Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

NATURAL ENGLAND

Monitoring and Evaluation of Nature Improvement Areas: Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report

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Collingwood Environmental Planning Limited

in partnership with GeoData Institute and Cascade Consulting

Collingwood Environmental Planning

CASCADE

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Abbreviations

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty	MBC	Metropolitan Borough Council
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan	MBWN	Morecambe Bay Wildlife Network
BARS	Biodiversity Action Reporting System	MENE	Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment
BW	British Waterways		
CEEP	Consultancy for Environmental Economic and Policy	MFTF	Moors for the Future
		MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
CEH	Centre for Ecology and Hydrology	MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
CEP	Collingwood Environmental Planning Ltd	NCCVM	National Climate Change Vulnerability Model
CLA	Country Land and Business Association		
CO_2	Carbon Dioxide	NE	Natural England
CPRE	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England	NEWP	Natural Environment White Paper
		NFU	National Farmers Union
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
		NIA	Nature Improvement Area
DVGH	Dearne Valley Green Heart	NLG	Northamptonshire Leadership Group
DVGHP	Dearne Valley Green Heart Partnership	NNR	National Nature Reserve
EA	Environment Agency	NT	National Trust
EH	English Heritage	ONS	Office of National Statistics
ELS	Entry Level Stewardship	PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services
ERZ	Ecological Restoration Zones	PROW	Public Right of Way
ES	Ecosystem services	RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
EU	European Union	SAC	Special Area of Conservation
FC	Forestry Commission	SCaMP	Sustainable Catchment Management Programme
FIN	Freshwater Invertebrate Network		
GI	Green infrastructure	SHL	Single Habitat Layer
GIA	Grant-in-Aid	SPA	Special Protection Area
GWCT	Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust	SPD	Supplementary Planning Guidance
ha	Hectare	SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
NELMS	New Environmental Land Management Scheme	TEP	Thames Estuary Partnership
		UKNEA	United Kingdom National Ecosystem Assessment
HLP	Humberhead Levels Partnership		
HLS	Higher Level Stewardship	UNEP-WCMC	United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
IDB	Internal Drainage Board		
IHN	Integrated Habitat Network		
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
km	kilometre		
LDF	Local Development Framework	WLT	Wildlife Trust
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership	WP	(NIA M&E Phase 2 project) Work Package
LNP	Local Nature Partnership		
LNR	Local Nature Reserve	WTP	Willingness to Pay
LWS	Local Wildlife Site	WWT	Wildfowl and Wetland Trust
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation		

Foreword

Over the last year I've been fortunate to visit seven of the twelve NIAs. I'm not trying to avoid the other five – I have been invited to visit, but fitting it in my diary proved to be impossible. By the way, in the year covered by this report I've also given 21 presentations about NIAs (one every two weeks) all over the country both to NIAs themselves, and also to a wide range of other organisations. Interest in NIAs is intense, and (if my diary is anything to go by) shows no sign of diminishing. So monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes are vital.

I no longer have any official position in the system, but somehow I see NIAs as my baby, and watching progress brings a vicarious sense of pleasure. One of the things that struck me forcefully when I have been visiting is the huge amount of enthusiasm, collaboration and vision in every consortium. Yes, I know it's a lot of work, and I know there have been, and still are problems, but nothing that is worth-while, and certainly nothing that is pioneering is ever easy! And in the middle of the day-to-day problems and frustrations it's often hard to realise that you are making progress. But you are. Real progress. I'm amazed by how much has been achieved already, as this report makes abundantly clear. I always knew that making more space for nature in the NIAs would take time – certainly longer than the three years allocated when we set off on this journey. But looking at what has been achieved in this first year, I think we will all be pleasantly surprised by where we are by 2015.

Keep up the good work, and thank you!

Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS
York, July 2013

Executive Summary

Introduction

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, landowners and business through a shared vision. They will try out different approaches, and the variety of objectives, issues and partnerships seen across the NIAs is part of this purpose. Nevertheless a consistent approach for monitoring and evaluation is necessary to be able to assess what works well, and potentially not so well, and to take stock overall. The NIAs are applying several concepts where the practical use of science is still contested and/or developing, for example relating to restoration of habitat connectivity and ecosystem services. Implementation of such new and largely untested approaches poses significant challenges. This innovative, experimental and developmental context needs to be borne in mind when considering the results of this evaluation of the first year of progress in NIAs.

As part of the NIA programme, the 12 initial NIAs are required to undertake monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of their projects. A monitoring and evaluation framework including indicators under four themes (Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Social and Economic Benefits and Contributions to Well-Being, and Partnership Working) was developed in a Phase 1 project commissioned by Defra. The framework aims to provide a useful tool for the NIAs to measure the progress of their delivery within and beyond the three year programme. Some of the indicators are 'core' indicators that must be adopted by all the NIAs, while the others are optional. The Phase 1 project also included the development of an online tool to aid the capture and reporting of monitoring information and data collected by all of the 12 initial NIAs and in future other locally determined NIAs. The 12 initial NIAs must also submit quarterly progress reports and annual financial reporting to Natural England.

In March 2013, Defra in collaboration with Natural England commissioned Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP), with its partners GeoData Institute and Cascade Consulting, to undertake a Phase 2 monitoring and evaluation project to build on the work completed during Phase 1. The Phase 2 project is undertaking further technical development of indicators and reporting tools, providing support for NIA partnerships, enabling co-ordination and knowledge exchange with other related initiatives and undertaking an evaluation of the NIAs after 1, 2 and 3 years. This Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report presents the results of the evaluation of the NIAs at the end of their first year of activity.

Key findings from the monitoring and evaluation of NIAs in Year 1

From the monitoring and evaluation of NIAs set out in this Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report, the following key findings have been identified:

1. **NIA management and organisation**: In Year 1, all of the NIAs have established clear management structures and partnerships (many of which are based on pre-existing partnership arrangements), prepared clear plans for the three year programme and have started to implement projects to deliver against their objectives. They have however also faced some challenges, which have included: the scale of the resourcing required for effective NIA management and delivery; the costs, time and effort required to recruit appropriate staff; and staff resources to deliver expected project activities.

2. **Input of financial and human resources to the NIAs:** The NIAs have mobilised significant financial and human resources in Year 1. They have attracted significant value added[1] over-and-

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[1] Added value is defined here as any additional financial support over and above that provided by Defra in the initial NIA scheme grant, and is based on financial information supplied by Natural England. It is likely that some of the financial

above the grants awarded by Defra and Natural England: each £1 invested by government resulted in £5.50 in additional support. When planned support is taken into account, each £1 invested by government should result in nearly £6.80 in additional support.

3. **Development of the NIA partnerships:** A wide variety of types of partners are involved in working together towards a shared vision for each NIA. This includes representation from the private sector, academia, NGOs, the government arms-length bodies (e.g. Environment Agency, Forestry Commission) and land managers. In Year 2 the evaluation will need to investigate in more detail how the partnerships are working in practice and if they are added value compared with other approaches to delivering landscape scale conservation.

4. **Engagement with local communities by the NIAs:** NIAs are engaging with people, including local communities and volunteers. Five NIAs have reported work with local schools, two NIAs have involved volunteers in surveys and all the NIAs have reporting working with volunteers in delivering other activities such as local cultural events linked to the natural environment. The number of volunteers involved in some NIAs is very high, with three NIAs recording more than 1,000 days of volunteering in the

"The coordinator has been working with four volunteer groups training and hosting approximately 30 local volunteers engaged in practical habitat management, heritage restoration and livestock lookering" (South Downs Way Ahead NIA)

first year. Some NIAs have also provided training for volunteers, to build their capacity. There are also examples of activities in Year 1 providing a wide range of other social and cultural benefits.

5. **Delivery of 'on the ground' outcomes by the NIAs:** The NIAs have already delivered 'on the ground' improvements in Year 1. By way of examples recorded by NIAs in their quarterly Progress Reporting and Year 1 progress summaries this includes: over 6.5ha of new woodland planted[2] in Birmingham and Black Country; approximately 350ha of habitat restored through agri-environment schemes in Northern Devon (with the NIA supporting through advisory site visits with landowners and helping with grants and capital works); creation or restoration of three dew ponds and the construction of five tree sparrow nesting sites in Marlborough Downs; and major access routes for visitors restored in The Dark Peak NIA with the help of volunteers.

6. **Progress against the NIAs own objectives:** The NIAs have self-reported on their progress in Year 1 and all report that they have made 'good' or 'satisfactory' progress against targets under their own objectives. Five have reported that delivery is in line with planned milestones, while seven have reported that some elements of delivery is behind schedule in

"We're … running projects which are explicitly working to target as yet unreached community groups and volunteers" (Birmingham and Black Country NIA)

relation to one or more objectives. The most frequently cited reasons for delays to projects were the time taken for project staff to be appointed and to then get up to speed with the work and the wet weather conditions (rain and floods) during the year which had an impact on the

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support included as 'added value' will come from other public sector initiatives, including from within the Defra family. A more detailed analysis of these data will be completed in Year 2 of the evaluation.

[2] Based on self-reported achievements in Birmingham and Black Country NIA quarterly Progress Reports, specifically: 4.59ha of new 'community woodland' created in Walsall at the proposed Walsall Country Park site; 1.97ha mixed broadleaved woodland with shrub layer planted at Bleak Hill.

work of farmers and land managers. The evaluation of self-reported progress is not intended to be comparative, as each NIA will have set milestones according to their own planning priorities and expectations, and some may have been more achievable than others.

7. **Delivery of biodiversity outputs and outcomes:**   Many of the NIAs have been engaged in activities during Year 1 which have led to biodiversity outputs and outcomes across the habitat, species and ecological connectivity sub-themes within the monitoring and evaluation framework. Typical activities include: habitat restoration, creation and enhancement for a variety of habitats; activities to improve the status of key species or species groups, such as bats, bees and farmland birds; and improvements to ecological networks through creation and restoration of habitats, buffers, corridors for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

> *"The Eastern Moors Partnership has restored the Moss Road, reversing the drastic erosion that has occurred on this access route over the last few years. This work was carried out with extensive consultation with the key stakeholders and users, so that the newly designed route would meet their requirements. These stakeholders and users then formed work parties to carry out a large proportion of the work themselves … the success of this meant that NIA money was available to restore an adjoining bridleway". (Dark Peak NIA)*

8. **Delivery across all the monitoring and evaluation framework themes and wider policy objectives:** The NIAs have undertaken activities across all four of the themes (i.e. Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Social and Economic Benefits and Contributions to Well-Being, and Partnership Working) during Year 1 and these have contributed to wider policy objectives, including ambitions set out in the *Biodiversity 2020* strategy[3]. In Years 2 and 3 the evaluation will investigate the nature and significance of these contributions in more detail.

9. **Evidence of NIAs working together and sharing learning:** There is some evidence that the NIAs are working together and sharing learning. Examples include: the two NIA best practice events that were held in the first year (focussing on Making Space for Grasslands at the Landscape Scale and Planning Policy and Land Use); discussions on the NIA workspace on Huddle – an online resource which includes a discussion forum, bulletin boards, calendar and document library; and opportunities to share experience provided by events such as the NIA Forum in March 2013. Several of NIAs are also working with local universities and research organisations, with research being used to develop an understanding of innovative approaches to natural environment project delivery and assessment. Ecosystem services are a focus of research in at least four NIAs.

10. **Implementation of the monitoring and evaluation framework by the NIAs:** The 12 NIAs have all reported on progress using the online reporting tool and indicators selected from the framework, including both core and optional indicators. NIAs have chosen to use between 14 and 28 indicators each, and in the first year each NIA has entered at least some data against 13 indictors on average. It is noted however that the indicators and protocols in several areas, such as habitat connectivity, ecosystem services and social and economic benefits and wellbeing, are still under development and that further definition and refinement will be necessary over the next year to enable outcomes and impacts of the NIAs to be fully evaluated. As far as is possible this will draw on and share approaches already being developed within some NIAs. In addition,

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[3] Defra (2011) *Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services*.

the online reporting tool requires some further developments and refinements to address the difficulties many of the NIAs have experienced in using it for the first time in Year 1.

Purpose of the evaluation and overview of approach

The Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report provides an overview of the progress of the NIAs during their first year of operation since they were established in April 2012. It aims to provide an early indication of whether the NIAs individually and collectively are on the right trajectory to meet their objectives. This first year Progress Report particularly focuses on establishing and testing the approach to the monitoring and evaluation and the potential data that will be used to support it – given this is first year of the NIAs, the focus is inevitably on assessing the inputs to the NIAs and processes and activities they have been involved in rather than outcomes and impacts at this stage. It should be noted however that in Year 1 there have been some challenges in establishing the baseline situation, or starting position prior to the NIAs, and in undertaking comparative analysis to fully understand what difference the NIAs have made compared with where NIAs do not exist. The approach to monitoring and evaluation also reflects the innovative nature of the NIA initiative and the need to develop new approaches in several areas (e.g. habitat connectivity, ecosystem services and social and economic benefits and wellbeing).

The evaluation method uses a logic model which links the intended outcomes (both short term and longer term impacts) with the policy inputs, activities and processes. Within the logic model, evaluation objectives, sub-objectives and criteria have been structured under the four themes of the NIA M&E framework[4] namely: Biodiversity; Ecosystem Services; Social and Economic Benefits and Contributions to Wellbeing; and, Partnership Working. Evaluation questions have been developed around each criterion, as a basis for the evaluation of: individual NIAs; and the NIAs collectively at the programme level.

The online reporting tool provides 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 reporting tool is structured to reflect the M&E framework and associated indicators and is designed to enable the NIA partnerships to record each year their achievements relating to each indicator. The tool is also intended to complement rather than duplicate other systems of data recording, such as BARS (the Biodiversity Action Reporting System). The online reporting tool has been used for the first time to inform the Year 1 evaluation and whilst further planned developments and refinements are required, it has provided one of the main sources of information for the evaluation in the first year. Other sources drawn on by the evaluation include: NIA Business Plans and Funding Agreements; Quarterly NIA Progress Reports; each NIA's Year 1 annual summary Progress Report and annual financial reporting; as well as Natural England's synthesis and analysis for certain indicators.

Overview of NIA achievements in Year 1

All of the NIAs have been successful in delivering practical initiatives in Year 1, noting that activities in some areas, such as maintaining and restoring ecosystem services and improving habitat connectivity, are intended from the outset to be innovative and to explore and test approaches over the three years of the NIA initiative. Much initial activity within the NIAs has been focussed on establishing project teams (especially recruitment of key staff), finalisation of partner responsibilities, the securing of additional funds and the planning of projects in line with Business Plans. However, as the table below shows there has also been project activity and delivery across all themes. Note that all figures included in the table below are drawn from NIA quarterly Progress Reports (particularly the 4th quarter) and Year 1 Progress Reports. These figures therefore reflect the level of delivery as reported by NIAs for the period 1st January 2012 – 30th March 2013.

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[4] See: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/monitoringandevaluation.aspx

Self-assessment of progress by the NIAs indicates that: all have made 'good' or 'satisfactory' progress against their targets; five have reported that delivery is in line with planned milestones; while seven have reported that some elements of delivery is behind schedule in relation to one or more objectives.

Examples of NIA activities delivered in Year 1

Themes	Examples of NIA delivery by sub-theme
Biodiversity	**Habitat** • Over 6.5ha of new woodland created within the Birmingham and Black Country NIA. • New saline lagoon created within the Wild Purbeck NIA. • Around 350ha of habitat restored through agri-environment schemes (with the NIA supporting through advisory site visits with landowners and helping with grants and capital works) and through use of machinery and grazing rings in Northern Devon NIA. • Blanket bog restoration works undertaken within Dark Peak NIA. • 21.5ha woodland, 51.8ha grassland, 6.5ha of heathland and two geological sites enhanced within the Birmingham and Black Country NIA. • Condition of watercourses improved by preventing pollution by contaminants within the Dearne Valley. • Scrub clearance undertaken at Crowle and Hatfield Moors in the Humberhead Levels NIA. **Species** • Variety of actions for a range of species within Marlborough Downs NIA, including providing food and nest sites for farmland birds, including planting five new tree sparrow 'villages' and putting up 70 tree sparrow nestboxes and putting up five new kestrel boxes and one new barn owl box. • Research being undertaken into seed priming protocols for chalk grassland species restoration for the South Downs NIA. • Works undertaken across a network of sites for bumblebee species in Greater Thames Marshes NIA. **Connectivity** • 19.5km wildlife corridor, including watercourses, hedgerows and boundary features, enhanced within the Birmingham and Black Country NIA. • Over 1,500ha of land to be incorporated within Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements to strengthen the ecological network in the Nene Valley NIA. • Interactive on-line atlas produced that takes account of existing biodiversity, land uses and anticipated pressures for change to help delivery of an ecological network in Greater Thames Marshes NIA. **Invasive species** • Rhododendron control undertaken within the Meres and Mosses NIA. • Bracken and Rhododendron control undertaken to restore moorlands and woodlands in Dark Peak NIA.
Ecosystem Services	**Cultural services** • Schools visited the RSPB Old Moor in the Dearne Valley and a range of working with schools initiatives developed. • Major access routes for visitors restored in Dark Peak NIA with the help of volunteers enabling additional works to nearby routes. • School groups visited the River Torridge with a storyteller, saw the Giants in the Forest art installation and wrote their own stories of the river and its environment in Northern Devon NIA. **Supporting services** • Digital maps produced showing density of bees and other pollinators across the Nene Valley NIA. • Training delivered on resource protection and soil management in Northern Devon NIA. **Regulating services** • Training delivered the Woodland Carbon Code for application within Northern Devon NIA. **Provisioning services** • Two sustainable woodfuel projects initiated and volunteers registered for a 'woodshare' scheme and seven tonnes of wood cut for conservation management moved to a 'wood bank' in Morecambe Bay NIA.

Themes	Examples of NIA delivery by sub-theme
Social & economic benefits & contributions to wellbeing	**Social impacts** • The CONNECT Project within the Humberhead Levels NIA has resulted in more than 2,500 additional visitors to Gateway Sites and over 5,000 hours of volunteer time. • A big volunteer day held at Arnside in Morecambe Bay NIA engaged around 80 volunteers, including school children, in practical tasks. **Wellbeing** • Working with local Rights of Way officers to identify a four mile long circular route for people to enjoy the Downs and view project activities of the Marlborough Downs NIA. • Walking resources in development in the Meres and Mosses NIA. **Economic values and impacts** • Production of seven different types of biomass fuel products from harvested reed and removal of trees and scrub under investigation and trial by the Humberhead Levels NIA. • Nature tourism business network launched in the Morecambe Bay NIA. • Breeding flock of Shetland ewes and herds of Dexters and British White cattle acquired and deployed at sites within the South Downs NIA. • Work started for a South Downs Way Visitor Payback Scheme. • Investigations underway to identify the quantity and usability of scrub arising from heathland management works in Wild Purbeck NIA.
Partnership working	**Mobilisation of resources** • Just under £2.1 million secured from the Catchment Restoration Fund for water quality improvements and £92,000 from SITA for blanket bog restoration within Dark Peak NIA. • £0.5 million secured from the Coastal Communities Fund for a Morecambe Bay sustainable tourism project. **Efficient and effective delivery** • Links developed with nearby landscape project groups by the South Downs NIA to maximise outcomes and achieve efficiencies in delivery through combined effort. • Partners in the Wild Purbeck NIA are working with the Frome Piddle Catchment Management Plan, particularly on woodland planting and wetland restoration to achieve joint outcomes. **Leadership and influence** • NIA Best Practice events on grasslands hosted by Northern Devon NIA and planning hosted by the Dearne Valley NIA. • The Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) for North Northamptonshire has been amended to include the Nene Valley NIA. • Branding and communications exercise completed and work being undertaken with local universities and agricultural colleges within the Meres and Mosses NIA. • Website developed for Greater Thames Marshes NIA.

