■			■					■	■			4	4	0
Supporting services	ES05_S	Area of habitat supporting pollinators	Optional	■												1	1	0
Regulating services	ES06_R	Contribution to water quality	Optional	■	■	■	⊗					■	■	■	■	8	7	1
	ES07_R	Contribution to carbon storage & sequestration	Optional		■	■		■		■	■					5	5	0
Provisioning services	ES08_P	Area of more-sustainable agricultural production	Optional		■	■	■	■	■	■		■	⊗	■	■	10	9	1
	ES09_P	Percentage of woodland in active management	Optional	■	■	■		■			■		■	■		7	7	0
Social and Economic																		
Social impacts & well-being	S&E01_S	Attitudes of local community to the natural environment and environmental behaviours	Optional	■	■	■	■	⊗				■				6	5	1
	S&E02_S	No. of educational visits	Optional			■		■		■	■		■			5	5	0
	S&E03_S	No. and social mix of visitors to NIA sites	Optional		■			■								2	2	0
	S&E04_S	No. and social mix of people involved in NIA activities and events	Optional		■		■	■		■						4	4	0
	S&E05_S	Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents	Optional	■		■	■									3	3	0
	S&E06_S	No. of volunteer hours on NIA activities	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
Economic values & impacts	S&E07_E	Estimated value of visitor expenditure to local economy	Optional													0	0	0
	S&E08_E	No. of people employed in NIA activities	Optional		■	■	■	⊗	■	⊗	■		■		■	9	7	2
Partnership working																		
Mobilisation of resources	PW01_R	Project income and expenditure	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
	PW02_R	Financial value of help-in-kind	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
Efficient & effective delivery	PW03_E	Fulfilment of identified skills needs	Optional													0	0	0
	PW04_E	Attitudes of local community to NIA	Optional		■	■	■	■						■		5	5	0
	PW05_E	Assessment of partnership working	Optional	■		■		■	■	■	■	■	■		■	9	9	0
Leadership & influence	PW06_L	Audience reach	Optional				■	■				■	■			4	4	0
	PW07_L	Level of awareness of NIA in local community	Optional		■	■		■	■	⊗	■			■		7	6	1
	PW08_L	No. of enquiries	Optional	■											■	2	2	0
Number selected (not including locally developed indicators)				18	20	22	18	25	14	19	16	16	17	16	14	215		
Number data entered				18	20	20	16	21	13	16	16	16	15	16	14		201	
Number selected but data not entered				0	0	2	2	4	1	3	0	0	2	0	0			14

Table A2: Local indicators developed by NIA partnerships

Theme and sub-theme	Local indicator title	NIAs that have developed local indicators
Biodiversity		
Habitat	Area of non-priority habitat created and managed as a result of NIA activity	Dearne Valley
Habitat connectivity	Measure of river habitat connectivity	Dearne Valley
Ecosystem Services		
Cultural services	Percentage of historic features managed positively in DVGH NIA	Dearne Valley
	Cultural services indicator	Northern Devon
Supporting services	Measure of percentage of Local Planning Authority LDF documents, that have been prioritised by the NIA partnership, that reference the NIA and include policies that aim to deliver NIA objectives that are adopted by the council	Dearne Valley
	Supporting services indicator	Northern Devon
Regulating services	Areas of new habitat created for pollinators	Marlborough Downs
Provisioning Services	Woodland products	Birmingham and Black Country
Social and Economic		
Social impacts and wellbeing	Number of educational activities in schools delivered by the DVGH NIA Outreach project and through the activity of partners of the DVGH NIA	Dearne Valley
	Number of volunteer hours on activities within the DVGH NIA that help meet the broader objectives of the NIA Business Plan	Dearne Valley
Economic values & impacts	Economic activity	Northern Devon
	Estimated value of ecosystem services in NIA	Birmingham and Black Country; Nene Valley; South Downs
Partnership working		
Mobilisation of resources	Complementary funding secured in the area	Dearne Valley
	Delivery indicator	Northern Devon
Leadership & influence	Leadership and influence indicator	Northern Devon

Appendix 2: Data Sources and Methods of Analysis

Appendix 2 provides an overview of the main data sources which support the progress and evaluation reporting, and summarises the methods of analysis used.

