



MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY AND NORTH SOMERSET NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

Appendix VIII: Business Engagement Findings

Business Engagement Methodology

As part of the development of the West of England and North Somerset Nature Recovery Toolkit (acting as the LNRS for the region), Bristol Green Capital Partnership (BGCP) supported business engagement to ensure that the priorities and priority areas agreed in the Strategy are informed by the views of businesses from across the region.

From October – November 2023, BGCP engaged with 33 businesses from across the West of England to understand and identify:

- How businesses would like to support local nature
- How the LNRS could help businesses get more involved with local nature
- What parts of the region are priorities for businesses in the West of England
- How could the LNRS be designed to support businesses to do more for nature

To gain insights from a range of businesses, BGCP offered three routes of engagement:

1. **Virtual 1-2-1 meetings**

The team identified a selection of businesses for BaNES, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire and relevant contacts within each business and reached out directly to invite them to attend a 30-minute 1-2-1 meeting.

Engagement per region:

Overall engagement was highest in Bristol compared to the other regions in the West of England. The following number of businesses attended 1-2-1 meetings:

- BaNES – 3 (with one business choosing to feedback via the online form)
- Bristol - 8
- North Somerset - 1
- South Glos - 1

If the West of England Combined Authority team is interested in gathering further insights, there are an additional six businesses keen to attend a meeting and share their nature priorities.

The 1-2-1 meetings that were held throughout October and early November explored the following:

What is the top nature priority for the business?

- Funding local projects to aid **nature recovery**
- Funding local nature recovery projects with a focus on **climate resilience**
- Engaging staff with nature to **support wellbeing**
- Supporting nature recovery in the area around your **workplace**

- Supporting nature through business activities

How is the business actively working to support nature recovery i.e.

- Goals / main drivers
- Current projects/activities
- Challenges / Barriers

How can the LNRS be designed and developed to support the business to do more for nature?

Notes were captured in each meeting to record the key points and insights shared. These findings have been incorporated into the summary findings for each nature priority.

2. Free business workshop

In partnership with the West of England Combined Authority, BGCP hosted a free business workshop on 31 October at the West of England Combined Authority Office in Bristol to offer businesses from across the West of England an opportunity to gain a detailed insight into:

- The development of the LNRS
- How businesses can support/engage with nature recovery

The event also included a facilitated breakout discussion, to enable businesses to share their business nature priorities and views on what their business needs to do more for nature.

To promote the workshop widely across the West of England, BGCP promoted the event across its social channels and worked in collaboration with business networks across the West of England, including:

- Business West,
- Future Leap,
- Invest in BaNES, North Somerset and South Glos
- Redcliffe & Temple BID
- West of England Combined Authority comms and Growth Hub
- West of England Nature Partnership

Bookings and participation

More than 40 individuals booked to attend, with attendees representing businesses based in the following locations:

- BaNES – 4
- Bristol – 26
- North Somerset – 1
- South Gloucestershire – 3

- Operations across West of England – 5

23 attended on the day, representing 21 businesses from across the West of England.

Identifying top nature priorities

In addition to sharing their nature priorities during the breakout discussion, BGCP asked participants the following question at sign-up.

- What is the top nature priority for your business?
 - Funding local projects to aid **nature recovery**
 - Funding local nature recovery projects with a focus on **climate resilience**
 - Engaging staff with nature to **support wellbeing**
 - Supporting nature recovery in the area around your **workplace**
 - Other

42.5% of businesses selected 'other' which after analysis highlighted that this cohort of businesses is interested in supporting nature through their business activities. 20% then identified supporting nature recovery in the area around the workplace, 10% selected funding local projects to aid nature recovery, and just 5% identified their top priority as engaging staff with nature to support wellbeing.

However, as the 1-2-1 meetings have revealed, it is challenging for businesses to identify their top priority, as often one or two are a strategic focus.

Workshop Agenda

- The development of LNRS – presentation from Sophie Spencer, The West of England Combined Authority
- How businesses can play an active role in nature recovery – presentation from Tom Swithinbank, Redcliffe & Temple Business Improvement District
- Interactive mapping exercise – to enable businesses to plot the locations that are a priority for their business and why
- Facilitated breakout discussion to enable businesses to share their priorities and what they need to do more to support nature recovery in the west of England. During the breakout discussion, businesses were asked to sit at a table linked to their top nature priority (as detailed above) and were asked to answer the following questions:
 - What in particular is important to your organisation?
 - Why is this a priority for your organisation?
 - What has your organisation done so far?
 - What are the challenges/barriers to doing more on this priority?
 - How could the LNRS be designed and delivered to better help your organisation do more?