Source: selected information and data from NIA quarterly Progress Report and NIA Year 1 summary Progress Reports.

The resources invested in the NIAs in Year 1

This part of the evaluation considered the scale and type of resources invested by each NIA in Year 1 and how these resources have been used. Governance arrangements at the outset of each NIA project were also considered as well as existing networks (e.g. of community or volunteering groups) as key input factors to each NIA.

The evaluation in Year 1 shows that significant financial resources have been expended by the NIA's and that they have attracted significant value added[5]: in total, each £1 invested by government resulted in £5.50 in additional support, and when planned support is also taken into account each £1 invested by government should result in nearly £6.80 in additional support.

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[5] Value added is defined here as any additional financial support over and above that provided by Defra 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 'value added' will come from other public sector initiatives, including from within the Defra family. A more detailed analysis of these data will be completed in Year 2.

While staff costs and running costs represent a large share of expenditure in Year 1 and the effort and cost of recruitment was in some cases higher than expected, a number of NIAs have already invested significant amounts in implementing projects 'on the ground'. Volunteers are also being widely used and large amounts of volunteer time has been mobilised in Year 1 e.g. Nene Valley (approximately 3,300 days), Humberhead Levels and Morecambe Bay (both more than 1,300 days).

Most of the NIA partnerships developed from existing partnerships: 10 of the 12 NIA partnerships can be considered to have existed prior to the NIA initiative.

The processes and activities undertaken by the NIAs in Year 1

This part of the evaluation considered the processes and activities adopted by the NIAs to deliver their own objectives and the wider policy objectives of the NIA initiative.

The evaluation in Year 1 shows all NIAs met the requirement to deliver regular Progress Reports of delivery against their Business Plans. While monitoring and evaluation was challenging in Year 1, the majority of NIAs successfully reported on more than half of their selected indicators (noting that a number of indicators were not expected to be reported in Year 1) - there are 43 indicators available for NIAs to select from, of which a minimum of 13 are required and five are core that all NIAs must report on. Collectively the 12 NIAs identified more than 200 different measures relating to the core and optional indicators, covering all four themes of the NIA M&E framework. Some data was recorded against 75% of these indicators in Year 1 using the online reporting tool. Any issues raised during Year 1 by the NIAs relating to problems they encountered in using the online reporting tool or the indicator protocols have been logged by the Phase 2 contractors and will provide an important input to project work in these areas in Year 2.

The NIA partnerships are very varied in the number (from three to 54) and type of partners involved, and many partnerships are still actively developing with new partners joining or expressing interest in doing so. The Environment Agency, Natural England, and the Forestry Commission are partners in all of the NIAs. A wide range of organisations are involved, including local authorities in all NIAs and private sector organisations in eight NIAs, indicating the diversity of interest in the NIA projects.

The NIAs have already undertaken considerable community engagement activity: working with schools (in five NIAs); undertaking surveys (in two NIAs); and activities such as concerts and sustainable tourism. Volunteers have been involved in numerous NIA activities, and helped deliver NIA projects, while many NIAs have sought to build volunteer capacity by providing training.

In addition a number of NIAs are working with local universities and research organisations, with research projects focussed on developing innovative approaches to natural environment project delivery and assessment.

The contribution to biodiversity outputs, outcomes and impacts by the NIAs in Year 1

This part of the evaluation assessed the Year 1 Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts steps in the evaluation logic model under the Biodiversity theme.

The focus of monitoring in Year 1 has been on developing the baseline situation, and limited information was available to enable an evaluation of outcomes and change to be able to determine whether the NIAs are on trajectory to meet their objectives.

However, many of the NIAs have been engaged in activities during Year 1 which have led to biodiversity outputs and outcomes across the habitat, species and connectivity sub-themes, including activities related to: habitat restoration, creation and enhancement for a variety of habitats; activities to improve the status of key species or species groups, such as bats, bees and farmland birds; and improvements to ecological networks through creation and restoration of habitats, buffers, corridors for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife.

All NIAs have reported on the core indicators and some of the optional indicators for biodiversity within Year 1, but few have had data to measure change against a baseline obtained prior to or at the initiation of the programme. BARS, the Biodiversity Action Reporting System, is being used to collate and report on habitat actions within the NIAs, but wider take-up is needed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the completed actions.

The indicators on widespread and focal species are providing some measure of the response of selected species to conservation actions; in addition, the invasive species indicator has been selected by four NIAs to show actions taken to control non-native species. The baselines for these indicators, the species included and trends are often uncertain at this stage; NIAs have included local surveys to help to provide a more robust baseline and programme for monitoring, but typically these have been delayed in implementation.

Two of the NIAs note specific research collaborations that are supporting the analysis of the species status e.g. Dearne Valley water vole studies and South Downs for skylark and corn bunting. Two NIAs (Nene Valley and Dearne Valley) have mentioned a comprehensive habitat survey being produced at the outset of the project to support future monitoring and planning and connectivity assessments, although other NIAs have been collating habitat information and using volunteers to capture habitat information.

Connectivity of habitat is a central component of the biodiversity objectives addressing the 'more joined up' coherent ecological network described in *Making Space for Nature* (Lawton et al 2007)[6] and endorsed in the Natural Environment White Paper and the *Biodiversity 2020* strategy. Progress in the uptake of the indicator of habitat connectivity within Year 1 has been limited, with only four of the NIAs generating measures. Further sharing of experience within the NIAs, and development of guidance is planned within the Phase 2 project.

Under the Biodiversity theme and sub-themes, there is evidence that the NIAs are currently contributing to ambitions set out in *Biodiversity 2020* including Outcome 1 (Habitats and ecosystems on land), Outcome 3 (Species) and Outcome 4 (People), and Themes 1 (A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea) and 3 (Reducing environmental pressures).

Further developments of the biodiversity indicator protocols will be necessary to facilitate robust monitoring and evaluation in future years.

The contribution to ecosystem services outputs, outcomes and impacts by the NIAs in Year 1

This part of the evaluation assessed the Year 1 Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts steps in the evaluation logic model under the Ecosystem Services theme.

It is noted that all of the NIAs are using the concept of ecosystem services to support the identification and rationale for their projects, however, only some are framing specific projects around ecosystem services and using the language and concept explicitly. This difference is largely semantic. Those projects that are targeted at increasing the provision of specific services are fairly evenly distributed across provisioning, regulating and cultural services. There are limited examples of NIAs focussing on enhancement of supporting services.

It is acknowledged that indicators and protocols under the Ecosystem Services theme require further development to enable outcomes and impacts of the NIAs on ecosystem services to be robustly evaluated, and as such this is included as a work stream within the NIA M&E Phase 2 project.

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[6] Lawton, J.H., Brotherton, P.N.M., Brown, V.K., Elphick, C., Fitter, A.H., Forshaw, J., Haddow, R.W., Hilborne, S., Leafe, R.N., Mace, G.M., Southgate, M.P., Sutherland, W.J.,Tew, T.E., Varley, J., & Wynne, G.R. (2010) *Making Space for Nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network*. Report to Defra. http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf

However, lessons can be learnt from several of the NIAs that have already started developing their approaches to measuring ecosystem services.

The contribution to social and economic outputs, outcomes and impacts by the NIAs in Year 1

This part of the evaluation assessed the Year 1 Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts steps in the evaluation logic model under the Social and Economic Benefits and Wellbeing theme.

It is acknowledged that indicators and protocols in this theme require further development, and as such this is included as a work stream within the NIA M&E Phase 2 project. This includes a thorough review of the relevant literature[7] and the current work on the NIAs' social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing. This will ground the development of this theme in the reality and practice of the NIAs. The evaluation and reporting will therefore be more comprehensive in Year 2, following development of appropriate evaluation approaches and the evaluation recorded in this report for Year 1 should be seen in this context.

The concept of human wellbeing brings together the range of social and economic benefits including: health; education and learning; social development and connections; symbolic/cultural/spiritual significance; and economy. These categories provide a way of making sense of social and economic benefits, and further work is needed to explore potential approaches in order to develop and agree a framework for their evaluation and discussion. Consideration will also be given in the Phase 2 project to overlaps between social and economic benefit categories and ecosystem services and the extent to which these can be considered separately.

The contribution to partnership working outputs, outcomes and impacts by the NIAs in Year 1

This part of the evaluation assessed the Year 1 Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts steps in the evaluation logic model under the Partnership Working theme.

The evaluation of partnerships in Year 1 has focussed on inputs, process and activities, however partnership working is also considered important as an output, outcome and impact, as effective partnership working can: ensure efficient and integrated planning, action and delivery in NIAs; increase resource mobilisation; facilitate information sharing and learning; strengthen leadership and influence.

A review of NIA Progress Reports revealed a small amount of evidence of partnership working leading to improved NIA outcomes, for example in terms of greater integration of actions to improve biodiversity and ecosystem services and more effective delivery of actions.

The limitations of Year 1 evidence on partnership working are considered to have two main causes: most of the effort in the Year 1 has gone into setting up structures and processes, which may be expected to produce outputs in Years 2 and 3; and outcomes of partnership working is not a significant focus in the M&E framework.

A number of questions have been identified which could be used in the Phase 2 project to focus the collection of additional evidence on partnership working in Years 2 and 3.

Next steps

The Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report is intended to assess as far as possible the first year achievements of the NIAs, but as the first report in a three year evaluation process is also a starting

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[7] Collingwood Environmental Planning (June 2013) *Literature Review: Social and Economic Benefits Associated with Natural Environment Initiatives and their Contribution to Wellbeing*. Version 1.0.

point. A number of development activities relating to monitoring and evaluation were foreseen at the outset of the NIA M&E Phase 2 project, including:

- For a number of indicators the monitoring approaches and protocols require additional development, for which research and working with small groups of interested NIAs is foreseen in Year 2, recognising the need to keep the burden on NIA time and resources to a minimum and for the M&E framework and protocols to remain flexible, accessible and user-friendly.

- At the end of each evaluation section in this report a list has been included to provide an overview of the data that may be collected or available and the analysis that may be possible in Years 2 and 3 of the evaluation. Much of these data will be gathered through direct contact with NIAs, although some may also be available through information exchange with other research projects and initiatives. All additional data and analysis proposals will be critically assessed to ensure they minimise any additional reporting or monitoring burden on NIAs.

- A comprehensive list of other relevant projects and initiatives are to be identified and the ways in which they relate to the NIA initiative considered. A dedicated work package within the NIA M&E Phase 2 project will be seeking to identify opportunities for learning and information exchange to inform the monitoring and evaluation, but also to help NIAs draw on and learn from activities and practice in other initiatives. Relevant project and initiatives could include other partnership based initiatives such as Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs), other landscape scale initiatives such as the Catchment Based Approach or Futurescapes, and other environmental initiatives with a spatial dimension such as the biodiversity offsetting pilots. Developing an understanding of which other initiatives and projects each NIA partnership are involved in will also help facilitate learning and the exchange of knowledge and information between NIAs. A further aspect of this work could help understand the extent to which agencies within the Defra family, as well as other organisations such as NGOs and local authorities, are integrating their work in practice and if further synergies are possible.

- The approaches to monitoring and evaluation under the Ecosystem Services and Social and Economic Benefits and Contributions to Wellbeing themes are to be developed based on research, working with NIAs and learning from the experience of other relevant research initiatives:

  A key ongoing activity of the M&E Phase 2 project is the development of approaches relevant to the monitoring and evaluation of social, economic and human wellbeing outputs, outcomes and impacts of the NIAs. This includes research into social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing associated with NIAs and will propose an appropriate approach to capturing outcomes and impacts where indicators are not appropriate or sufficient. This work is intended to be carried out during Year 2 (2013 – 2014) of the three-year NIA programme.

- The indicator protocols and online reporting tool which is used by the NIAs to record all their monitoring and evaluation data are to be reviewed and developed further in Year 2. This will draw on the feedback already received from the NIA and the issues that were logged during Year 1. The developments to the online tool will potentially include enhancing its usability and functionality, support for users and reporting outputs.

- Developing an understanding of the overall contribution of an NIA at the landscape scale. A central aim of the NIAs is that they will benefit both wildlife and people by creating more and better-connected habitats at a landscape scale. Evaluating individual activities or achievements in line with the M&E framework themes may not enable a full understanding

of the overall, landscape scale contribution the NIAs are making. In Year 2 the evaluation will seek to explore ways in which progress can be considered across themes and collectively in a spatial sense to better understand how landscape scale benefits are being delivered.

- Part of the ongoing work of the M&E Phase 2 project is to explore approaches to measuring change that is attributable to the NIA activities against a meaningful and robust baseline and / or comparators.

All of these development activities are intended to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of monitoring and evaluation for the NIAs, as well as enhancing the evidence base for the evaluation.

1. Introduction and Context

The section provides an introduction to the Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs), the monitoring and evaluation process and report and includes the following sub-sections:

- Introduction to the 12 initial NIAs

- Understanding the NIA policy objectives and intended outcomes

- The NIA monitoring and evaluation requirements and process

- Objectives and approach to the evaluation

- Purpose and structure of the Year 1 Evaluation Report

Introduction to the 12 initial NIAs

The Lawton review (*Making space for nature*) was published in September 2010 and considered whether England's wildlife areas represented a coherent and robust ecological network that would be capable of responding to the challenges of climate change and other pressures. The review highlighted the highly fragmented state of nature in England and made a key recommendation that Ecological Restoration Zones (ERZs) need to be established, "operating over large, discrete areas within which significant enhancements of ecological networks are achieved by enhancing existing wildlife sites, improving ecological connections and restoring ecological processes". The government responded to the Lawton review through the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) – *Natural choice – securing the value of nature* (June 2011), and supporting the establishment of NIAs was the Government's response to this specific recommendation.

The 12 initial NIAs started work in April 2012, following a national competition for a share of £7.5 million which attracted 76 bids. The NIA Grant Scheme is planned to operate over three years from 2012 to 2015. The selected NIAs are partnerships of local authorities, local communities and landowners, the private sector and conservation organisations. The location of the 12 initial NIAs is shown in Figure 1.

The aim of the NIAs is that they will benefit both wildlife and people - creating more and better-connected habitats at a landscape scale; providing space for wildlife to thrive and adapt to climate change; as well as enhancing a wide range of benefits that nature provides, such as recreation opportunities, flood protection, cleaner water and carbon storage.

Natural England and Defra developed NIA General Guidance Notes[8] and Criteria which set out who may apply for the NIA grant scheme, and what was expected from NIAs: opportunities to deliver ecological networks; a shared vision for the natural environment among a wide partnership; significant improvements to the ecological network being achievable; surrounding land use can be better integrated with valued landscapes; benefits to urban areas and communities can be achieved; that "win-win" opportunities are identified; and, that there are opportunities to inspire people through an enhanced experience of the outside world.

Natural England has set out the components of an ecological network which are key to successful NIAs[9]: core areas, especially existing wildlife sites (National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) etc.); corridors and stepping stones; restoration areas, where priority habitats are created to provide (in time) more core areas; buffer

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[8] http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NIA-guidance-notes_tcm6-26959.pdf
[9] http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/aimsandobjectives.aspx

zones, that reduce pressures on core areas; and, surrounding land that is managed including for sustainable food production, in a wildlife friendly way.

Figure 1.1: Location of Nature Improvement Areas
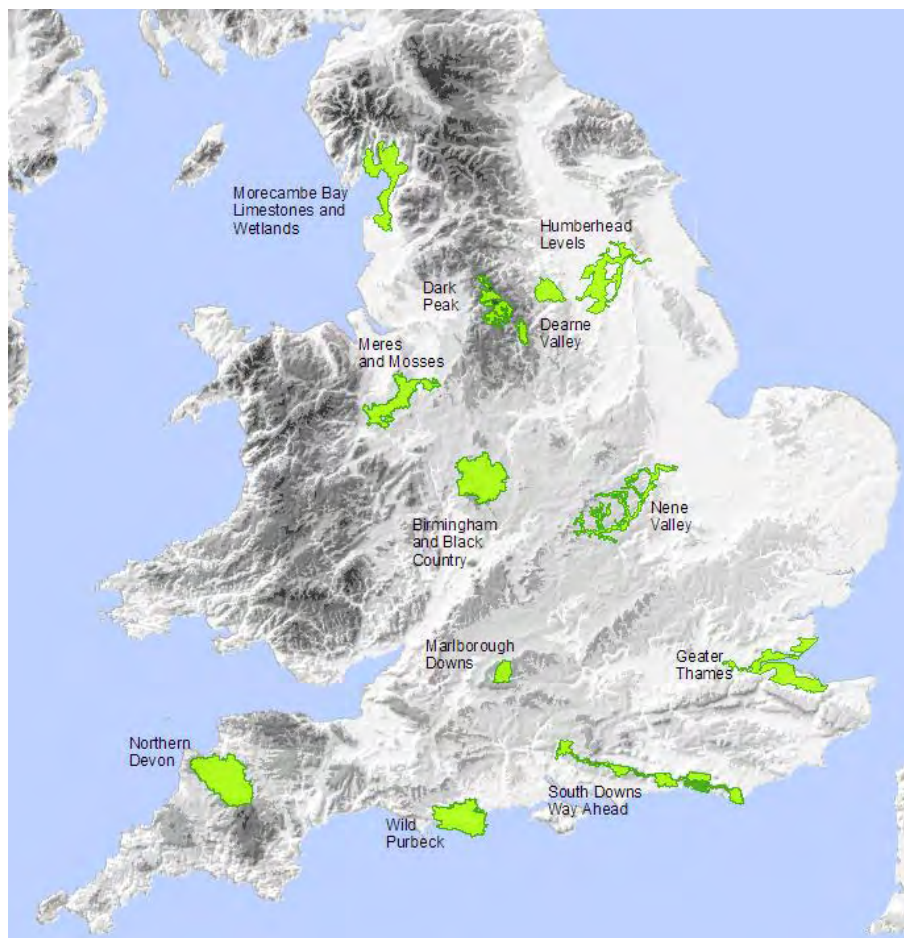
Source: Natural England 2013, STRM hill-shaded relief

It is important to recognise that the NIAs are intended to test approaches to, for example, promoting opportunities for restoring and connecting nature on a significant scale and the actual model is not prescribed or dictated to the NIAs. The variety of the NIAs is important as part of this process to be able to test what works well, and not so well. Similarly, with some of the monitoring and evaluation indicators and protocols (see below), they are a work in progress which may lead to further refinement of the approach during the three years where the science is not conclusive or developed, e.g. habitat connectivity, and hence there is a strong link to research. Additionally, it is intended that the monitoring and evaluation for NIAs is not too onerous but meaningful and can be used without huge resource being expended or specialist skills required.