Overview of data sources / data collection and methods of analysis used

Table A3 presents the main data sources and methods of data collection used as part of the evaluation together with an overview of the data management and subsequent analysis used to interpret these data.

Table A3: Overview of data sources, collection and analysis methods and use in the evaluation

Data source / collection methods	Data management and analysis
M&E framework indicator data as recorded by NIA partnerships in the online reporting tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data extracted from online tool for all indicators across all NIA partnerships in CSV¹³⁶ format using the report function Data collated and tidied into a searchable Excel file. Specific indicators or NIAs selected by using Excel sort / filters and data extracted to separate worksheets (e.g. by theme) where necessary. Basic data analysis performed e.g.: summing data across NIA partnerships; using pivot tables to examine specific types of feature; generating Excel graphs to illustrate change over time etc.
National data and data from existing monitoring tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In most cases data from national sources have been collated by Natural England (with support from other agencies in particular Forestry Commission, English Heritage and the Environment Agency) into Excel files presenting annual data for each NIA, initially as input to the NIA partnerships' monitoring. In Year 2 Natural England provided such data for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SSSI unit condition assessment Priority Habitats Inventory Public Rights of Way Environmental Stewardship Options Scheduled Monuments: Scheduled Monuments at Risk National Forest Inventory (NFI): Woodland in management Performance Indicator Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) Basic analysis performed to calculate e.g. change over time, share of a particular feature across all NIAs, comparison of NIA trends with national trends etc.
NIA partnership progress reports as submitted to Natural England	<p>Progress reports were manually reviewed to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of specific activities by NIA partners related to particular thematic objectives / outcomes (e.g. related to biodiversity, partnership working etc.). Evidence of NIA partnerships overcoming challenges relating to staffing; project delivery etc. Self-assessment of progress by all NIA partnerships against their own objectives (see further description following this table).
NIA partnership's annual summaries of progress and achievements	<p>Annual summaries were manually reviewed to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of specific activities by NIA partners related to particular thematic objectives / outcomes (e.g. related to biodiversity, partnership working etc.).

¹³⁶ CSV – Comma Separated Values format

Data source / collection methods	Data management and analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headline progress and achievements relating to specific M&E themes or NIA objectives.
NIA partnership financial reporting (claim forms) as submitted to Natural England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural England audited and collated all NIA partnership financial reporting into an Excel file. Basic analysis performed, including: comparison with reporting through the online reporting tool (e.g. of volunteering, income and expenditure, value of help in-kind); summing data across NIA partnerships; developing Excel graphs to illustrate change over time and compare features (e.g. sources of added value) etc.
Interviews with NIA partnerships (<p>In Year 2 two sets of interviews were undertaken focussing on NIA research activities and innovation (December 2013 – January 2014) and partnership working and social, economic and wellbeing benefits (April – May 2014). The key steps for both sets of interviews involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of semi-structured interview questions was prepared and agree with the M&E project steering group. Telephone interviews with NIA partnership staff were arranged in advance, interviewees were sent questions in advance and interviews completed as per agreed scheduling. Notes were recorded from interviews in Excel format to enable comparison of outcomes across NIA partnership responses to each question. Key messages were identified through manual analysis of specific question responses (e.g. importance of partnership working in project delivery, reflections on the difference being an NIA partnership has made).
Case studies of projects / activities with social and economic wellbeing benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case study template developed and annotated to guide NIA partnerships in its completion. Example case studies completed and shared with M&E project steering group and interested NIA partnerships – leading to refinement of template. Case studies developed by NIA partnerships in discussion with M&E Phase 2 project team. Case studies reviewed to understand and illustrate NIA partnership contributions to social and economic wellbeing benefits. Short summary boxes developed for reporting purposes.
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two annual M&E workshops with NIA partnerships have been held (July 2013 and July 2014), with additional workshops convened to discuss revisions to the M&E framework and indicator protocols (February 2014) and to provide training / feedback on the revised online reporting tool (April 2014). Written workshop records were developed following each workshop and circulated to all participants prior to finalisation. Workshop records have been used to inform ongoing project work (e.g. amendments to indicator protocols) and as direct input to the evaluation and reporting (e.g. NIA partnership reflections on key progress and achievements).
Direct informal discussion with NIA partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone and email exchanges on an ad-hoc / as needed basis with individual NIA M&E officers or project managers for example to clarify data aspects, or request additional information.