Notes were captured by facilitators and the key findings have been included in the summary report.

3. Online Form

To ensure all businesses in the West of England had the opportunity to engage in this process, an online form was created to capture feedback from businesses that, for example, could not attend a 1-2-1 meeting or the workshop.

Summary of findings

The insights from the 1-2-1 meetings and workshops have been combined to create a summary of findings for each priority area.

Please note:

We have combined the following two priorities in one summary, as we have found that businesses are prioritising employee wellbeing, and limited activity is taking place around the workplace. The only exception is where a business owns and operates an extensive piece of land.

- Engaging staff with nature to **support wellbeing**
- Supporting nature recovery in the area around your **workplace**

We have also not reported against businesses funding projects with a focus on climate resilience, as we did not identify any businesses through our 1-2-1 meetings or business workshops which are actively involved in funding climate-related projects or exploring opportunities linked to this priority.

Funding local projects to aid nature recovery

Nature is becoming an increasingly important strategic priority due to the changing commercial context

Supporting nature recovery is becoming an important strategic priority for businesses, with many wanting to bring nature up the agenda on par with climate. The more acute focus on nature is being driven by changes in the commercial landscape. Businesses identified the introduction of the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), new business initiatives including Nature Positive, the higher weighting that action on nature now has within bid/tender processes, and customer demand for nature positive action, as some of the factors that are motivating them to demonstrate a robust and coherent commitment to supporting nature. For some businesses, funding local nature recovery projects is one of the best ways to do this.

Identifying opportunities to invest in nature is a significant challenge

Although there is greater interest in supporting nature recovery across the business community, there are limited examples of businesses funding nature recovery projects in the West of England or beyond. On the one hand, this is because carbon has taken the front seat in most sustainability agendas, but on the other, it is due to a lack of information about the variety of investment opportunities across the West of England, and assurance of how funds will make a difference and integrate into strategic and collective nature action.

While some mechanisms do exist to enable investment in nature recovery projects, there is a lack of awareness of what these are, and also an impression that these mechanisms are designed for financial organisations and private equity, rather than businesses themselves. Several businesses confirmed that they need mechanisms that will enable them to invest in projects with genuine integrity, that support real and visible action (which is a priority for businesses and their employees) and avoid greenwashing.

Lack of guidance for businesses

Although businesses seem to accept that actively supporting nature recovery is in more of an embryonic development phase (compared with climate action), they are prepared to begin investing. However, the lack of guidance, support, and resources to enable businesses to invest, set targets and report on their impact, is slowing down decision-making. There is, therefore, an opportunity for the LNRS to signpost to investment opportunities as well as examples of best practice in the business community and useful resources to guide and accelerate decision-making.

The need for overarching strategic goals

Currently, businesses appear to be using gut instinct to guide nature action, and in turn funding nature recovery projects, rather than being guided by wider strategic goals. Some

are separating climate and nature strategies; others are integrating climate and nature into one comprehensive sustainability strategy. A few businesses are using their EDI strategy as a compass to direct nature action. For example, two businesses are looking to fund projects in areas of social deprivation, which typically have limited access to green spaces. However, businesses require more information and resources to guide decision-making.

Local Impact

Although there is a mix of approaches to nature in the business community, there is a strong strategic commitment to making a local impact. Businesses are keen to make a difference in the communities where their operations are based, and where possible do so in locations where their employees can benefit or contribute. Enabling businesses to identify hyper-local opportunities at a variety of scales is therefore important, and how they integrate with wider nature action across the West of England. During the 1-2-1 business meeting, only one business was found to be investing in nature recovery projects outside of the UK. The global focus on nature recovery projects was due to its global presence and its active interest in restoring depleted areas of significance.

Partnership working and collaboration

Signposting to investment opportunities at a variety of scales is important, as affordability in the West of England was highlighted as a barrier. One solution suggested is enabling businesses to connect and collaborate on funding opportunities, particularly where a business wants to invest directly in a piece of land. For example, one business would have invested in the West of England had the price point been lower, or if they could have identified a local partner to share the project with.