Note that Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) and local planning authorities can now identify and agree where locally determined NIAs can take shape. These are distinct from the 12 initial NIAs that were awarded NIA status and a share of the £7.5 million funding. The Locally Determined NIAs are encouraged to apply the M&E framework, NIA criteria[10] and lessons learnt from the 12 initial NIAs to help inform their development and progress. However, the Locally Determined NIAs are not considered in this evaluation report.

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[10] Defra (September 2012) *Criteria for Local Authorities, Local Nature Partnerships and others to apply when identifying Nature Improvement Areas.*

Characteristics of the NIAs

The 12 initial NIAs vary considerably in character. As part of the evaluation during Year 2, the NIA's environmental and social characteristics will be investigated and analysed in more detail as this will be important contextual factor in evaluating the delivery of their outputs, outcomes and impacts. This includes the characteristics of the NIAs themselves as well as their surroundings areas. Some of the key characteristics of the NIAs are introduced here. There are a wide range of types of habitat within the NIAs ranging from farmland and urban habitats to chalk downland, moorland, marsh, woodland, heathland, grassland and wetland (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Broad types of habitat present in the NIAs

NIA	Broad types of habitat present
Birmingham and Black Country	Urban, wetland, river and heath
Dark Peak	Moorland and woodland
Dearne Valley	Farmland and former mining settlements with woodland and wetland
Greater Thames Marshes	Agricultural, marsh and urban
Humberhead Levels	Wetland, lowland and peat
Marlborough Downs	Chalk downland
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Wetlands, peat bogs and ponds
Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands	Limestone, wetland and grassland
Nene Valley	Post-industrial, river and wetland
Northern Devon	River, woodland and grassland
South Downs Way Ahead	Chalk downland
Wild Purbeck	River, wetland, heath and woodland

Source: based on overview of NIA characteristics provided by Natural England

The sizes of the 12 NIAs vary considerably (see Figure 1.2), from the smallest Marlborough Downs (10,398ha) to the largest Northern Devon (72,560ha), as does the populations living within and in close proximity to the NIAs – for example Birmingham and the Black Country NIA has a population of at least 2.2 million which is more than ten times greater than any other NIA.

Figure 1.2: Area of Nature Improvement Areas
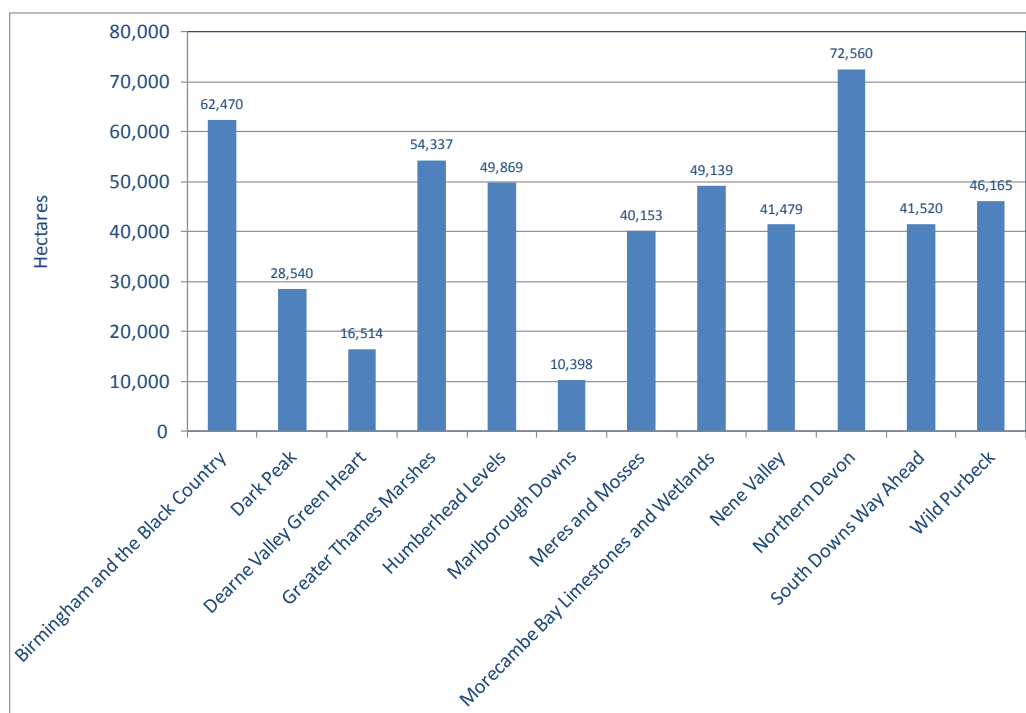
Source: based on overview of NIA characteristics provided by Natural England

The NIAs include a range of different nature conservation and landscape designations, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), County and Local Wildlife Sites, National Parks, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), RAMSAR sites, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), World Heritage Sites and a Biosphere Reserve. Figure 1.3 shows the total number of several different designations which are either completely within or partly within the NIAs. Figure 1.4 shows the total area of the different designations which are either completely within or partly within the NIAs

Figure 1.3: Number of different types of designations completely within and partly within the NIAs
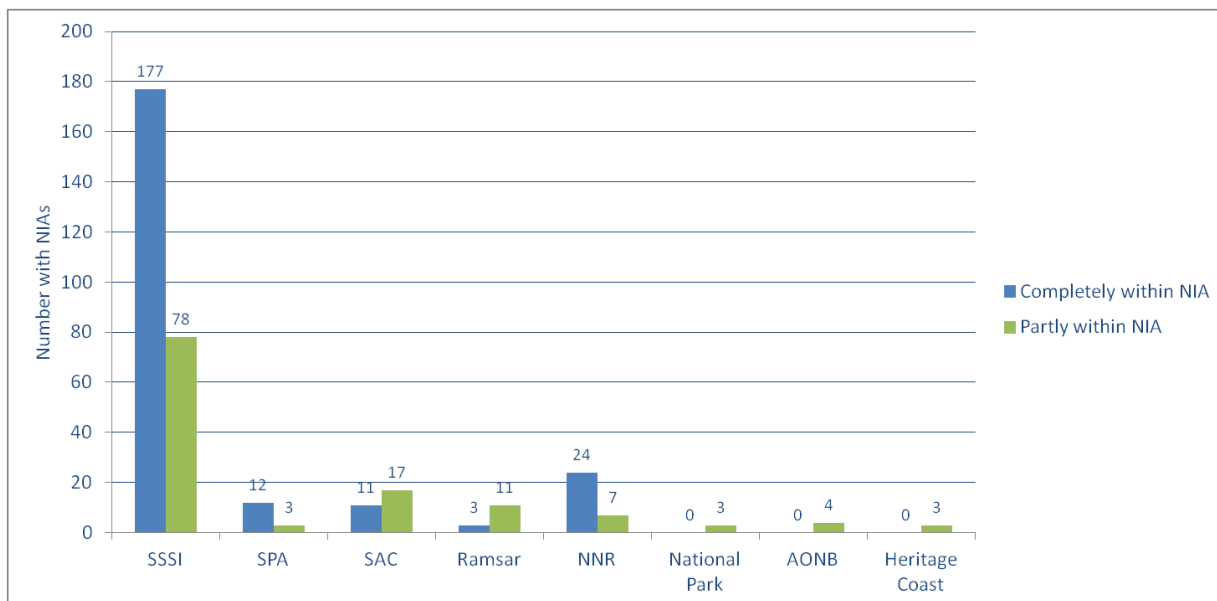
Source: based on NIA designation statistics provided by Natural England

Figure 1.4: Area of different designations within the NIAs
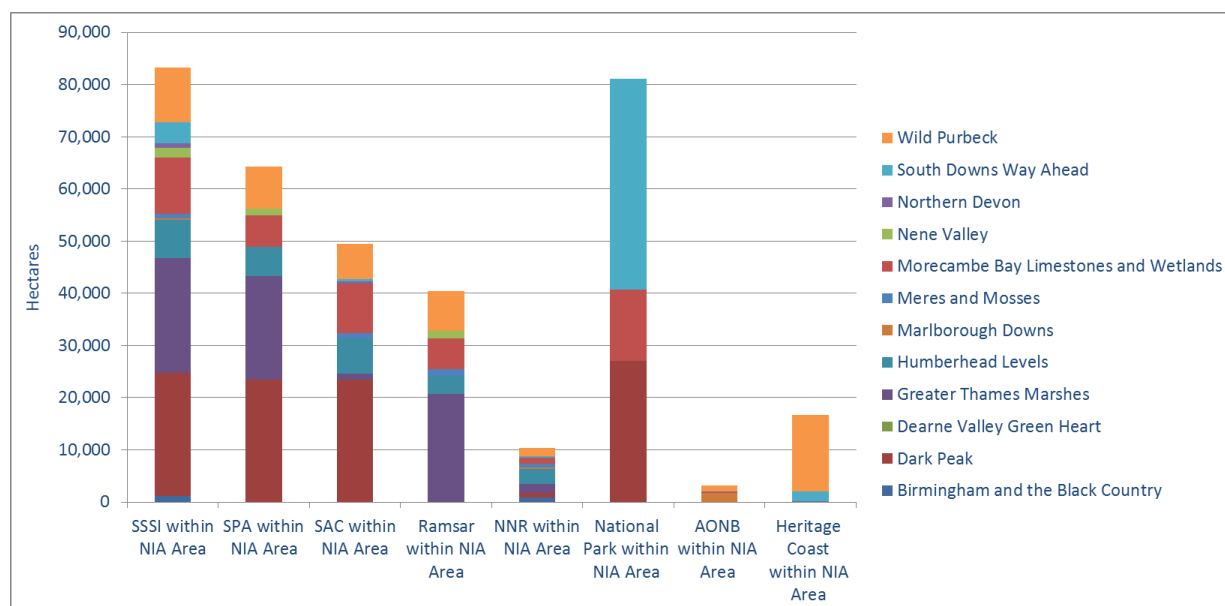
Source: based on NIA designation statistics provided by Natural England

Many of the NIAs also include areas covered by other initiatives, including catchment based approach pilots, biodiversity offsetting pilot areas, Local Nature Partnerships, Living Landscapes and Futurescapes.

Understanding the NIA policy objectives and intended outcomes

A key step in planning an evaluation is to understand the objectives and intended outcomes of the policy concerned – in this case the creation of the initial 12 NIAs – to identify what the evaluation should assess. Testing whether these policy objectives and intended outcomes have been achieved is ultimately the key question for the evaluation.

The Natural Environment White Paper was in part a response to the challenging international targets to take effective action to halt biodiversity loss and restore ecosystem services the UK has signed up to, as well as the increasing evidence base relating to the benefits and value for money of such investments in the natural environment and green infrastructure. It included a core commitment to develop new policy that is able to protect biodiversity at a landscape scale, and that is embedded in local communities. A core component of this policy development was the creation of NIAs, partnerships of local authorities, local communities and the public, the private sector and conservation organisations. These NIAs were intended to make local assessments of opportunities for restoring and connecting nature on a significant scale, and feed learning and community insight into evolving national policy processes and priorities.

One of the aims of NIAs is to unite local communities, landowners and businesses through a shared vision for a better future for people and wildlife. They also aim to explore and develop innovative means to deliver the biodiversity commitments in the NEWP, and outcomes in Biodiversity 2020, the international 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.

The establishment of NIAs represents a significant new approach to conservation of biodiversity and restoration of ecosystem services in England operating at a landscape scale. It aims to build on existing information, knowledge and practical experience of landscape-scale initiatives, but place partnerships with local communities and civil society at its heart. It is also intended to provide an opportunity for the NIA partnerships to embed public dialogue for decision making in their areas, and contribute to future national development of biodiversity, landscape and ecosystem policy. Each NIA has developed their own Business Plan which set out locally determined priorities and action planning, reflecting among other things the diversity of size and types of NIA, different partnership arrangements and the variety of focal habitats and species seen across the NIAs.

The General Guidance Notes describes NIAs as:

> *'large, discrete areas that will deliver a step change in nature conservation, where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment. The partnership will plan and deliver significant improvements for wildlife and people through the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring and creating wildlife habitats, connecting local sites and joining up local action.'*

It is intended that NIAs will:

- **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 provide us, such as recreation opportunities, flood protection, cleaner water and carbon storage.

- **Unite local communities, landowners 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.

The NIAs' monitoring and evaluation requirements and process[11]

NIA monitoring and evaluation requirements

As part of the NIA programme the 12 initial NIAs are required to undertake monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of their projects. The criteria for identifying high quality NIA proposals (as developed by Defra, Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission) required NIAs to indicate at the application stage how outcomes will be monitored and reported and how data would be made available. The NIA Competitive Grant Scheme General Guidance Notes indicated that NIAs should have a M&E process in place and for resources (financial and time) to be illustrated in NIA Business Plans. NIAs are also required to submit qualitative and quantitative M&E reporting as part of this process, following the M&E framework and using the online reporting tool developed for this purpose (see below). The NIAs must also submit quarterly progress reports (following a template provided by Natural England) and annual financial reporting to Natural England.

NIA monitoring and evaluation framework

A key outcome of the first phase of the M&E work was the development of a M&E Framework for the NIAs[12]. The framework was developed with the aim of enabling NIA partnerships to report on their contribution to meeting local, national and international commitments and objectives, and to help Defra and Natural England identify requirements for ongoing support, outreach, and additional research and development. The draft M&E framework report[13] indicates that the framework was developed in consultation with steering group members, government agency experts who are responsible for the development and maintenance of relevant datasets, and NIA partnerships. The framework was developed with the intention that it would: be simple and cost-effective to use (minimising burden on those using it); make use of the best available data, drawing on existing monitoring, surveillance and reporting initiatives at national and local levels; be flexible to allow for evaluation of different objectives and approaches adopted within NIAs or adaption of existing user-orientated data capture systems (e.g. BARS); and provide compatible results that can be summarised nationally.

The framework is structured by four themes, under which there are a number sub-themes:

- **Biodiversity** (Habitat, Species, Connectivity and Invasive species)
- **Ecosystem Services** (Cultural services, Supporting services, Regulating services, Provisioning services)
- **Social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing** (Social impacts, Wellbeing and Economic values and impacts)
- **Partnership working** (Mobilisation of resources, Efficient and effective delivery and Leadership and influence)

Indicators and protocols were developed under each sub-theme to guide the NIAs in their monitoring activities. Many of the indicators utilise existing data sources (e.g. MENE data – Monitor

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[11] More details on the NIA M&E requirements and process can be found on the Natural England NIA webpages: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/monitoringandevaluation.aspx
[12] This work was undertaken as part of the NIA M&E Phase 1 project which was completed at the end of 2012.
[13] Nature Improvement Areas Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, July 2012: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/monitor-evaluation-framework_tcm6-33143.pdf

of Engagement with the Natural Environment). Table 1.2 below sets out the four themes, their sub-themes and indicators.

The approach to monitoring and evaluation also reflects the NIAs are trying out new approaches, with innovation required to assess topics such as habitat connectivity, ecosystem services and social and economic benefits and wellbeing. The current M&E framework is therefore still under development and one focal area of work under the M&E Phase 2 project is to refine the framework, including review and development of existing indicator protocols (many of which were not finalised in Phase 1).

As Table 1.2 indicates there are five 'core' indicators that must be adopted by all NIA partnerships, while the remaining indicators are optional. NIA partnerships are also able to propose and develop their own local indicators under any theme or sub-theme. Section 3 provides details of which indicators each of the NIAs selected.

The NIAs are required to select a minimum of 13 indicators in total, covering all four themes:

- a minimum of four biodiversity indicators (the two core habitat indicators, one species indicator and one habitat connectivity indicator; an indicator of invasive non-native species is optional;

- a minimum of three ecosystem services indicators (one indicator of cultural services, one of regulating services, one of provisioning services; indicators of supporting services are optional). As the ecosystem services are very location-dependent and methods for monitoring are not well-developed, NIA are encouraged to identify their own optional indicators to develop and test approaches to examining locally-specific issues;

- a minimum of two indicators for the social and economic benefits and contributions to well-being theme (one indicator on social impacts and well-being – the core indicator on volunteer hours - and one indicator of economic values and impacts); and

- a minimum of four indicators for the partnership working this theme (two indicators of mobilisation of resources, one indicator of efficient and effective delivery and one indicator of leadership and influence).

Table 1.2: Monitoring and evaluation framework themes, sub-themes and indicators

Themes	Sub-themes	Indicators	
Biodiversity	Habitat	Extent of habitat managed to improve its condition	Core
		Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat	Core
		Extent of habitat in favourable or recovering condition	Optional
		Total extent of habitat	Optional
	Species	Extent of habitat managed to secure species-specific needs	Optional
		Status of widespread species	Optional
		Status of focal species	Optional
	Connectivity	Local indicator of habitat connectivity	Local
	Invasive species	Control of invasive or other non-native species	Optional
Ecosystem Services	Cultural services	Local measures of extent of land managed to enhance landscape character	Optional
		Length of accessible PROW and permissive paths	Optional
		Condition of historic environment features	Optional
		Access to natural greenspace and/or woodland	Optional
		Local indicator of cultural services	Local
	Supporting services	Area of habitat supporting pollinators	Optional
		Local indicator of supporting services	Local
	Regulating services	Contribution to water quality	Optional
		Contribution to carbon storage & sequestration	Optional
		Local indicator of area of new habitat created for pollinators	Optional

Themes	Sub-themes	Indicators	
	Provisioning services	Area of more-sustainable agricultural production	Optional
		Percentage of woodland in active management	Optional
		Local indicator of provisioning services	Local
Social & economic benefits & contributions to wellbeing	**Social impacts and wellbeing**	Attitudes of local community to biodiversity, geodiversity & the natural environment	Optional
		No. of educational visits	Optional
		No. and social mix of visitors to NIA sites	Optional
		No. and social mix of people involved in NIA activities and events	Optional
		Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents	Optional
		No. of volunteer hours on NIA activities	Core
	Economic values and impacts	Estimated value of visitor expenditure to local economy	Optional
		No. of people employed in NIA activities	Optional
		Estimated value of ecosystem services in NIA	Optional
Partnership working	**Mobilisation of resources**	Project income	Core
		Financial value of help-in-kind	Core
	Efficient and effective delivery	Fulfilment of identified skills needs	Optional
		Attitudes of local community to NIA	Optional
		Assessment of partnership working	Optional
	Leadership and influence	Audience reach	Optional
		Level of awareness of NIA in local community	Optional
		No. of enquiries	Optional

The monitoring and evaluation online reporting tool

An online reporting tool[14] was developed by the M&E Phase 1 project 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 reporting tool is related to the M&E framework and associated indicator protocols and is designed to enable the NIA partnerships to record each year their achievements relating to each indicator. The tool is also intended to complement rather than duplicate other systems of data recording, such as BARS (Biodiversity Action Reporting System).