Analysis of the NIA partnerships' self-assessment of progress against their objectives

Each evaluation section (Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6) includes an analysis of NIA partnerships' self-assessment of progress against their funding agreement objectives. This was a qualitative assessment based on the self-assessment of progress against these objectives made by each NIA partnership in the fourth quarter Progress Reports to Natural England (final quarter of Year 2). These self-assessments of progress are based on the level of progress made towards project outcomes under each funding agreement objective and the extent to which this progress is in-line with original milestones.

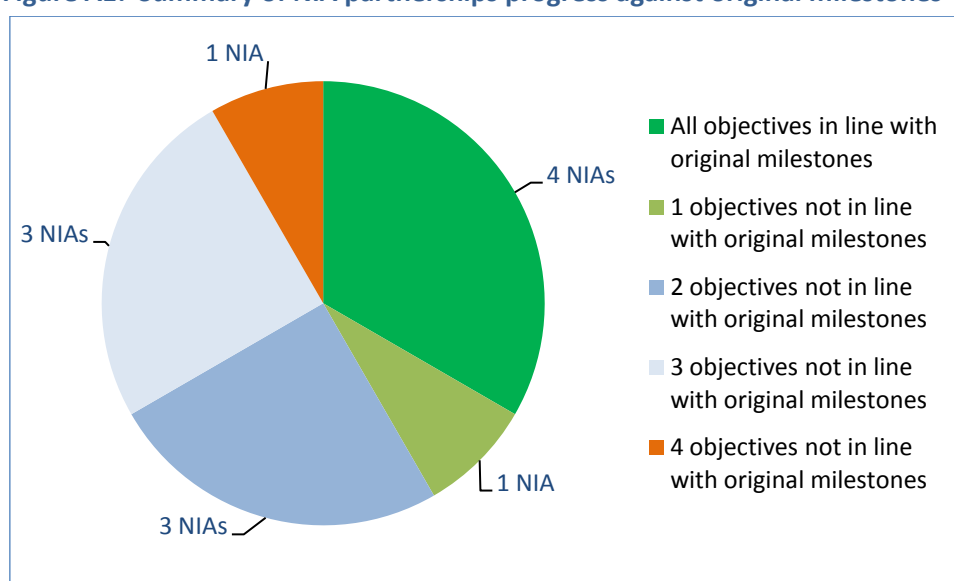
A traffic light scoring system has been used for the analysis. Presence of a 'No' recorded in response to the question 'Is progress in line with your original milestones?' for any objective (or project within an objective) within the fourth quarter Progress Report resulted in the objective being assigned to the amber or red category (unless the reason for the 'No' response was because progress was *in advance of* milestones).

Projects were assigned to green, amber or red according to the response made to the requirement to describe the level of project progress made towards this outcome since it started (None/Little/Satisfactory/Good). Projects were assigned to a category according to the key below.

Score	Level of project progress made towards the outcome	Progress in line with original milestones?
Green	None (if none planned)/Little/Satisfactory/Good	'Yes' (or 'No' where progress in advance of milestones)
Amber	None/Satisfactory/Good	No
Red	None/Little/Some	No

Bringing together the thematic assessments presented in Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 this shows that: four NIA partnerships have reported that delivery is in line with all their milestones at the end of Year 2. The remaining eight NIA partnerships reported that they have not achieved their planned milestones, for between one and four objectives, as planned (see Figure A1).

Figure A1: Summary of NIA partnerships progress against original milestones



Source: NIA self-assessment of progress as reported in the 4th quarterly Progress Reports

It should be noted the milestones that have not been achieved are individual elements of projects that contribute to the achievement of the overall objective. The NIA partnerships' milestones were set in their funding agreements, and were an estimate of their delivery programmes at the time but unforeseen practical issues they were unaware for example may have emerged since which have affected delivery (e.g. the unusually wet and stormy winter in 2013 / 2014¹³⁷ delaying some habitat activities).