Restoring nature on operational sites

A few businesses confirmed they are looking to invest in nature recovery on their operational sites, but for the majority of organisations, this work is currently in its development phase, often due to a lack of information or evidence-based research. However, a few businesses are beginning to make progress, including those interested in:

- **Becoming Nature Positive** – the strategic commitment to becoming nature-positive is driving one business to achieve a 10% biodiversity net gain across operational sites
- **Improving employee and service user well-being** – one business places the well-being of staff and their service users as a top strategic priority and managing and restoring nature on-site is a core part of this work

How could the LNRS be designed:

Drawing from direct feedback about the design of the LNRS and the barriers identified by businesses, the following design features would enable more businesses to fund nature recovery projects. There is consensus that a mapping tool would be useful if it could provide the following:

- **Identification of investment opportunities** – hyper-local, range of size and price points
- **Signposting to resources** to guide and inform investing in nature
- **Signposting to examples of best practice** within the business community
- **Facilitation of partnership working** – the ability for businesses to find others who are looking to fund/manage similar projects and also advertise that they are looking to invest

Engaging staff with nature to support wellbeing

Businesses recognise that engaging with nature is one of the best ways to improve staff wellbeing, but finding the right opportunities can be a challenge

The majority of businesses that we engaged with are committed to actively supporting their employees to maintain and improve their well-being. There is consensus that engaging staff with local nature offers one of the best ways to honour this commitment. However, while businesses are engaging staff with nature on a variety of scales, from wildflower planting sessions to 'walk and talk' meetings in nature, some find it challenging to find the right opportunities for their employees and their business.

For smaller businesses in particular, limited availability and budget hamper the ability to engage staff with nature regularly. Some smaller businesses have said having more information about the hyper-local and micro-opportunities (e.g. nature walks from the office, and locations of green spaces near to where their employees live) would enable them to do more. There is therefore an opportunity for the LNRS to signpost to opportunities, in a variety of categories and at different price points.

Multiple strategies guide how businesses direct and support employee engagement with nature

Businesses recognise there are multiple benefits of engaging staff with nature and are using more than one strategy/line of thinking to decide how and where they engage their staff with nature. For example, one business recognises that by engaging staff with nature, they can not only improve employee wellbeing but also embed their climate and nature agenda and bring their goals to life for their staff. This increased level of engagement with sustainability helps to drive change across the organisation. Similarly, another business uses corporate nature volunteering to support employee and community well-being, work towards its nature goals and educate staff about the climate and ecological crises, which is part of the company's carbon literacy training.

Businesses want to engage their staff with local nature

Regardless of how businesses are choosing to get their staff involved, there is a strong desire across the business community to support and engage staff with nature on a local level. The focus on local nature is mostly driven by strategic commitments to supporting employee and community wellbeing. Businesses are also keen to support local projects, as employees can then see the impact they are making and engage more easily.

Businesses are also keen to support their employees to engage with nature from their homes. However, they recognise that not everyone has easy access to green spaces. So similarly, to the feedback shared by smaller businesses above, information about green spaces on a hyper-local level would support businesses to address this challenge.

Corporate volunteering to support nature recovery is used to improve employee wellbeing and also respond to commercial demands

Corporate volunteering with nature projects is a great way for businesses to not only improve employee wellbeing but also demonstrate a genuine commitment to both people and the planet, which is becoming increasingly important. Reasons for this include requirements from responsible business accreditations such as B-Corp, the higher weighting that climate and nature now have within bid/tender processes, and also increasing demand from staff, clients, and suppliers, who expect businesses to 'walk the talk.'

Making a meaningful impact on both employees and nature is challenging to report on

While businesses recognise the positive impact volunteering, in particular, can have on wellbeing and also the local environment, there is a growing need amongst businesses to have more clarity about how their time (and indeed other forms of support e.g. funding) contributes to nature recovery efforts both in the project's location and across the region. If the LNRS could show how projects across the region inter-link and contribute to wider nature recovery efforts, that would help guide decision-making and where businesses choose to engage their staff.