The site is also intended for use by Defra, Natural England and other interested organisations and individuals, who may view the project and national monitoring reports generated through the online tool.

During 2013 the online tool and the M&E framework will be further developed, for example to enhance its usability, and to assist the monitoring activities of the NIAs through improvements to indicator protocols. In future it is intended that locally determined NIAs will be able to use the M&E framework and online reporting tool without the need for external support.

The experience of the NIAs in using the online reporting tool in Year 1 and its effectiveness is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.

Overall approach to the evaluation of the NIAs

As of March 2013, the second phase of the M&E project started to build on the work completed during Phase 1[15]. This includes undertaking further technical development of the online tool, providing support for its users, further development of some of the indicators, and development of the evaluation methodology. It will also enable co-ordination and knowledge exchange with other related initiatives and involves undertaking an evaluation of NIAs after 1, 2 and 3 years. The overall objectives of this project are:

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[14] http://nia.naturalengland.org.uk/
[15] Collingwood Environmental Planning (CEP), with its partners GeoData Institute and Cascade Consulting, has been commissioned by Defra, in collaboration with Natural England, to undertake Phase 2.

A. **To assess the individual and aggregated contribution of the 12 initial NIAs towards meeting the outcomes, included in the Natural Environment White Paper and other agreed policy outcomes.**

B. **To gather evidence of approaches used within the NIAs and their outcomes, to maximise learning from them and build a practical evidence base to inform future extension of the NIA approach.**

These objectives set the high-level framing of the evaluation and provide valuable input to specific evaluation methodology requirements. Objective A reflects the need for the evaluation to be able to show how the NIAs both individually and collectively help to achieve the desired policy outcomes (see the logic model below), as well as national (and international) policy objectives, such as the outcomes of the Natural Environment White Paper, the *Biodiversity 2020* strategy, and the UK Governments' wider ambitions for economic growth and the expansion of the green economy.

Meeting Objective B requires the development of an evaluation approach which: identifies, compiles and assesses the efficacy of the approaches used by individual NIAs in implementing their objectives; draws out common lessons from good practice in the initial NIAs and encourages the sharing of experience and knowledge between and within NIAs and other relevant projects or initiatives; and which draws out lessons on what has worked well, and less well, and provides findings on the possible extension of the NIA approach in future.

Overall, a key objective for the evaluation is to **test the logic model for the 12 NIAs and the assumptions which underlie it** (see Figure 1.5)[16]. The logic model provide an overarching framework for understanding and systematically testing the assumed connections between the intervention and the anticipated impacts – has the policy worked and why, under what circumstances and/or conditions has it worked well and not so well etc. The criteria for NIAs set out in the General Guidance Notes also provide a useful input to the evaluation objectives, and the criteria and questions in particular (see below).

Figure 1.5: The Logic Model for NIAs
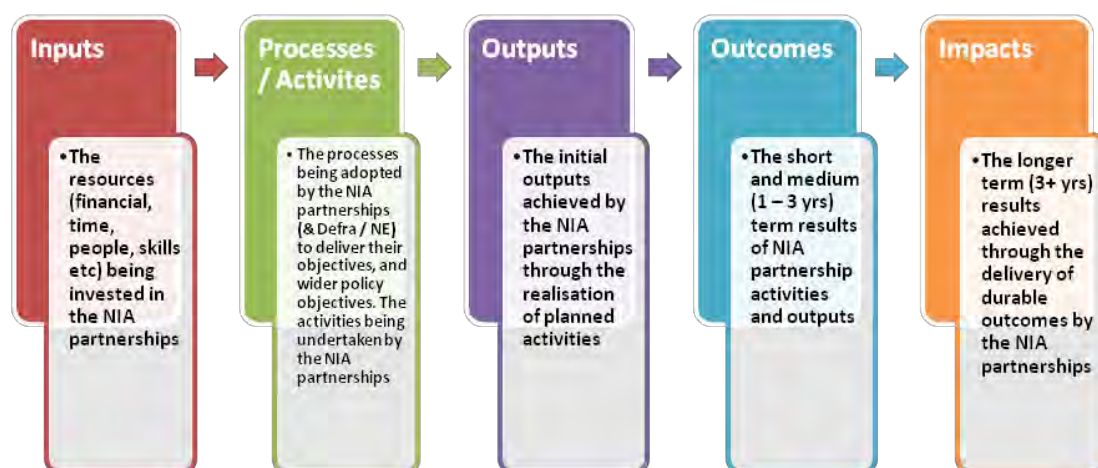
Based on a sound understanding of the activities and outcomes within each NIA, the evaluation will assess the collective outcomes of both the NIA programme as a whole and progress related to the objectives of individual NIAs. It will be particularly important to understand the baseline in order to robustly attribute change to the NIA activities, as far as this is possible. To this end the M&E

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[16] 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.

framework indicators which include a baseline will be useful, however careful consideration will be given to attribution.

The evaluation reflects the relatively recent implementation of the 12 NIAs and need for a phased approach. This phasing will correspond with the annual M&E reporting of the NIAs themselves, but will also allow for the development of new evaluation approaches (including modifications to the M&E online tool and indicator protocols) over the course of the project, while ensuring a consistent 'core' to the evaluation so that progress over the three years can be measured.

Evaluation sub-objectives and criteria

In order to enhance the evaluation objectives a series of sub-objectives and criteria have been developed, structured according to the themes / sub-themes in the M&E framework (see Table 1.3). Further evaluation questions have been developed around each evaluation criterion. These are being applied at two different scales:

- Individual NIAs
- NIAs collectively at the programme level

These questions are being linked with the steps in the logic model (i.e. inputs, activities and processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts) and prioritised by evaluation years (Years 1, 2 and 3), with the particular priorities for the evaluation in Year 1 investigated further throughout this report (see Sections 2 – 7).

Table 1.3: Evaluation sub-objectives and criteria

Themes	Evaluation sub-objectives	Sub-themes	Evaluation criteria (*To what extend have NIAs ....*)	Evaluation questions
Biodiversity	To enhance the natural environment and improve ecological networks	Habitat	Improved the area and condition of priority habitats and led to habitat creation and enhancement?	A series of evaluation questions have been developed under each of the evaluation criteria. These detailed evaluation questions are linked to indicators and other data / information sources where possible and also to the steps in the logic model. The questions pertinent to the Year 1 evaluation are posed throughout this report (see Sections 2 – 7).
Biodiversity	To enhance the natural environment and improve ecological networks	Species	Increased the extent and status of key species?	
Biodiversity	To enhance the natural environment and improve ecological networks	Connectivity	Increased ecological connectivity through habitat creation or restoration?	
Biodiversity	To enhance the natural environment and improve ecological networks	Invasive species	Helped control invasive or non-native species be?	
Ecosystem Services	To enhance the benefits provided from a range of ecosystem services	Cultural services	Improved cultural services?	
Ecosystem Services	To enhance the benefits provided from a range of ecosystem services	Supporting services	Improved supporting services?	
Ecosystem Services	To enhance the benefits provided from a range of ecosystem services	Regulating services	Improved regulating services?	
Ecosystem Services	To enhance the benefits provided from a range of ecosystem services	Provisioning services	Improved provisioning services?	
Social & economic benefits & contributions to wellbeing	To deliver social and economic benefits and contribute to wellbeing	Social impacts	Contributed to positive social impacts?	
Social & economic benefits & contributions to wellbeing	To deliver social and economic benefits and contribute to wellbeing	Wellbeing	Contributed to increased wellbeing?	
Social & economic benefits & contributions to wellbeing	To deliver social and economic benefits and contribute to wellbeing	Economic values and impacts	Produced economic benefits either directly or indirectly?	
Partnership working	To deliver well supported and functioning partnerships	Mobilisation of resources	Mobilised different types of resources and attracted additional funding and resources?	
Partnership working	To deliver well supported and functioning partnerships	Efficient and effective delivery	Delivered effective, integrated and joined up partnership working?	
Partnership working	To deliver well supported and functioning partnerships	Leadership and influence	Provided leadership and increased awareness?	

The Year 1 Evaluation and Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report

Purpose of the Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report

The Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report provides an overview of the progress of the NIAs during their first year of operation since they were established in April 2012. It aims to provide an early indication of whether the NIAs individually and collectively are on the right trajectory to meet their objectives. Given that this report is being prepared at an early point in the proposed three year evaluation, this first year report particularly focuses on establishing the approach to the evaluation and the potential data that will be used as well as assessing the inputs to the NIAs and processes / activities they have been involved in. Some outputs and outcomes are reported, but this will be more of the focus for subsequent years.

The Year 1 evaluation focuses on particular aspects of the evaluation objectives and the related evaluation questions. This has been dictated by a number of factors, including:

- the early stage the NIAs have reached after only one year since they were set up;

- data availability, including which indicators the NIAs are able to report on;

- the priorities of Defra and Natural England;

- the limited timescales available to undertake detailed data analysis (limited time in year 1 has also meant new data collection and direct dialogue with the NIAs has not been possible for the M&E Phase 2 project team); and

- the early stage in the M&E Phase 2 project[17] (with research to develop the approach to the monitoring and evaluation of certain outcomes of the NIAs scheduled for subsequent years).

These factors have also influenced the focus of the first year evaluation in terms of the themes (Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing, and Partnership working) and scale (i.e. individual NIAs or the NIAs collectively at the programme level), as well as which steps in the logic model (i.e. inputs, activities and processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts).

As a result, Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report focuses on the following in particular:

- Investigating inputs (and some outputs) in the logic model, especially related to the Partnership Working theme;

- Process and activities aspects of the evaluation, including the setting up and first year of the implementation of the NIAs including the development of their M&E reporting (this dimension is also linked closely to the point above);

- Where available, the core indicators in the M&E framework that are reported by all the NIAs allowing the data to be analysed for the NIAs collectively at the programme level;

- Other indicators, both Optional and Local indicators, are reported on an individual NIA basis and as part of a qualitative description / narrative which will also draws on the NIAs own progress summaries (these aspects may also be particularly organised theme by theme); and

- From the data available, the contribution of the NIAs to Biodiversity 20/20 outcomes (within the Biodiversity theme as well as other themes where relevant) - this dimension is also linked closely to the point above as it will draw particularly on the core biodiversity indicators.

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[17] The NIA M&E Phase 2 project only started in earnest in March 2013 and the NIAs' reporting deadline using the online tool was Mid May 2013.

Note that for the Year 1 evaluation it has been necessary to draw relatively extensively on data and analysis provided by Natural England for certain indicators and to provide data across the NIAs where data is not readily or consistent available via the online reporting tool. This was not initially intended or ideal but has been necessary to supplement the evaluation in Year 1, but it is hoped that in future years the online reporting tool will provide most of the data required for the evaluation.

An evaluation Progress Report will also be prepared in Years 2 and 3 on progress including the outcomes and impacts of NIAs. These will consider progress towards the individual NIA and programme objectives and overcoming known barriers, or in achievement of identified successes). The evaluation at end Year 3 will provide an opportunity to reflect on three years of intervention and activity in the NIAs, reflecting on broader lessons learned, outcomes achieved and successes (and failures) in and across the NIAs as a whole. The final project report will also draw on the three years of evaluation to identifying aspects of NIA activity that would benefit from additional support, for example through changes to planning policy or regulations, or through targeted capacity building and awareness raising.

Key information and data sources

The information and data for the Year 1 evaluation has drawn on a number of sources, as illustrated in the table below (see Table 1.4). Due to the timescales of the Year 1 evaluation, this has had to rely on data already available. However, in future years it is planned that additional data collections will be used to inform the evaluation.

Table 1.4: Year 1 evaluation information and data sources

Information and data sources	Information provided for Year 1
• **Core, optional and local indicators reported in the online reporting tool**	Including the core indicators to report on the NIAs collectively at the programme level, including the contribution of the NIAs to Biodiversity 2020 outcomes. Using the baseline included within the indicator protocols to report on change where available. Selected optional and local indicators to inform the qualitative description / narrative to report on individual NIAs' progress and progress theme by theme.
• **NIA Business Plans** • **Funding Agreements, including Partnership Agreements**	Reporting against the inputs and processes / activities (and some outputs and outcomes) in the logic model and process aspects of the evaluation, especially related to the Partnership Working theme.
• **Quarterly Progress Reports** • **Year 1 annual summary Progress Report**	Summarising progress / achievements to inform the qualitative description / narrative to report on individual NIAs' progress and progress theme by theme.
• **Annual financial reporting year 1** • **Natural England's synthesis of financial reporting**	Reporting on the financial resources as part of the evaluation of inputs.
• **Data and analysis provided by Natural England for certain indicators**	Supplementary information to the core and options indicators above drawn on in Year 1 in particular to provide a baseline and data across all the NIAs where it was not available in some key areas from the data entered on the online reporting tool.

Structure of the Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report

The structure of the Year 1 (2012-13) Progress Report uses both the logic mode (see above) and the themes in the M&E framework (see sub-section above on the M&E framework) to structure the report – as illustrated in the Figure 1.6.

Figure 1.6: Structure of the report and link to the logic model and M&E framework themes

|		Logic model steps				
		Inputs	**Processes / Activities**	**Outputs**	**Outcomes**	**Impacts**
M&E framework themes	**Biodiversity**	**Section 2** Resources invested in the NIAs	**Section 3** Processes and activities undertaken by the NIAs	**Sections 4 / 5/ 6 / 7** **Section 4** Biodiversity Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts		**Section 8** Overview of NIA's progress against their own objectives and synthesis of findings contributions to Biodiversity 2020 outcomes and themes
	Ecosystem Services			**Section 5** Ecosystem Services Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts		
	Social & economic benefits & wellbeing			**Section 6** Social & economic benefits & wellbeing Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts		
	Partnership working			**Section 7** Partnership working Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts		

2. Evaluation of the Resources Invested in the NIAs

Key messages from Year 1: resources invested in the NIAs

- In the Year 1, **significant financial resources have been expended by the NIA's, and there was very little variance between actual and planned expenditure**. In total, the NIAs planned to spend £1.516 million in the year 2012-13 from their Defra / Natural England grants and in fact spent £1.509 million.

- Staff and running costs represent the largest expenditure in Year 1 for most NIAs, however **a number of NIAs have already invested significant amounts in implementing projects** 'on the ground'.

- **The NIAs have attracted significant value added**[18]: in total, each £1 invested by government resulted in £5.50 in additional support, and when planned support is also taken into account each £1 invested by government should result in nearly £6.80 in additional support.

- **Almost all NIAs have a dedicated Project Manager** and a small number (typically three to five full-time employees), however **project implementation is largely decentralised**, with a common approach to project delivery being to distribute responsibility to appropriate partners.

- The effort and cost of recruiting appropriate expertise was in some cases higher than expected and has meant **there were delays in recruiting key staff in some NIAs**. In addition the level of staff resource required to coordinate and implement NIA activities was identified as a challenge in a number of NIAs.

- Volunteers have been used in almost all NIAs, and **some NIAs have reported very significant amounts of volunteer time being mobilised in Year 1** (e.g. Nene Valley approximately 3,300 days, Humberhead Levels and Morecambe Bay both more than 1,300 days).

- **Most of the NIA partnerships have developed from existing partnerships**: 10 of the 12 NIA partnerships can be considered to have existed prior to the NIA initiative, and all of these existing partnerships are seen to have had previous experience managing and delivering large-scale natural environment projects.

Introduction

This section presents an assessment of the **Input** step in the evaluation logic model (see below).
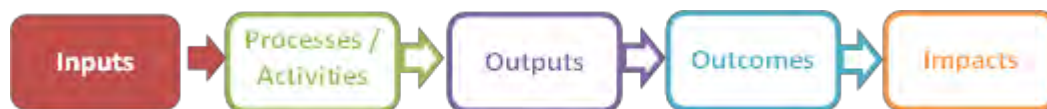
This part of the evaluation is considering the resources invested in the NIAs. Specifically it seeks to assess the resources available for the NIA in Year 1 and considers the scale and type of resources invested and assesses how these resources have been used by the NIAs. The section also considers governance arrangements at the outset of each NIA project as well as the existence of existing networks (e.g. of community or volunteering groups) as these are considered key input factors to each NIA.

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[18] Added value is defined here as any additional financial support over and above that provided by Defra 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. A more detailed analysis of these data will be completed in Year 2.

This section considers four types of inputs:

- **Financial resources** – including the funding available, use of financial resources, and value added (the amount of additional funding, in-kind and other support attracted, over and above the government grant) as identified by each NIA.

- **Human resources** – including the people involved, their skills and the level of volunteering.

- **Partnerships administration and governance** – including the NIA's partnership structure and whether these were based on or linked to an existing partnership or other grouping.

- **Networks** – including the extent to which at the start of the NIA initiative there already existed local community support for biodiversity organisations and activities, and the nature of existing networks between organisations in each NIA.

Overview of data available

The evaluation in Year 1 of the resources invested in the NIAs is based on a review and analysis of the following data sources:

- **Monitoring and evaluation framework indicators** under the social and economic and partnership working themes as entered into the NIA M&E online reporting tool. Potential indicators included: number of volunteer hours on NIA activities; *number of people employed in NIA activities; project income*; *financial value of help-in-kind; amount of funding contributed to NIA projects from development*; and *fulfilment of identified skills needs*. However, with the exception of the number of volunteer hours the data for these indicators was not used in the evaluation either because data covered only a small number of NIAs, or, in the case of financial data that Natural England had already completed a preliminary compilation and analysis.

- **Financial reporting data** submitted by the NIAs to Natural England and collated by them. These data provide the basis for the evaluation of financial resources.

- **NIA Business Plans and Funding Agreements**. These provided a valuable source of information on the nature of each NIA partnership and the human resources available, as well as whether there were existing partnerships or coordinated activities in NIA areas.

- **Quarterly and annual Progress Reports** produced by the NIAs, which were a key source of information for the evaluation of human resources (staffing) and partnership administration as these include self-reporting on activities, progress and challenges within each NIA.

It is recognised that for some NIAs the information available from these sources will not represent all inputs in the first year. For example Northern Devon NIA have indicated that, due to delays in the recording of partner in-kind contributions and activities, the figures recorded in quarterly and annual Progress Reports are likely to be an underestimate of actual inputs, particularly in relation to human resources.

Financial resources

In the first year, significant financial resources have been expended by the NIAs. Figure 2.1 shows the actual expenditure incurred compared to the planned spending by each NIA from their Defra / Natural England grants. This shows that there was very little variance between these amounts. In total, the NIAs planned to spend £1.516 million in the year 2012-13, and in fact spent £1.509 million.

Figure 2.2 compares NIA spending in 2012-13 with the total three year grant to each NIA (2012-15). This illustrated the fact that the anticipated expenditure is lower in the first year (approximately 20% of the grant), with approximately 40% scheduled to be spent in each of the subsequent two years.