¹³⁷ See: <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/summaries/2014/winter>

Summary of data sources and analysis used for the M&E indicators

Table A4 provides an overview of the main data sources and methods of analysis used by NIA partnership in relation to each of the M&E framework indicators.

Table A4: Data sources and methods of analysis used by the indicator protocols

Theme and sub-theme	Indicator code	Indicator title	Indicator category	Data sources						Methods of analysis				
				NIA data through BARS	National data through BARS	Direct NIA monitoring	MENE	Survey (visitor etc.)	Local & /or national datasets	GIS analysis	BARS reports	NE supplied	Collation of values (e.g. in Excel)	Qualitative assessments
Biodiversity														
Habitat	B01_H	Extent of existing priority habitat managed to maintain / improve its condition	Core	✓	✓	✓					✓			
	B02_H	Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat	Core	✓	✓	✓					✓			
	B03_H	Proportion of SSSIs in favourable or recovering condition	Optional						✓			✓		
	B04_H	Total extent of priority habitat	Core						✓			✓		
Species	B05_S	Extent of habitat managed to secure species-specific needs	Optional	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓			
	B06_S	Status of widespread species	Optional			✓			✓				✓	
	B07_S	Status of focal species	Optional			✓			✓				✓	
Invasive species	B08_S	Control of invasive non-native species	Optional	✓		✓					✓			
Habitat connectivity	B09_C	Optional indicator of habitat connectivity	Optional	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	
	B10_C	Comparative indicator of habitat connectivity	Core	✓	✓	✓					✓			
Ecosystem Services														
Cultural services	ES01_C	Measure of extent of land managed to enhance landscape character	Optional			✓			✓	✓				
	ES02_C	Length of accessible PROW and permissive paths created and/or improved	Optional			✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	
	ES03_C	Condition of historic environment features	Optional						✓			✓	✓	

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	ES04_C	Access to natural greenspace and/or woodland	Optional						✓	✓				
Supporting services	ES05_S	Area of habitat supporting pollinators	Optional						✓	✓				
Regulating services	ES06_R	Contribution to water quality	Optional						✓		✓		✓	
	ES07_R	Contribution to carbon storage & sequestration	Optional						✓		✓		✓	
Provisioning services	ES08_P	Area of more-sustainable agricultural production	Optional			✓			✓			✓	✓	
	ES09_P	Percentage of woodland in active management	Optional			✓			✓			✓	✓	
Social and Economic														
Social impacts & well-being	S&E01_S	Attitudes of local community to the natural environment and environmental behaviours	Optional				✓					✓	✓	
	S&E02_S	Number of educational visits	Optional			✓							✓	
	S&E03_S	Number and social mix of visitors to NIA sites	Optional			✓		✓					✓	
	S&E04_S	Number and social mix of people involved in NIA activities and events	Optional			✓		✓					✓	
	S&E05_S	Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents	Optional				✓					✓	✓	
	S&E06_S	Number of volunteer hours on NIA activities	Core			✓							✓	
Economic values & impacts	S&E07_E	Estimated value of visitor expenditure to local economy	Optional			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
	S&E08_E	Number of people employed in NIA activities	Optional			✓							✓	
Partnership working														
Mobilisation of resources	PW01_R	Project income and expenditure	Core			✓							✓	
	PW02_R	Financial value of help-in-kind	Core			✓							✓	
Efficient & effective delivery	PW04_E	Fulfilment of identified skills needs	Optional			✓							✓	
	PW05_E	Attitudes of local community to NIA	Optional					✓					✓	✓

Theme and sub-theme	Indicator code	Indicator title	Indicator category	Data sources						Methods of analysis				
				NIA data through BARS	National data through BARS	Direct NIA monitoring	MENE	Survey (visitor etc.)	Local & /or national datasets	GIS analysis	BARS reports	NE supplied	Collation of values (e.g. in Excel)	Qualitative assessments
	PW06_E	Assessment of partnership working	Optional			✓								✓
Leadership & influence	PW07_L	Audience reach	Optional			✓							✓	
	PW08_L	Level of awareness of NIA in local community	Optional					✓					✓	
	PW09_L	Number of enquiries	Optional			✓							✓	