Engaging both staff and service users/clients

It is important to highlight that some businesses are looking to engage both their staff *and* their service users/clients with nature to improve wellbeing. Typically, this approach sits with businesses that manage nature on their operational sites. For example, one business places the well-being of staff and their service users as a top strategic priority and managing and restoring nature on-site is a core part of this work. Another business has created spaces on-site that can support employee and service-user wellbeing. However, the main barriers for these businesses to do more in this area are created by conflicting strategic priorities and budget constraints.

Businesses that work directly with nature do not always prioritise staff engagement with nature outside of work commitments

Businesses that support nature recovery as part of their business activities, typically do not prioritise staff engagement with nature outside of business as usual. If activities are organised, e.g. team walking days, or volunteering, this seems to happen on more of an ad-hoc basis. This is not to say that the health and well-being of staff is a low priority, simply that getting out into nature is not seen as the go-to option.

Workplace nature activity appears limited, in comparison with activity away from the office

In general, there appears to be a greater focus on engaging staff with nature away from the office, than supporting nature recovery around the workplace. Very few businesses amongst those we have engaged with have a plan to bring nature into the office or improve nature around the site where they are based. It might be helpful to explore this theme further. However, businesses at the workshop shared that engaging staff in nature can be difficult if they can't experience it, which is perhaps why the focus is on enabling staff to engage with wilder settings.

How could the LNRS be designed:

Drawing from direct feedback about the design of the LNRS and the barriers identified by businesses, the following design features would enable more businesses to engage their staff with nature to support wellbeing. There is consensus that a mapping tool would be useful if it could provide the following:

- **Signposting to a range of opportunities** for businesses to engage their staff at a variety of scales/costs
- **Identify businesses seeking opportunities** – so that businesses could put themselves forward as potential supporters for projects or as previously mentioned, investors
- **Information about hyper-local and micro-opportunities** e.g. walks in nature, green spaces near employees' homes and business locations
- **Demonstrate how nature recovery projects for staff contribute to wider collective action**, interlink with nature recovery networks
- **Information about urban nature networks** to help those who do happen to have green space around their office direct their support/funding

Supporting nature recovery through business activities

Business nature priorities are inextricably linked to business activity/delivery

More than half of the businesses we engaged directly associate their nature priorities with the delivery of their business activities. While some feedback is very specific to individual businesses, some key themes emerged regarding what businesses need to ensure their activity supports nature recovery in the West of England. Business needs include:

- **Greater access to information about nature priority areas, nature recovery activity and networks across the region**, to ensure projects and day-to-day business activity integrates with collective action. Several landscape architects, ecologists and architects highlighted that if information is available, it is out of date or is of limited use. For example, a Sustainability Consultancy explained they regularly look at local plans and biodiversity action plans to inform their work but find that the information is vague or no longer relevant. A Landscape Architecture practice also highlighted there is a lack of information about specific species, both in terms of plants and wildlife, and that having more information about which species need support and where would help guide their designs.
- **Planning officers to be trained to highlight nature priority areas and networks and identify how a project will link to collective action.** Architectural firms suggested that as part of the LNRS launch, it would be helpful if planning officers were trained on the priority areas, to ensure that the design elements to restore nature are not lost or watered down as a project progresses. One practice emphasised this is particularly important at the pre-app stage and added that the definition of an area of significance or priority area must be consistently applied by all authorities as part of this training.
- **Information about community engagement with nature**, and which sites are of intrinsic value to local communities. Businesses from a range of sectors confirmed that having information about where a project is likely to receive support or opposition would help guide design and funding.
- **Resources to help them engage and educate communities to support the delivery of their projects**, as sometimes the general public does not understand why a particular action to restore nature is implemented and will actively oppose or delay it. For example, there was a public outcry of tree felling in Plymouth centre, even though the replacement trees were set to significantly boost biodiversity.
- **Information about the quality of land in terms of biodiversity and nature**, which would help (for example) developers target lower quality sites and actively avoid those with higher natural value, farmers identify land which is less likely to have competition from

those looking to rewild, and funders, take a balanced view when funding rewilding or sustainable farming businesses. Identifying which areas are also at risk due to climate change would also be helpful.