Figure 2.1: Projected and annual spending of NIAs (2012-13)
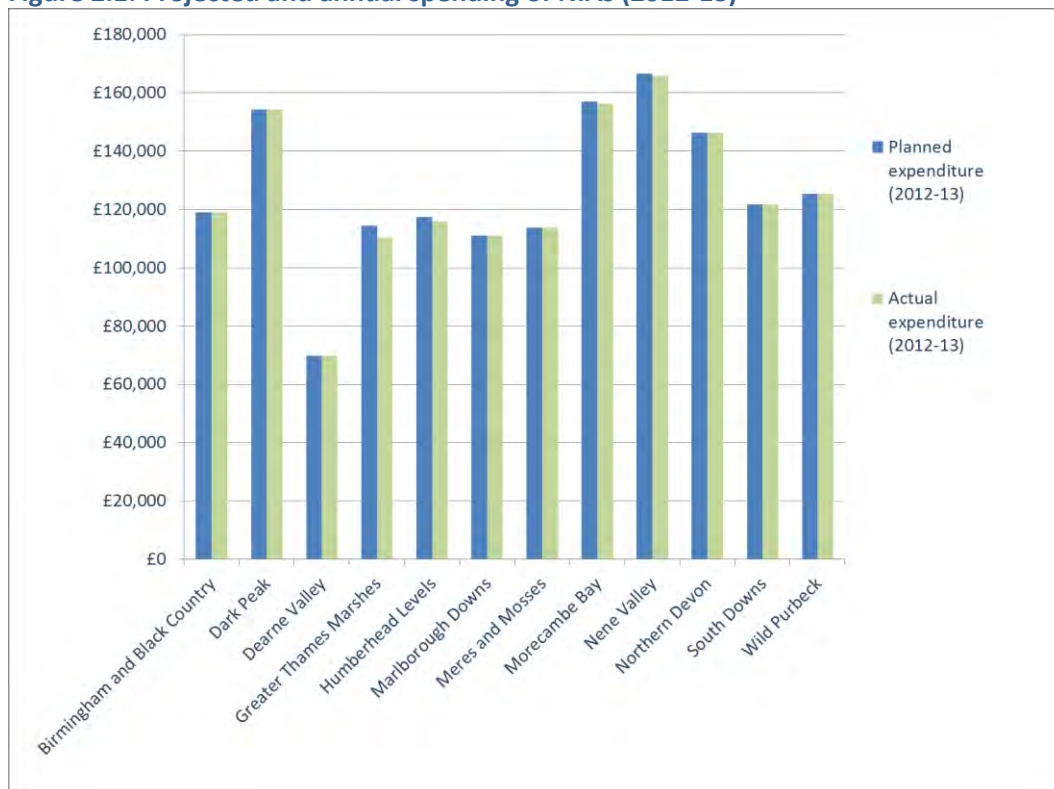
Source: Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims

Figure 2.2: NIA annual spending (2012-13) and programme grant (2012-15)
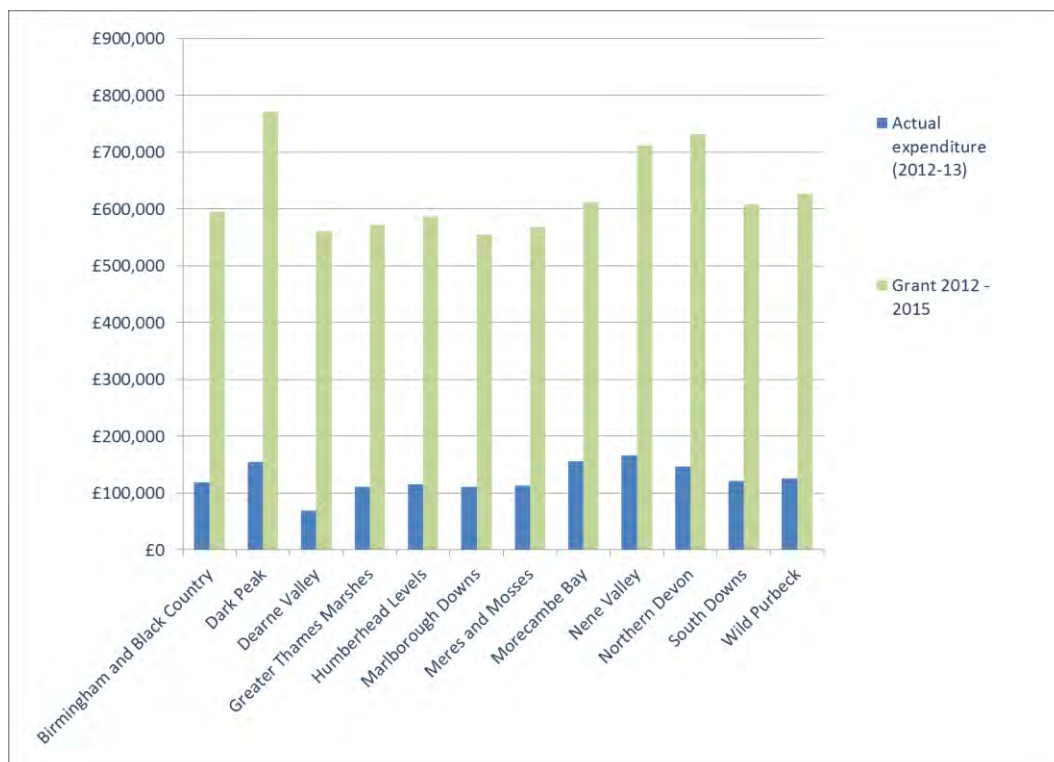
Source: Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims

It is difficult to compare specific areas of expenditure, since the NIA partnerships have bespoke agreements with each having its own objectives and specific projects. However, each NIA uses the same claim form and quarterly reporting and the analysis of expenditure was based on information provided by Natural England which brought together each individual NIA reporting in one spreadsheet. As each NIA classified expenditure differently it was necessary to re-categorise into broad types, and these categories are broadly defined as follows:

- **'Admin, training, recruitment'** covers any costs related to staff, project officers/advisors, training, recruitment, administration, project management and other overheads;

- **'Consultation, stakeholders'** covers any costs related to education, community/other events, websites and other promotions;

- **'Data, surveys, mapping'** covers any costs related to data collection, site surveys, network mapping and research;

- **'Monitoring & evaluation'** covers any costs related to all monitoring and evaluation, including baseline data, monitoring and condition assessment; and

- **'Implementation'** covers any costs related to capital and other improvement works and actions on the ground.

Some expenditure items may have been allocated to a category different to that originally intended by the NIA. In particular it is likely that some of the expenditure allocated to 'admin, training, recruitment' which includes staff costs, will in fact represent officer time being used to manage the implementation of specific activities, and could equally be allocated to 'implementation'. More detail on the nature of each expenditure recorded by NIAs would be required to record such factors consistently however, and we will seek in Year 2 to encourage NIAs to report across common expenditure categories where appropriate and possible and will also contact NIAs to verify financial data as required.

With this caveat in mind, Figure 2.3 shows how expenditure relates to these five categories over Year 1. It indicates that staff / running costs dominate for most NIAs in the first year (for three NIAs it is between 11% and 21%, but for the remainder it is at least 50% and up to 95% in one case). A key question for subsequent years and the evaluation overall, will be whether it balances out overall to an acceptable percentage of the grant – for example up to 10%.

Some NIAs (especially Wild Purbeck, Birmingham and Black Country) have spent significant amounts on consultation and stakeholder engagement in the first year.

The amount spent on monitoring and evaluation varies between NIAs, but overall is considered relatively moderate in the context of the significant challenges faced by the NIAs as they were using the M&E framework and online reporting tool for the first time in Year 1. However, one NIA indicated that the monitoring and evaluation process has been very time consuming and has had a detrimental impact on delivery. It should also be noted that NIA Year 1 financial reports were submitted to Natural England *before* Year 1 monitoring and evaluation activity was completed due to an extension of the monitoring and evaluation deadline from end of March 2013 to mid-May 2013. Some significant expenditure on Year 1 monitoring and evaluation is likely to therefore in many cases be reported in Year 2 expenditure, and these data should therefore be seen as indicative rather than complete.

A further point of note is that a number of NIAs (especially Wild Purbeck, South Downs and Birmingham and Black Country) have already started to spend a relatively high proportion of their overall expenditure on implementation. This includes habitat creation, fencing, restoration schemes and a variety of other measures and indicates that many partnerships have managed to coordinate partners and initiate activities 'on the ground' early within the three year projects.

Figure 2.3: Expenditure categories in NIAs (2012-13)
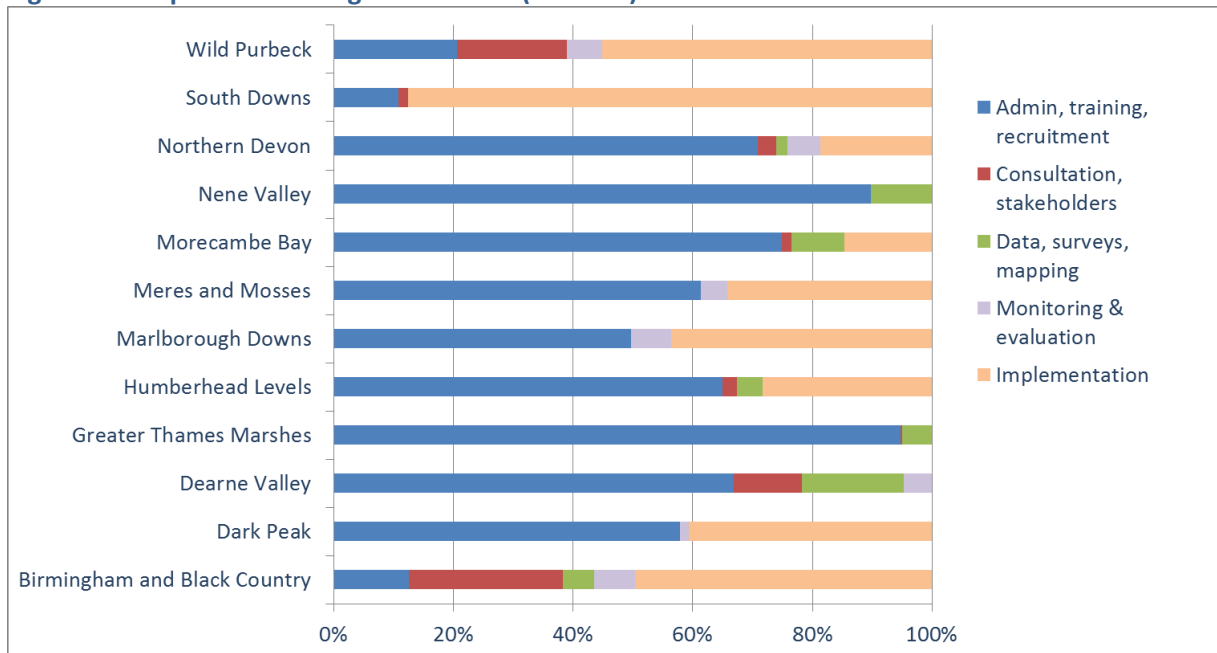
Source: analysis based on Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims.

Note: The very high levels of expenditure allocated to 'Admin, training, recruitment' reflects the data as recorded by NIAs, however it is likely that expenditure on staffing included in this category includes some direct support to implementation. The analysis in this figure may therefore underestimate the amount of spend on other categories, in particular 'Data, surveys and mapping' and 'Implementation'.

The added value achieved by the NIAs (the amount of additional funding, in-kind and other support attracted, over and above the government grant) has been considerable. Figure 2.4 shows the added value for each NIA compared to initial 2012-13 grant. Figure 2.5 shows the breakdown of this added value in percentage terms.

A note on added value

Added value is defined here as any additional financial support over and above that provided by Defra 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' in Figures 2.4 and 2.5 will come from other public sector initiatives, including from within the Defra family.

In the Year 2 evaluation we will seek to define and identify 'value added' more clearly, drawing on information collected directly from NIAs where necessary. This could consider value added as the total additional investment in an NIA divided by total public grant (or grant equivalent).

Figure 2.4: Added value compared to initial grant (2012-13)
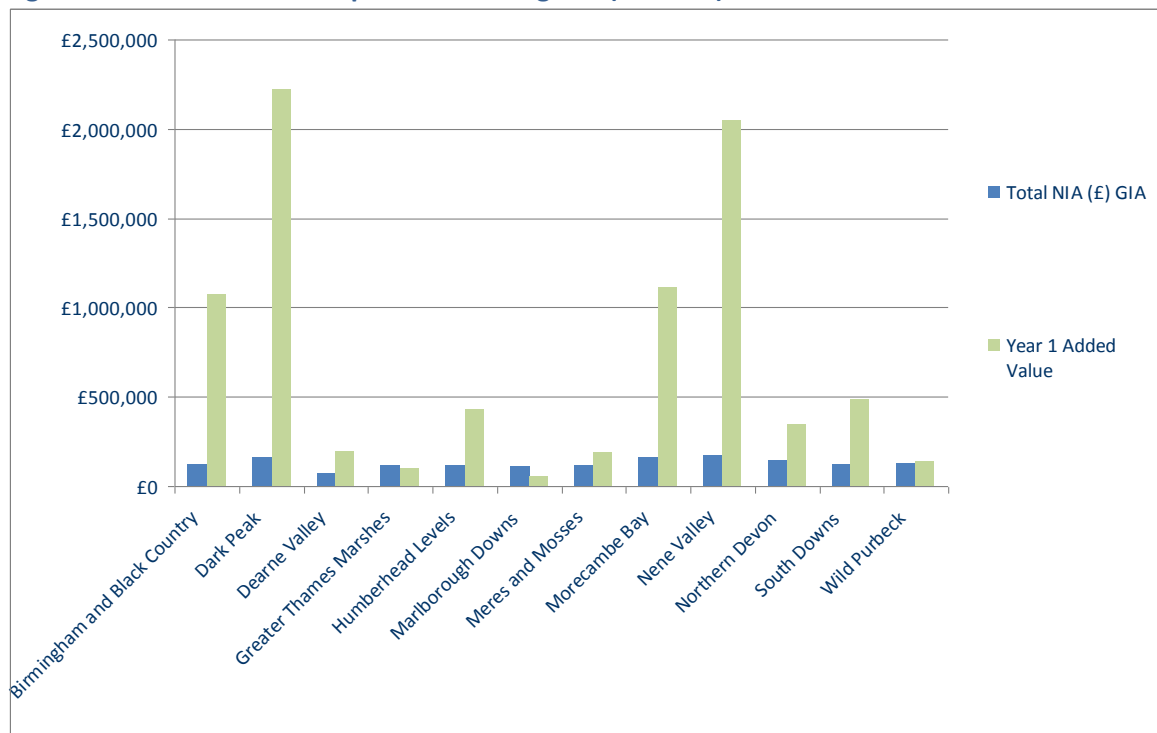
Source: analysis based on Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims

Figure 2.5: Breakdown of added value (2012-13)
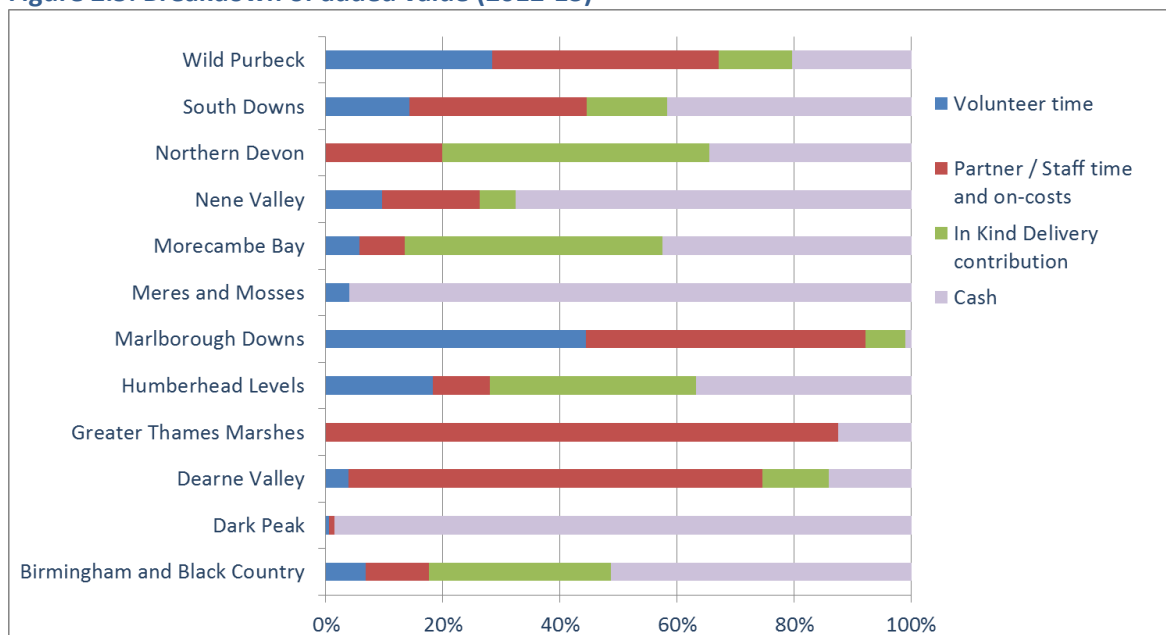
Source: analysis based on Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims

Notes:
1. Volunteer time calculated at rates available in NIA guidance
2. Partner / Staff time and on-costs includes salary costs, on-costs i.e. overheads and also staff/partner time working on the NIA and /or management and time at meetings/workshops, etc
3. In Kind Delivery contributions include costs for carrying out projects within the NIA (e.g. farm advice)
4. Cash refers to cash received either from partners or other external funding sources (includes HLS/grant schemes)

Figure 2.4 shows that four NIAs attracted over £1 million of additional support (Birmingham and Black Country, Morecambe Bay, Nene Valley and Dark Peak). In total, each £1 invested by government resulted in £5.50 in additional support. One NIA (Northern Devon) has also reported that the figures included in this analysis may represent an under-estimate of actual added-value, due to delays in reporting on in-kind work provided by NIA partners. We will ensure that these, and other possible omissions from these data, are included in the analysis of added-value in Year 2.

Figure 2.5 shows that the type of support varied. For some NIAs (e.g. Dark Peak), it consisted almost entirely of cash, whilst for others 'partner/staff time and on-costs' (e.g. Greater Thames Marshes) or 'in-kind delivery' (e.g. Northern Devon) were more dominant. For most NIAs, volunteer time was the least significant aspect of additional support.

Figure 2.6: Added value by NIA size (2012-13)
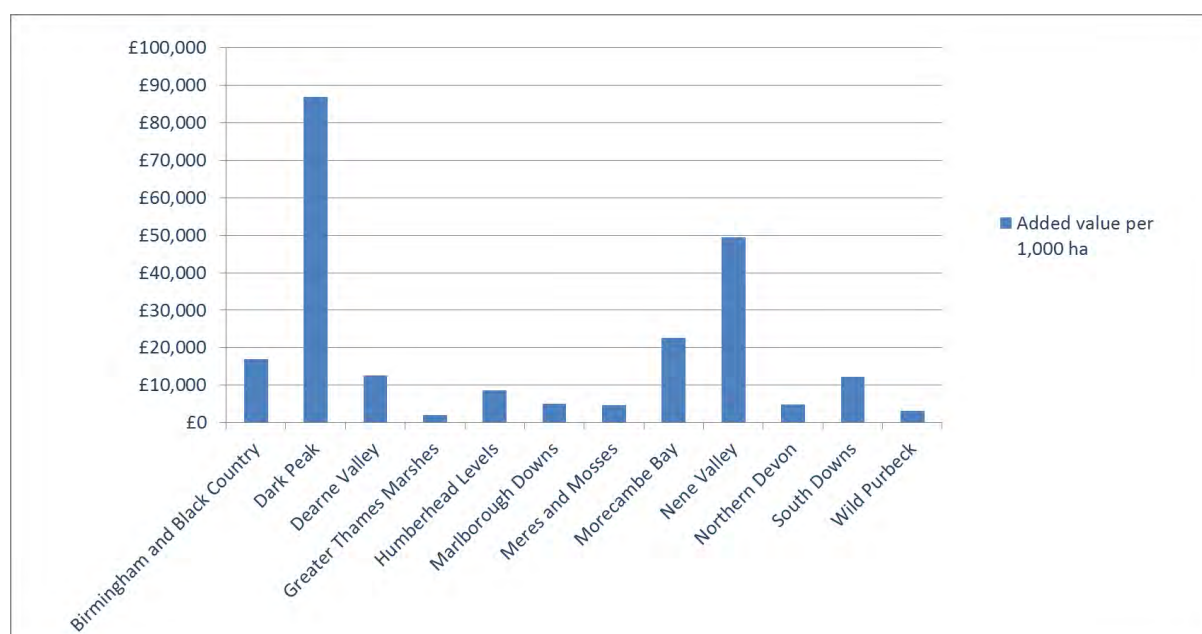
Source: analysis based on Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims

Of course, not all NIAs are the same – they vary according to size, number of partners and other factors. Figure 2.6 shows the value added for each NIA normalised by geographic area (value added per 1,000 ha).

Figure 2.6 shows that, once normalised for size, three NIAs (Morecambe Bay, Nene Valley and Dark Peak) had the highest added value.

Finally, the government expected to contribute £1.5 million to NIAs in the first year and £3 million in each of the two subsequent years. Figure 2.7 shows the projected income profile for the NIAs from this and other sources over the three-year period of the programme (2012-15). This shows that, in almost all cases, the NIA grant is expected to be smaller (in most cases significantly smaller) than income and support from other sources. A number of NIAs have already secured additional support, whilst other have applied, or have planned, for this. Overall, income from other sources is expected to contribute over 80% of the total, meaning that each £1 invested by government should result in nearly £6.80 in additional support.

Figure 2.7: Projected income for NIAs (2012-15)

Source: analysis based on 'three year programme profile' information included in Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims

Human resources

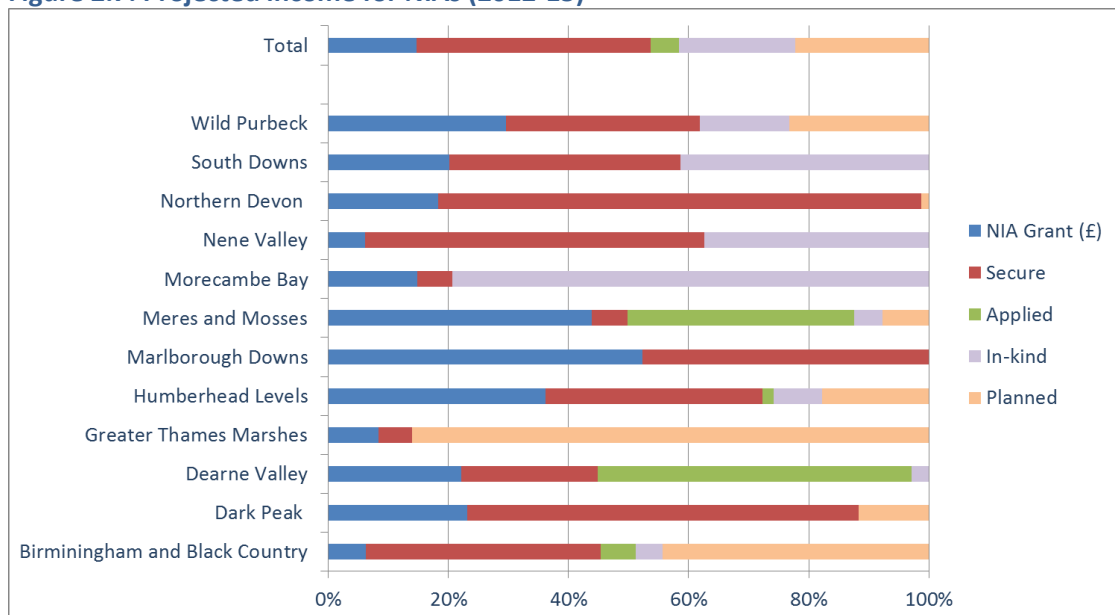This sub-section assesses the human resources available for the NIAs in Year 1. Human resources in this case includes the physical number of people and hours of effort inputted by an NIA plus time contributed by volunteers, and also the skills and expertise available to the NIAs, for example in support of particular activities or broader management and administration of partnerships.

In Year 1 the data available are intended represent a baseline: they include as far as possible the number of staff and volunteering hours inputted, with a break-down of types of volunteering. However, with the data available it has not been possible to evaluate in more detail skills availability and needs, a gap which it is intended will be addressed more fully in Year 2.

Table 2.1 presents an overview of staffing arrangements and challenges in Year 1, based on a review of each NIA's Business Plan and quarterly progress reports.

Table 2.1: NIA Year 1 staffing arrangements and challenges

NIA	Overview of staffing arrangements and challenges identified
Birmingham and Black Country	A decentralised approach with centralised resources kept to minimum required to manage delivery, coordination and monitoring and evaluation. Lead organisations (Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and Black Country) employ a Conservation Projects Manager who manages the NIA (75% full time employee) with support from Finance Manager (15% full time employee). . Additional Wildlife Trust senior staff who contribute in-kind support include the Chief Executive and Development Manager. Local Records Centre (EcoRecord) and Consultancy for Environmental Economics & Policy (CEEP) commissioned to undertake M&E on behalf of partnership. Individual projects are managed within relevant partner organisations (including the Wildlife Trust) with support from the core NIA team. **Challenges:** • Progress reports in quarters 3 and 4 indicate NIA partnership staffing levels insufficient, to be addressed in Year 2 with recruitment of an NIA Project Officer.
Dark Peak	Business Plan indicates the NIA Project Officer will have overall coordination responsibility. Individual programmes assigned to specific partners, with responsibility for delivery, with a lead Officer identified in each partner to coordinate delivery and volunteer management. Quarterly Progress reports indicate a PhD student recruited to be dedicated to visitor surveys, and the recruitment of a Woodland Officer jointly between a number of partners.

NIA	Overview of staffing arrangements and challenges identified
	Challenges: • Managing volunteers *"risk as always is that either people don't turn up when they say they are going to, or not as many as you hoped"*.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Quarterly progress reports identify a full time Project Manager and two Community Rangers (Part Time). Business Plan indicated the team would include two Project Officers and one Development Officer in addition to the Project Manager. Senior staff within the RSPB as the Accountable Body would provide high-level oversight of programme activities and financial management / tracking. Projects managed within identified, contracted partners. **Challenges:** none identified.
Greater Thames Marshes	Thames Estuary Partnership and Medway Council officers to provide administrative and financial aspects of NIA project management (exact staffing not indicated). Business Plan indicates a part time administrative post created. Quarterly Progress reports indicate that a Project Management Officer has been employed part time (2 days per week). A Community Engagement Officer recruited end of Year 1 to commence work in Year 2. **Challenges:** • Project Management Officer time increased to 3 days per week in third quarter.
Humberhead Levels	Business Plan indicates there will be a full-time Programme Manager. Individual projects managed by specific partners, with coordination by the Programme Manager. Quarterly Progress reports indicates that a Wetlands Advisor and CONNECT coordinator appointed in addition to the Programme Manager (not clear if these are full-time positions). **Challenges:** • Changes in Programme Manager noted to have caused "slight issues in capacity". Programme Manager has changed twice in Year 1. Interim coverage was provided during changes.
Marlborough Downs	Business Plan indicates a Project Manager, Financial Controller and four Delivery Groups relating to specific areas of activity. No direct employed staff as management and delivery undertaken by consultants, contractors and volunteers (with farmers being important for delivery). **Challenges:** • Coordinating delivery groups, and the challenge this presents for the Project Manager, although Delivery Groups became more active in third and fourth quarters. • Coordinating volunteer potential is a challenge, as many want to be involved but difficult to coordinate in time available. • Non-delivery of some activities, notably by volunteers.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Business Plan indicates that Shropshire Wildlife Trust provide: administrative support; financial management and accountant. A Programme Manager, delivery staff (number not specified) and administrator also noted. Three full-time posts mentioned: Farming Adviser; WFD Adviser; and Community Officer. A Wetland Officer also to be included. Wildlife Trust providing office space (hot desking). Quarterly Progress reports indicate a 2-day per week volunteer to assist with events planning, and the use of "several" regular volunteers. **Challenges:** • "Knowledge shortfall" in nutrient management, addressed through a training course.
Morecambe Bay	Business Plan identifies a NIA Delivery Team to be hosted in Natural England Kendal Office, consisting of: Woodland land management specialist; Grassland land management specialist; Wetlands land management specialist; Community engagement specialist; and Resource specialist contractors. One of the Delivery Team is an accredited project manager. Volunteers recruited for specific tasks, such as visitor surveying. An Academy Ranger apprentice also mentioned. **Challenges:** • Challenge for partner organisations to provide adequate support given other commitments. • Integrating working of NIA staff in different organisations. • Additional funding sourced for programme management.
Nene Valley	Business Plan indicates a full-time Natural Development Officer and part-time posts relating to specific NIA projects including: administration; local planning authority officer support, post-doctoral work etc. Dedicated volunteer teams to carry of bird surveys within NIA. **Challenges:** • Decision to employ more experienced staff part-time rather than less experienced full-time. • Historic challenge recruiting sufficient experienced and dedicated volunteers for bird surveys.
Northern Devon	Business Plan indicates that the NIA will be delivered by five full-time and one part-time member of staff: Project Manager; two NIA Advisory Officers; Woodland Advisory Officer; Water Resources Advisory Officer; and a Community Outreach Officer. Quarterly Progress reports indicate 5.5 full-time employees, with Community Outreach Officer reduced to part-time (0.5) (although it is understood this has recently increased to full time, and supplemented by 0.5 full time employee

NIA	Overview of staffing arrangements and challenges identified
	from Devon County Council (Biosphere Reserve) staff. Student placements also used. **Challenges:** • Time and effort required to recruit appropriate staff. • Delay in recruiting staff leading to some delays in delivery. • Insufficient capacity, particularly for community outreach ambitions.
South Downs Way Ahead	Business Plan indicates a Project Officer with overall coordination and project responsibility. National Park Rangers to lead specific implementation activities, with Focal Area Champions (land owners or managers). Specific partners to also play a role in delivery of projects. Quarterly Progress reports indicate a NIA Administrator recruited. **Challenges:** • Potential risk of inadequate staff resources in some partner organisations.
Wild Purbeck	A Project Coordinator to manage delivery through small working groups from relevant partner organisations. Part-time staff member to work on the Community Gateway. **Challenges:** • Appointment of Project Coordinator took longer than expected (commenced work January 2013). • Delivery with existing staff identified as a challenge and the need for additional staff noted.

Source: Based on information included in NIA Business Plans and Year 1 quarterly Progress Reports

Table 2.1 indicates a number of common staffing approaches and challenges, including:

- Most NIAs have recruited or allocated senior staff within lead organisations to fill a dedicated post of Project Manager or Officer. The approach in Morecambe Bay appears to differ slightly from others, with a Delivery Team across a number of themes and no clearly nominated overall manager, although the Business Plan does indicate that a member of the Delivery Team is an accredited project management specialist.

- Although the exact nature of the Project Manager roles is not always stated, it appears that in all NIAs but Greater Thames Marshes the dedicated Project Manager is employed full-time on NIA activities. In Greater Thames Marshes the post of Project Administrator was originally employed for two days per week, but increased to three days per week in the third quarter.

- Based on the information available, the number of NIA support and thematic (e.g. wetlands, woodlands) staff directly employed appears to vary between NIAs. For example Birmingham and Black Country have decided to keep the centralised staff resources to the minimum required to manage delivery, with responsibility for specific themes allocated among existing staff from the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust. Other NIAs have recruited for specific roles, such as Northern Devon who have employed the equivalent of 5.5 full-time employees including: the Project Manager; two NIA Advisory Officers; Woodland Advisory Officer; Water Resources Advisory Officer; and a Community Outreach Officer (part-time). In Marlborough Downs NIA no staff have been directly employed by the NIA, with all management and delivery contracted to an external consultancy.

- A common approach to staffing specific projects is to assign this responsibility to partner organisations with existing knowledge, expertise or activities in particular areas of activity. The coordination and delivery of individual projects is therefore devolved to organisations considered best placed to deliver them.

- The practical and logistical arrangements for effective staffing of the NIAs is not commonly reported in Business Plans or Progress Reports. However some examples emerge, such as Meres and Mosses of the Marches where the Shropshire Wildlife Trust is hosting NIA staff, providing a 'hot-desk' facility and lap-tops to enable effective working.

- As intended by the NIA initiative, all of the NIAs are making use of volunteers to help deliver activities and outcomes. A more detailed breakdown of the input provided by volunteers is

included below, however Table 2.1 indicates that the roles filled by volunteers varies considerably, with some used to support general activities such as wildlife surveys, while others have been integrated into NIA delivery teams, such as in Meres and Mosses of the Marches where a volunteer has been recruited part-time (2 days per week) to assist with event planning.

Challenges identified in relation to staff resources in Year 1 include:

- Understanding the scale of the resourcing required for effective NIA management and delivery was noted as a challenge in many NIAs, for example: Wild Purbeck identified the challenge of delivering with existing staff and a need for additional staff; Northern Devon reported insufficient capacity, particularly in community outreach; coordination of Delivery Groups and volunteering in Marlborough Downs was identified as a particular challenge; Greater Thames Marshes increased the time allocated to their Project Administrator from two to three days per week; and Birmingham and the Black Country have reported insufficient staffing levels which is to be addressed in Year 2.

- The costs, time and effort required to recruit appropriate staff was identified as a challenge in some NIAs (e.g. Northern Devon, Nene Valley, Wild Purbeck), with this factor mentioned as potentially risking delays in some cases.

- Some NIAs have reported that using volunteers for the delivery of specific project activities has been a challenge, particularly as it can be difficult to predict levels of volunteering (Dark Peak) and that there is a risk that planned activities may not be delivered if volunteers do not deliver (Marlborough Downs).

- Some partner organisations may not have sufficient staff resources to deliver expected project activities, for example Morecambe Bay reported that partner organisations face a challenge to provide adequate support given other commitments, and South Downs Way Ahead reported that there is a potential risk of inadequate staff resources in some partner organisations.

It should be noted that these challenges are self-reported by the NIAs, and therefore are known risks or problems which are being and in some cases have been actively resolved through efforts within NIA management teams. A key question for evaluation to investigate in Year 2 will be whether these challenges have been overcome and whether any lessons learned have been shared as part of the innovative nature of the initiative.

As noted above most of the NIAs have mobilised volunteers to participate in and help deliver NIA activities, outcomes and outputs. Figure 2.8 below presents an overview of the total number of volunteer days (based on 7.5 hours / day) as reported by the NIAs (these data were extracted from the monitoring and evaluation online tool). Figure 2.9 then provides a breakdown of the categories of volunteering across all NIAs.

Figure 2.8 indicates that the total levels of volunteering reported in Year 1 vary significantly across the NIAs. Some NIAs have reported no or limited volunteering activity in Year 1: Greater Thames Marshes (none); Northern Devon (13 days). Others have reported very high levels of volunteering, including Nene Valley (more than 3,300 days), Morecambe Bay and Humberhead Levels (both more than 1,300 days). Based on these data the average (mean) number of days volunteering across the NIAs is about 700 days.

The very large differences in the number of volunteer days reported by the NIAs may be due to different interpretations by NIAs of what constitutes, and has therefore been recorded as NIA related volunteering (e.g. whether it is volunteering directly associated with NIA activities or wider volunteering in the area contributing to NIA outcomes) but are also likely to correspond with different types of activity undertaken in each NIA. For example Morecambe Bay held a "BIG

volunteer day" which sought to simultaneously coordinate volunteering across multiple sites within the NIA (seeking to encourage "landscape scale" volunteering), and Nene Valley used regular teams of volunteers to undertake bird surveys.

The data are reported without description of the specific activities undertaken, however four categories are used to classify volunteering time. These are described in the box below.