- **Opportunities to connect with potential business partners who share similar nature priorities.** For example, one of the food producers highlighted that it is currently challenging to find landlords who will support sustainable practices. Therefore, a platform or network that enables food producers to connect with landlords in the West of England, along with potential investors, who are looking to invest in businesses which will restore land through sustainable business practices, would be helpful.
- **Opportunities to share knowledge and build expertise.** Although guidance does vary depending on the type of business, there is a common challenge around the lack of information and resources for nature baselining, reporting and KPI management. For some businesses, particularly those from the health and education sectors, evidence-based research is vital to building a business case and securing investment to restore nature on the sites they own and go beyond the legislative requirements. However, businesses have expressed an interest in sharing knowledge and also contributing the knowledge they gain through their business activity (particularly ecologists) to the development of the LNRS and associated tools over time.
- **Resources that enable businesses to make the greatest impact possible within limited budgets.** Businesses, particularly landscape architects and architects, do not always have access to information about the most cost-effective interventions to benefit nature and support nature recovery or a platform to exchange knowledge about successful methods in their sector. Swift Bricks were mentioned as a classic example of a low-cost but high-impact intervention, and more information about such opportunities is needed.

How could the LNRS be designed:

Drawing from direct feedback about the design of the LNRS and the barriers identified by businesses, the following design features would enable more businesses to support nature recovery through their business activities. The suggestion of a mapping tool was generally well received, providing it can:

- Map nature priority areas, nature recovery activity and networks
- Identify community engagement with nature i.e. where communities value specific locations such as woodland
- Provide detailed information about the quality of land in terms of biodiversity and nature to guide decision-making
- Highlight recovery needs in terms of species (SSSI Wales Mapping Tool was mentioned as a great example)

Geographic Priority Areas

Businesses do not have the information to identify specific geographic priority areas

Businesses want to support local nature recovery, however, due to the lack of information about opportunities and where support is needed, the majority of businesses have not identified specific geographic priority areas. For example, corporate businesses have indicated it is challenging to identify where to focus their efforts, either in terms of funding or corporate volunteering. Architects and landscape architects have also highlighted the lack of information about nature recovery networks and how their projects can interlink with wider action.

Businesses want to support action locally, and as close to their office as possible

When discussing the priority areas for supporting nature recovery, most of the businesses have expressed an interest in supporting projects close to their office. This is particularly important for businesses looking to engage their staff with nature to support wellbeing, as they are keen to ensure staff can access nature easily, and, if they are giving their time, see the impact of their efforts.

For businesses that are keen to support projects which achieve both staff wellbeing and EDI goals, the interest then extends towards projects that are in areas of social deprivation, but still within the city limits.

Landowners and producers in the West of England are looking to go beyond legislative requirements to support nature on their sites

Unsurprisingly, landowners and food producers prioritise their operational sites. However, some are looking to go beyond legislative requirements to support nature. For example, some businesses are looking to improve service-user well-being both on and off-site, and others are using their strategic commitment to improve staff and service-user well-being to target and accelerate efforts to support nature recovery. Food producers are using their commitment to sustainable practices to select the landlords who will support and champion their goals.

Resource and budget constraints are a challenge for businesses supporting nature recovery in specific locations

For businesses that are directly involved with supporting local nature recovery through business activities, either through design or land management, limited resources and budget are restricting efforts to support nature recovery in specific locations. For example, at the business workshop, a landscape architect practice highlighted a specific challenge around a current scheme in Bristol, where they are finding it difficult to achieve their greening targets due to the cost of tree planting and a lack of support from Bristol City Council's parks department. One food producer also identified several changes they could make to support

nature recovery, however, due to the rise in costs, cannot invest in the equipment they need.

Engaging with nature door-to-door is important for businesses and employees

When discussing improving access to nature for employees, businesses have expressed an interest in supporting projects that do so both near the workplace and employees' homes. Due to hybrid working, allowing employees to access nature is important, however, as mentioned previously, information about how and where employees can access nature where they live is lacking. In addition, at the business workshop, a few businesses suggested that efforts focus on commuting routes, from highways to cycle paths. However, discussions at the business workshop revealed that maintaining nature alongside the cycle paths is often a challenge due to accessibility and a lack of resource for monitoring.

Supporting nature recovery to improve local climate resilience was rarely mentioned, even though areas are at increasing risk

Surprisingly, the extreme weather events of the last few years have not prompted businesses to discuss the need to improve the climate resilience of local areas or any specific geographic locations. A few businesses, particularly those in landscape management or design, mentioned that it is hard to know whether we should be planting for now or for the conditions of the future, but other than that, risks such as flooding and extreme heat exposure were not mentioned.