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 a requirement, 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

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Figure 2.8: Number of volunteer days by category of service provided
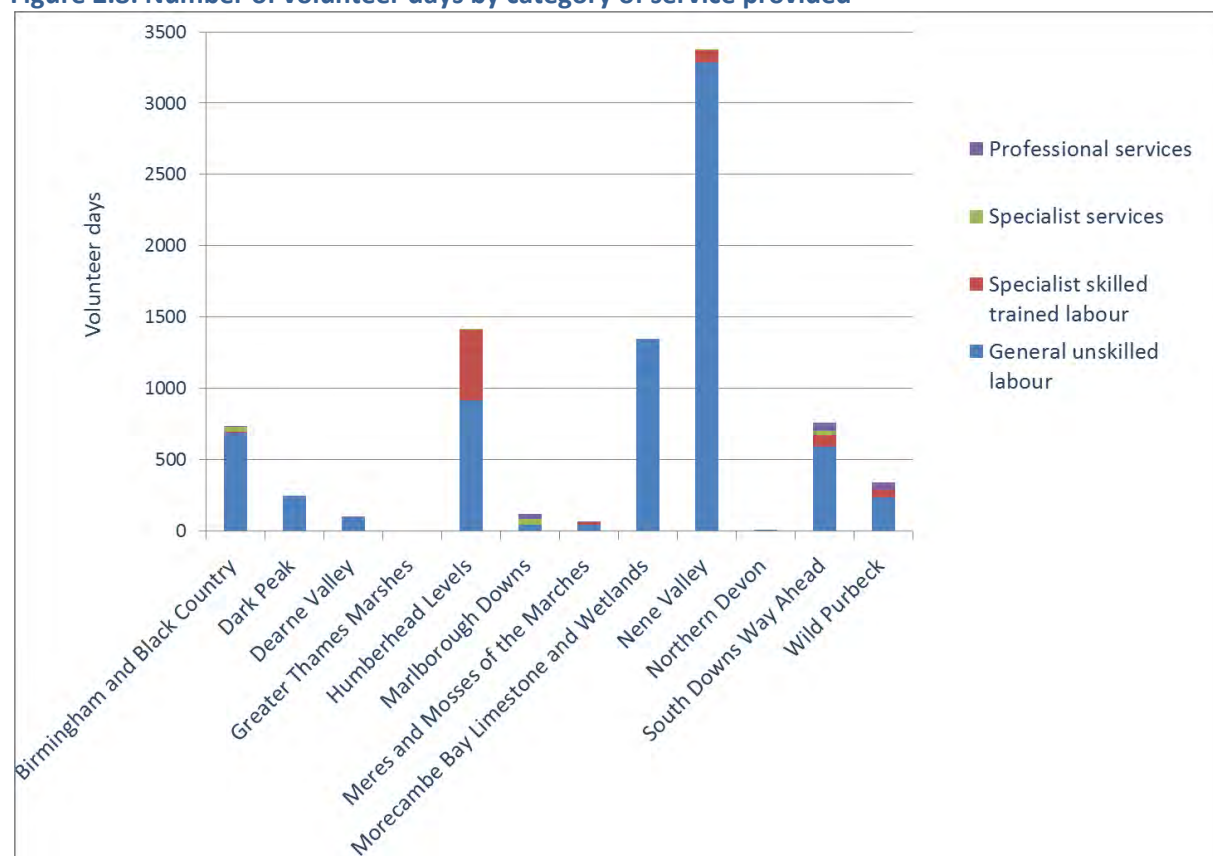
Source: Analysis based on data recorded by NIAs in the online reporting tool for indicator: Number of volunteer hours on NIA activities

Figures 2.8 and 2.9 indicate that the majority of volunteer time inputted to the NIA activities in Year 1 were in the 'general, unskilled labour' category. Across all the NIAs this category comprised 88% of total volunteering, with 'specialist, skilled labour' comprising 9% and 'specialist services' and professional services' comprising 1% and 2% respectively. These proportions are perhaps not

surprising given the nature of NIA activities, and reflect the 'hands-on' nature of NIA activities in seeking to deliver landscape scale improvements in habitats and biodiversity. These data also suggest that even in Year 1 the NIAs have achieved significant mobilisation of volunteering activity focussed on physical improvement of the environment or (through surveys) and improved understanding.

Figure 2.9: Percentage share of volunteer days by category of service provided
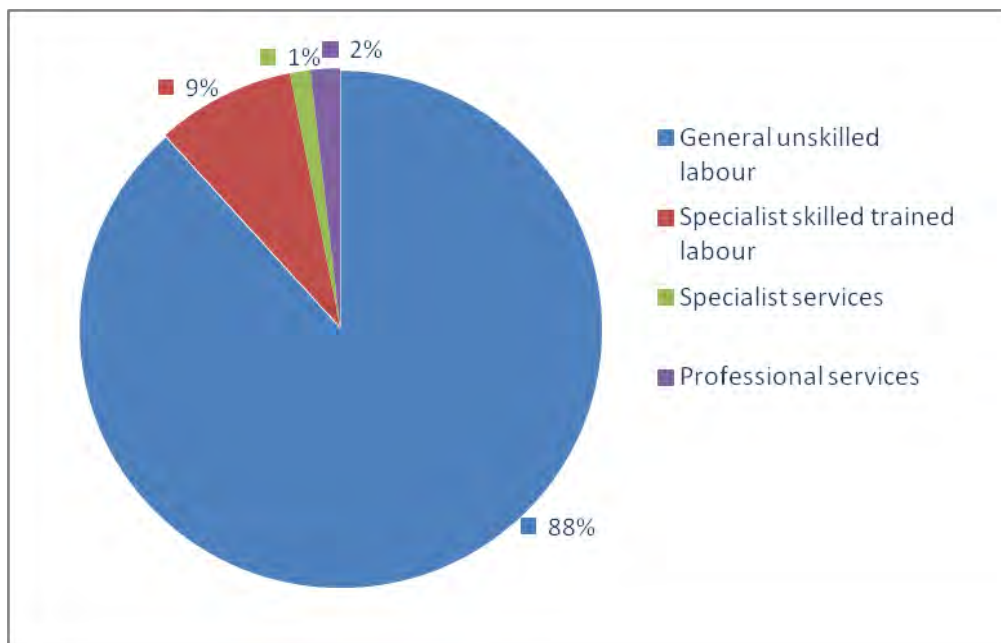
Source: Analysis based on data recorded by NIAs in the online reporting tool for indicator: Number of volunteer hours on NIA activities

Partnerships' governance arrangements

In considering the NIA partnerships as an **Input**, this sub-section describes the NIA partnerships in terms of their governance arrangements at the start of the NIA initiative and considers the nature and extent of existing partnerships on which the NIA partnerships may have built, whether governance arrangements within partnerships are formalised or informal, and the experience that existing or new partnerships may have in managing projects relevant to the NIA activities.

The implementation of partnership working during Year 1 and the development and expansion of the NIA partnerships are explored in: Section 3: Evaluation of Activities and Process Undertaken by the NIAs; and Section 7: Evaluation of the Contribution to Partnership Working Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts.

Based on the information available, Table 2.2 sets out for each NIA: whether the NIA partnership is new or based on an existing partnership; the nature of the partnership agreement; and, any evidence of previous experience in managing delivery on a scale with the NIAs.

Table 2.2 indicates that:

- 10 out of the 12 (83%) partnerships can be considered to have existed prior to the NIA initiative, with only two (17%) being considered new partnerships established specifically for NIA delivery.

- In relation to historic partnerships a mixture of formal and informal partnership arrangements are seen. Of the 10 NIAs where partnerships already existed six are considered to be have been based on a formal partnership agreement, and four were based

on a combination of formal and informal agreements. Note all NIAs are required to have memorandums of agreement as part of the formal funding procedure. These are discussed in Section 3 on processes and activities.

- All of these existing partnerships on which NIA partnerships were based are considered to have previous experience in delivering natural environment projects comparable with NIA projects (e.g. of relevant scale, engaging local communities and volunteers, working cross-organisationally).

The evaluation of governance arrangements has been based on a review of information available from the NIA partnership Business Plans, NIA Funding Agreements and quarterly Progress Reports and is therefore partial in Year 1. A more complete analysis will be undertaken in Year 2 drawing on direct data gathering, through interviews or other means, from the NIAs. As an example it may be interesting to identify whether the partnerships can be categorised according to their governance characteristics (more information on a potential typology of partnerships is included in Section 3). Exploring these historic partnership and governance aspects in more detail is considered important as context in understanding the relative success and achievements of the NIA partnerships.

Table 2.2: Partnership history, characteristics and experience

NIA	Existing or new partnership	Historic arrangements: formal or informal	Previous experience
Birmingham and Black Country	**Existing** Based on Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Partnership, hosted by the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. Many new partners joined the NIA partnership.	**Formal and Informal** The Wildlife Trust have a formal relationship with the Biodiversity Partnership. Other relationships are both formal and informal.	**Yes** The Biodiversity and Geodiversity Partnerships and the Wildlife Trust are established groups with experiencing of delivering projects to support related UK policy.
Dark Peak	**Existing** The NIA partnership based on three existing and overlapping partnerships: the Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (SCaMP), Sheffield's Moors Partnership and partnerships based around the Peak District National Park.	**Formal** SCaMP is a formal relationship between the RSPB and United Utilities. The Sheffield Moors Partnership is a formal grouping. Partnerships around the National Park are also largely formal.	**Yes** The existing partnerships have coordinated and delivered numerous projects.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	**Existing** The NIA partnership is based on the Dearne Valley Green Heart Partnership (DVGHP) which was established in 2005.	**Formal** DVGHP is a formal partnership of three local authorities, the RSPB, Natural England and the Environment Agency.	**Yes** The Dearne Valley Green Heart Partnership a six year track record of delivering landscape-scale natural environment projects and community engagement.
Greater Thames Marshes	**Existing** The lead organisation, the Thames Estuary Partnership (TEP), is an established grouping.	**Formal and informal** TEP is a registered charity but it is understood that partners are informally engaged. Partners and organisations that provide funding may do so via formal arrangements.	**Yes** TEP is a well-established organisation that has delivered numerous projects.
Humberhead Levels	**Existing** The Humberhead Levels Partnership (HLP) which administers the NIA was established in 2001. 5 of the 19 partners in the NIA were not part of the HLP (26%).	**Formal** The HLP is established via a Memorandum of Agreement between the partners.	**Yes** The HLP is an established partnership that has delivered a range of projects in the area as lead and as supporting partners.

NIA	Existing or new partnership	Historic arrangements: formal or informal	Previous experience
Marlborough Downs	**New** The Marlborough Downs formed a new charitable company to bid for the NIA grant; the NIA is supported by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and Wiltshire Council).	n/a	n/a Not applicable as not an existing partnership however partners and the local consultancy contracted to manage the NIA delivery have significant experience in relevant areas.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	**Existing** The main group (the Meres & Mosses Landscape Partnership Scheme) are a long standing partnership administered through the Shropshire Wildlife Trust.	**Formal** There is a signed agreement stemming from a previous Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme.	**Yes** The Meres & Mosses Landscape Partnership Scheme has delivered large projects, notably the Heritage Lottery Fund project previously referred to.
Morecambe Bay	**Existing** The NIA is based around the Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership and supported by the Morecambe Bay Wildlife Network (MBWN).	**Formal and informal** The AONB Partnership is formally determined and agreed, the MBWN is an informal grouping of related organisations.	**Yes** The AONB Partnership and MBWN have experience of delivering large projects within the area individually and with other bodies.
Nene Valley	**Existing** Based on information available, the NIA appears to be a new partnership but is based around existing relationships, notably the Nene Regional Park, who provide secretariat to the NIA with support from other organisations.	**Formal and informal** The Nene Regional Park is a Community Interest Company, so is in effect formal. A key partner: the Northamptonshire Leadership Group (NLG) appears to be an informal grouping.	**Yes** The Regional Park coordinates a large number of activities and projects as do the NLG.
Northern Devon	**Existing** The NIA is coordinated by the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Partnership which is an established coordinating body. The Wildlife Trust is the lead organisation and worked previously with the Partnership.	**Formal** The North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Partnership is formalised via Terms of Reference which have their roots in the Local Strategic Partnership for the area.	**Yes** The Biosphere Partnership are involved in numerous strategy and implementation projects across the area.
South Downs Way Ahead	**New** The NIA partnership led by the South Downs National Park Authority is effectively new (created in Summer 2011).	n/a	n/a Not applicable as not an existing partnership however the South Downs National Park Authority have significant experience in relevant areas.
Wild Purbeck	**Existing** The Dorset AONB Partnership is the lead organisation. This group was formed in 2003 and has established relationships with the NIA partners.	**Formal** The AONB Partnership is formally determined and agreed.	**Yes** The AONB Partnership has delivered numerous projects since its inception.

Note: Please note the information in this table is based on that available in public documents (NIA Business Plans, Funding Agreements) and should be considered partial.

Networks

Networks in the context of this evaluation of **Inputs** to the NIAs are defined as the existence and strength of factors such as: public and community trust in conservation and biodiversity organisations; and the networks between organisations involved in conservation and biodiversity. An understanding of such networks is considered valuable as a contextual factor for the evaluation,

enabling exploration of how such networks can help partnerships in the delivery of outcomes at the landscape scale and involving community groups, individuals and organisations.

As the NIAs were not required to report on or present such information the evaluation in Year 1 is not able to present a complete picture or assessment of networks. However, the NIAs were required to engage with communities as part of the Business Plan process, and a few examples of existing networks identified are presented in the box below.

Examples of existing 'networks' mentioned in NIA Business Plans:

The **Birmingham and the Black Country** NIA planned to "build on existing initiatives like the Black Country Living Landscape Community Involvement Programme" which engages with over 100 "local Friends' Groups" who are engaged with open spaces across the NIA area.

The existing **Dearne Valley Green Heart** Partnership has engaged with and involved communities in a range of actions previously including planting woodlands, restoring green spaces and painting underpasses on the Transpennine trail. In addition the Dearne Valley Green Heart NIA sits in the South Yorkshire Local Nature Partnership area, and the NIA reported that "there are already good links between these two initiatives, supported by the South Yorkshire Forest Partnership".

In the **Humberhead Levels** NIA, the success of the previous Wetland Vision Programme was identified as an indication that there are "sufficient willing landowners to ensure that [NIA] targets will be met".

It is proposed that data collection in Year 2, using interviews or questionnaires will be used to build a more detailed and comprehensive picture of the social, community and organisational networks in which NIA partnerships and activities are being delivered. This data gathering will seek to understand more fully:

- The evidence of existing public and/or community level trust in conservation and biodiversity organisations, such as through public support for campaigns, evidence of work with community organisations (including those not traditionally working with or interested in biodiversity and conservation).

- The evidence of existing strong networks between conservation and biodiversity organisations, for example: cooperation on campaigns, events, festivals. This could also include information sharing (such as cooperation on research and information centres).

Overview of data / analysis that may be possible in Years 2 and 3

In Year 2 and Year 3 it is proposed to expand on the evaluation that has been possible in Year 1 in relation to resources invested, including:

- Detailed information on human resources, such as partnership expertise and staff skills, both available (for the delivery of NIA objectives and specific activities) and required (skill needs).

- Existing relevant partnership capacity at the outset of NIA initiative to enable more comprehensive comparison across NIAs.

- Nature and extent of networks, community and public trust and support for NIA partnerships and their activities.

It is proposed to address these data gaps and associated analysis in Year 2 and Year 3 through:

- Direct data collection from NIA partnerships, particularly in the form of semi-structured interviews or questionnaires.

- Identification and exchange of information with other research initiatives, for example other partnership initiatives (e.g. Catchment Based Approach pilots) and natural environment initiatives.

- Additional data collection and analysis, for example from existing data sets, where appropriate.

3. Evaluation of the Processes and Activities Undertaken by the NIAs

> **Key messages from Year 1: process and activities undertaken by the NIAs**
>
> - All NIAs developed detailed Business Plans and specific financial agreements that form the detail for the grant, and have been required to produce quarterly Progress Reports. These provide a **valuable overview of the 'trajectory' of delivery in each NIA and an important project management tool**.
>
> - Based on data available most NIAs expended between 5% and 7% of their total expenditure in Year 1 on monitoring and evaluation, and **the majority of NIAs have successfully reported on more than half of their selected monitoring and evaluation indicators** including both core and optional indicators. NIAs have chosen to use between 14 and 28 indicators each, and in the first year each NIA has entered at least some data against 13 indictors on average.
>
> - A number of **issues arose during the Year 1 monitoring and evaluation activities**. All issues raised by the NIA partnerships during Year 1 have been logged, **the Phase 2 contractors will be working with the NIA partnerships, Natural England and Defra to address and resolve these in Year 2**.
>
> - **Most NIAs have between 10 and 15 partners**, though the number of partners varies: one NIA has 54 partners (Birmingham and Black Country) whereas Marlborough Downs has only three.
>
> - The NIA partnerships are also very varied. Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry Commission are partners in many of the NIAs. Also of note is that **private sector organisations are partners in eight NIAs, perhaps indicating the diversity of interest in the NIA projects**.
>
> - Already in Year 1, **the NIAs have undertaken considerable community engagement activity**, including working with schools (in five NIAs), undertaking surveys (in two NIAs) and activities such as concerts and sustainable tourism.
>
> - Volunteers have been involved in numerous NIA activities, and helped deliver NIA projects, and **many NIAs have sought to build volunteer capacity by providing training** for volunteers.
>
> - A number of **NIAs are working with local universities and research organisations, with much research being used to develop an understanding of innovative approaches to natural environment project delivery and assessment**. Ecosystem services is a focus of research in at least four NIAs.

Introduction

This section presents an assessment of the **Process / Activities** step in the evaluation logic model (see below).
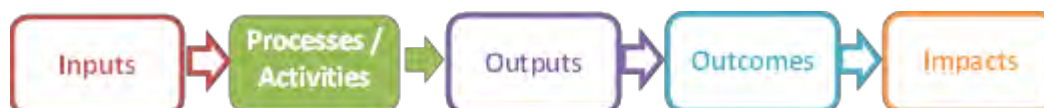
This part of the evaluation is considering the processes and activities adopted by the NIAs to deliver their own objectives and the wider policy objectives of the NIA initiative. This evaluation seeks in Year 1 to explore activities undertaken by the NIAs in relation to the management and planning of the NIA partnerships including the coordination and building of these partnerships and their monitoring and evaluation activities required. This section also considers the activities of the NIAs in

relation to engaging with communities and other organisations, encouraging volunteering and in developing innovative approaches and new research.

This section considers six broad categories of activities, however it is recognised that in practice many activities may contribute to more than one category (for example community outreach activities may also be aiming to encourage volunteering).

- **Management, planning and assessment** – including the NIA visions and Business Plans and the process of preparing them, whether NIAs have assessed constraints and opportunities, and evidence that existing activities in NIAs have been mapped.

- **Monitoring and evaluation** – including the resources spent and planned for monitoring and evaluation activities, the monitoring and evaluation indicators selected by each NIA and the progress achieved in reporting against them, as well as the challenges and issues which arose in Year 1 with applying the M&E framework and using the online reporting tool.

- **Partnership building and coordination** – including the nature of NIA partnership agreements, the organisations involved in the partnerships and the characteristics and working arrangements of NIA partnerships.

- **Community engagement and outreach** – including the activities of the NIAs in relation to community engagement and the main focus of such engagement.

- **Encouraging and organising volunteering** – including the activities of the NIAs in relation to encouraging and mobilising volunteering, and the activities being delivered in NIAs by volunteers.

- **Developing innovation and research** – including research being undertaken by NIAs or in which they are involved, relationships with universities including research funded by NIAs.

- **Support to NIAs** – including that provided by Natural England (for example through local advisers), Defra and other agencies such as the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency.

Overview of data available

The evaluation in Year 1 of the process / activities of the NIAs is based on a review and analysis of the following data sources:

- **Monitoring and evaluation framework indicators**, particularly under the partnership working and social and economic themes as entered into the NIA monitoring and evaluation online tool. Potential indicators included: *attitudes of local community to NIA; assessment of partnership working*; *audience reach*; *level of awareness of NIA in local community*; *number of enquiries*; *local indicator of delivery*; *local indicator of leadership and influence*; and *number of volunteer hours on NIA activities*. In practice these indicators have only been used to a limited extent in the Year 1 evaluation due to partial coverage across NIAs (only completed by some NIAs) and difficulties in extracting data in a format useful for evaluation.

- **Financial reporting data** submitted by the NIAs to Natural England and collated by them. These data provide the basis for the evaluation of financial resources used to fund monitoring and evaluation activities.

- **NIA Business Plans and Funding Agreements**. These provided a valuable source of information on the nature of each NIA partnership, their planned activities in relation to partnership building, volunteering and community outreach as well as information on the existence of links to universities and other research projects.

- **NIA Partnership Agreements / Memorandums of Agreement**, which were the basis of the evaluation of partnership building and coordination.

- **Quarterly and annual progress reports** produced by the NIAs, which were a key source of information for the evaluation as these include self-reporting on activities, progress and challenges within each NIA over the course of Year 1.

It is recognised that for some NIAs the information available from these sources will not represent all activities in the first year. For example Northern Devon NIA has indicated that, due to delays in the recording of partner activities, the figures recorded in quarterly and annual Progress Reports are likely to be an incomplete record of the scale and scope of overall activities in the NIA.

Management, planning and assessment

This sub-section seeks to assess the planning and management processes of the NIAs from a strategic perspective, for example in relation to business planning, vision setting and the identification of constraints and opportunities. In Year 1 this assessment is based on a review of the NIA General Guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions documents produced by Natural England, as well as the NIA Business Plans, the quarterly Progress Reports and other publically available information such as NIA websites.

The NIA General Guidelines for NIA applications set out a three stage application process. All partnerships successfully selected for Stage 2 were required to develop detailed Business Plans from their first stage application and applying the NIA criteria. Detailed guidance and a template were provided for the expected content of the Stage 2 Business Plans[19]. An overview is set out in the box below.

NIA Stage 2 Business Plan required contents:

1. **Executive summary**

2. **Introduction**

3. **NIA ambition** – including the NIA vision, and how the proposed NIA aligns with the NIA criteria

4. **Objectives, outputs, outcomes** – including SMART† objectives, quantified and timebound outputs and outcomes, an NIA map or maps, and plans for monitoring and evaluation

5. **NIA delivery** – including a work programme, project milestones, and how activities fit with NIA criteria

6. **Value for money** – demonstration of how business plan is based on a value for money approach and a clear rationale

7. **Sustainability** – how the NIA will progress after March 2015

8. **Governance and management** – including structures for partnership working, risk management, staff and volunteer responsibilities, financial responsibility and monitoring and evaluation

9. **Finally** – an endnote on the impact of the NIA by the year 2020

†SMART: Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic and Timebound

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The 12 initial NIAs are required to submit quarterly Progress Reports to Natural England to check their Business Plans are on track. The Progress Reports set out: a progress summary and detailed reporting on outputs and outcomes under each NIA objective, including risks emerging; an overview of added value within the NIA; progress checking against planned project milestones; reporting on conditions and permissions; overview of publicity and project materials generated; and summary

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[19] http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/Stage2-guidance_tcm6-28331.pdf [accessed 27 June 2013]

reporting on project management, including planning, staffing, engagement with local communities and finance.

The quarterly Progress Reports also included an appraisal template for Natural England use based on completed reporting from NIAs. It is noted that these appraisal were not completed systematically in Year 1 but could provide a very useful evaluation resource in Year 2.

One NIA (Birmingham and Black Country) also produced and is using an Excel based 'project tracker'. This listed all projects, including details such as site location, partners involved, annual and quarterly milestones and which delivery themes each project contributes to. The project tracker provides a structured tool for reporting progress against each individual project and delivery theme. Based on information available Birmingham and Black Country are the only NIA to have developed and used such a tool.

In Year 2 it is proposed to explore the NIA management and planning in more detail, including aspects such as:

- The process of developing NIA Business Plans and Visions, in particular the level and nature of community involvement (i.e. are visions 'shared').
- A more in depth overview and comparative evaluation of NIA level, and specific project management and planning.
- Exploring the extent to which constraints and opportunities have been or are being assessed in each NIA.

To gather information which will enable evaluation of these and other NIA management and planning processes will require additional data gathering, for example through semi-structured interviews with NIA Project Managers or Natural England local advisers, document review based on materials provided by NIAs (where available).

Monitoring and evaluation

The NIA partnerships are required to develop monitoring and evaluation of their NIA delivery following an existing M&E framework (see Section 1 for information on the NIA monitoring and evaluation requirements and process).

Section 4 includes a high-level analysis of NIA expenditure in Year 1 under five categories, including monitoring and evaluation. Table 3.1 draws on these data and shows the amount and percentage of total expenditure used for monitoring and evaluation. These data are as submitted by NIAs to Natural England as part of their Year 1 financial reporting in March 2013.

It should be noted that at this time some NIAs reported zero expenditure on monitoring and evaluation. This is considered to be a result of two factors:

- No expenditure may have been specifically recorded against monitoring and evaluation because expenses incurred on these activities have been allocated to other expense categories: e.g. due to monitoring being delivered through in-kind support, project management, or activities (e.g. mapping or surveys) recorded under other project objectives.
- Financial reports were submitted to Natural England *before* Year 1 monitoring and evaluation activity was completed as a result of an extension of the monitoring and evaluation deadline from end of March 2013 to mid-May 2013. Expenditure on Year 1 monitoring and evaluation will therefore in many cases be included in Year 2 financial reporting.

These data should therefore be seen as indicative rather than complete.

Table 3.1: NIA expenditure on monitoring and evaluation in Year 1

NIA	Total NIA expenditure	M&E expenditure	Percentage on M&E
Birmingham and Black Country	£118,887.00	£8,100.00	**7%**
Dark Peak	£154,212.00	£2,175.59	**1%**
Dearne Valley Green Heart	£69,740.00	£3,279.33	**5%**
Greater Thames Marshes	£115,769.00	-	-
Humberhead Levels	£111,018.00	£7,413.81	**7%**
Marlborough Downs	£113,694.00	£5,134.65	**5%**
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	£156,316.48	-	-
Morecambe Bay	£165,833.30	-	-
Nene Valley	£146,273.00	£8,030.00	**5%**
Northern Devon	£121,656.00	-	**-**
South Downs Way Ahead	£110,448.00	-	**-**
Wild Purbeck	£125,272.00	£7,344.00	**6%**
Totals	**£1,509,118.78**	**£41,477.38**	**3%**

Source: analysis based on Year 1 financial summary of spend spreadsheet, collated by Natural England based on NIA financial claims.

Note: cells marked "-" are where an NIA reported £0 in Year 1, although this does not mean that these NIAs did not expend any resource on M&E: based on information provided by Greater Thames Marshes, Morecambe Bay and South Downs, the zero reported expenditure to M&E is due to all expenses incurred through M&E being absorbed elsewhere, either through in-kind support, project management, or specific activities (e.g. mapping) recorded under other project objectives (e.g. in the case of Greater Thames Marshes Objective 1: mapping pressures and opportunities).

Table 3.1 indicates that those NIAs who recorded expenditure explicitly against monitoring and evaluation, expended between 5% and 7% of their total expenditure in Year 1 on monitoring and evaluation. An average expenditure of 3% is calculated based on the overall spend on monitoring and evaluation (£41,477.38) as a percentage of total NIA expenditure. Calculating an average percentage for those NIAs which reported expenditure on monitoring and evaluation increases this proportion to approximately 5% in Year 1.

Figure 3.1 is based on an analysis of the entries made by NIA partnerships into the online reporting tool and presents: the total number of indicators selected by each NIA; and how many have been completed in Year 1 (dark blue shading). Figure 3.1 illustrates a wide divergence in the number of indicators the NIAs have chosen to report against: Dearne Valley have selected the most with 28 indicators, while five NIA partnerships have selected 14 indicators. This divergence probably illustrates the diversity of the NIA partnerships, for example in terms of structure and proposed activities, and therefore those aspects requiring monitoring. A lower number of indicators therefore does not necessarily correspond to a less comprehensive monitoring programme, but may illustrate that activities in these NIAs are more focussed on specific outputs and outcomes. A more detailed analysis of these meta-data will be carried out in Year 2.

Figure 3.1: Number of indicators selected (dark and light blue) and those completed (dark blue) within Year 1
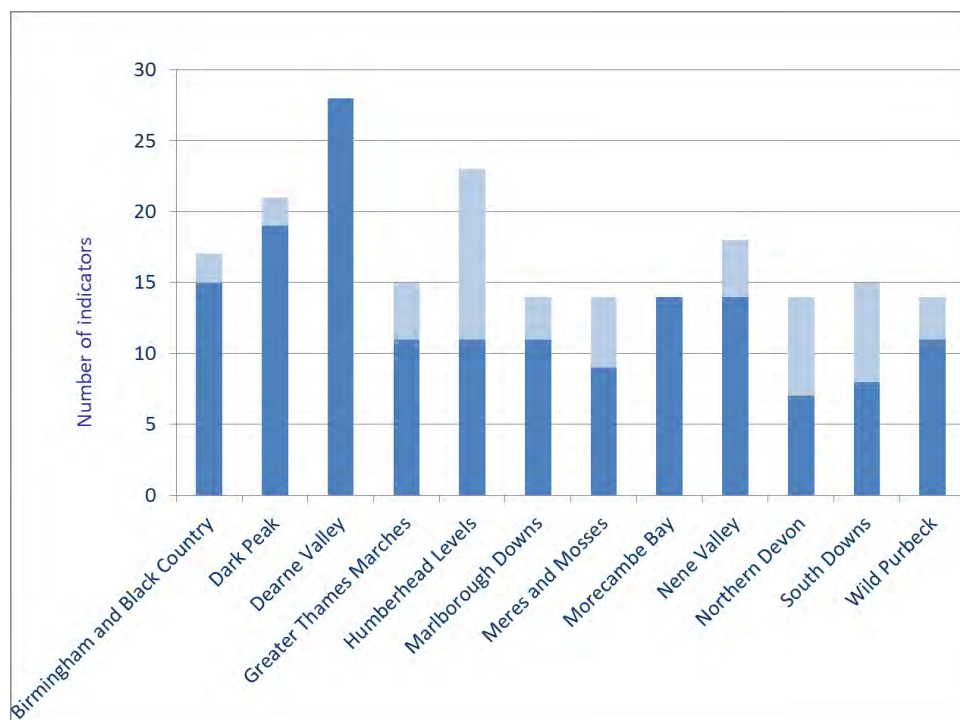
Source: Analysis based on indicators selected by NIAs on the online reporting tool (reviewed 23/08/13)

Figure 3.1 also shows that the majority of NIAs have successfully collated and entered into the online reporting tool data for more than half of their selected indicators. The number of indicators not completed in Year 1 largely reflects the fact that data for a number of indicators were not expected to be available in Year 1 (i.e. their expected baseline is 2014), and also that the approaches to monitoring for some indicators are still under development, particularly those relating to ecosystem services and social and economic impacts and wellbeing benefits. These approaches are intended to be developed in time for Year 2 monitoring and evaluation and it is expected therefore that the proportion of indicators completed will rise in Year 2.

Figure 3.2 shows a breakdown of the indictors selected by each NIA partnership into the four themes of the M&E framework: biodiversity; ecosystem services; economic and social; and partnership working. As discussed in Section 1, the NIAs were required to select a certain number of indicators from each theme which partly explains the relatively even distribution in the selections. A table is included at the end of this section (see Table 3.9) which shows the indicators selected by each NIA and whether they were completed in the online reporting tool during Year 1. The selection of indicators by a number of NIAs has evolved over the reporting period from those originally specified, and this is shown in Table 3.9 by the identification of indicators selected but subsequently deleted (these deleted indicators are not included in the analysis of indicators in Figure 3.1 or Figure 3.2). When the proportion of the indicators that were selected but not completed under each theme are compared, it shows that the following percentages of indicators selected were not completed: biodiversity 21%; ecosystem services 33%; social and economic 25%; and partnership working 17%. This highlights that some of the indicators and protocols are a work in progress in some areas like ecosystem services which presented challenges in completing them in the first year, and indeed as noted above for some indicators there was no expectation that these would be completed in the first year of activity.

Figure 3.2: Number of indicators selected within each monitoring and evaluation theme
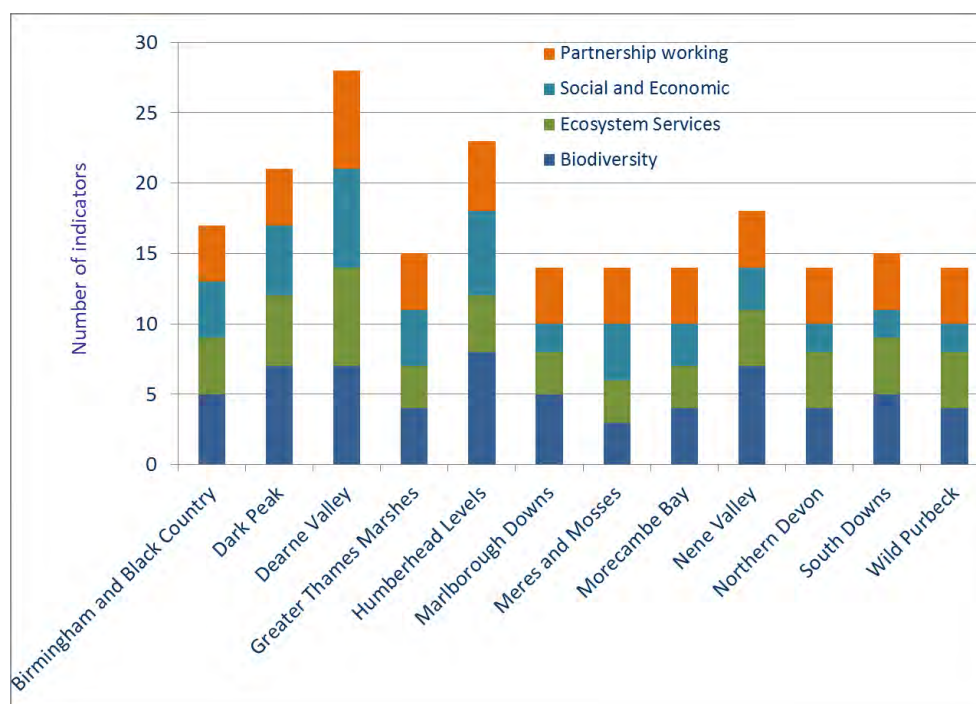
Source: Analysis based on indicators selected by NIAs on the online reporting tool (reviewed 23/08/13)

A number of issues arose during the NIA Year 1 monitoring and evaluation activities and the Phase 2 contractors have maintained a detailed log of queries and issues raised by the NIA partnerships during Year 1, and will be working with the NIA partnerships, Natural England and Defra to address and resolve issues experienced with the monitoring and evaluation process over the course of Year 2. The development of the M&E framework and online reporting tool will be made in the context of seeking to minimise the reporting burden on NIAs, and also that the intention is the framework and online tool are to be used by new, locally determined NIA without ongoing support.

Some examples of the type of issues experienced include:

- Delay in agreeing the M&E framework during year 1, which had an impact on the establishment of baseline data.

- Applying the M&E framework developed for the NIA initiative, in particular understanding and interpreting the indicator protocols and associated data requirements, such as establishing baseline data (the timing of which has caused considerable confusion as this differs between indicators).

- Difficulties in accessing and understanding how to effectively make use of the online reporting tool.

- Understanding how national data-sets and tools (such as BARS[20]) relate to and could support or provide input to monitoring and evaluation of NIA activities and outcomes. In some cases national data sets do not match proposed units or categorisations in the NIA monitoring and evaluation indicator protocols or online reporting tool (e.g. MENE survey data – Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment). This was cited as a reason for some indicators not being completed online in the first year, for example the indicators: Local Attitudes to Biodiversity, Geodiversity and the Natural Environment; and, Level of Outdoor Recreation by NIA Residents.

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[20] UK Biodiversity Action Reporting System: http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/

- Availability of data locally, and the time and resources required to collect and analyse new data. In relation to some areas of monitoring NIAs are dependent on other organisations obtaining and disseminating data.

- Collecting and analysing data across multiple indicators and from a large number of partners, particularly where partner organisations were not familiar with monitoring activities.

- Resources spent in researching and developing new local indicators.

Partnership building and coordination

The NIA partnerships vary considerably in terms of number of partners and structure. Figure 3.3 shows the number of partners in each NIA, with the highest being 54 partners (Birmingham and Black Country) and the lowest being three partners (Marlborough Downs), although most NIAs have between five and 15 partners.

Figure 3.3: Number of partners in each NIA
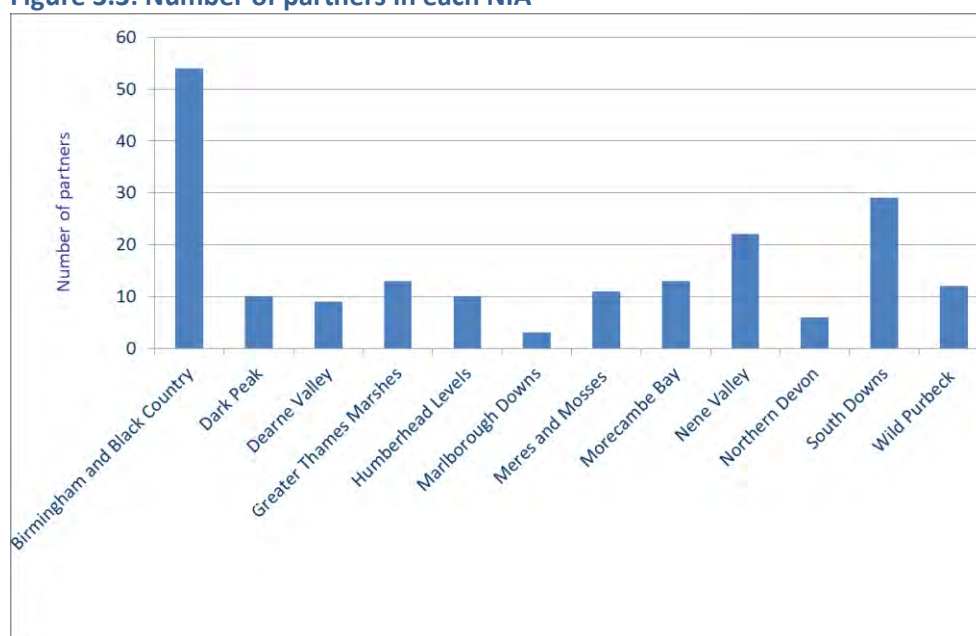
Source: analysis based on collated NIA information spreadsheet "NIA All Details FINAL July 2013" as provided by Natural England

Considering the types of organisations leading and involved in the NIA partnerships, of the Lead organisations four are wildlife trusts, two are AONBs (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), two are RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), and the remainder include a new charitable company set up specifically for the NIA (Marlborough Downs), a national and a regional park authority (South Downs and Nene Valley) and the Thames Estuary Partnership (Greater Thames Marshes).

Looking across the NIAs the variety of partners involved varies greatly (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3). A review of types of other partners involved indicates: Arms-Length Bodies and Local Authorities are partners in all NIAs, while Wildlife Trusts are partners in 11 of the 12 NIAs. The National Farmers Union (NFU) or other land management bodies are partners in 10 NIAs. Perhaps particularly of note is the involvement of private sector organisations and businesses as partners in 10 of the NIAs, such as United Utilities in Dark Peak and Atkins in Birmingham and the Black Country. The RSPB is also a partner in 10 of the NIAs, and NGOs are partners in nine NIAs. Academia, in the form of local universities or colleges are partners in five of the NIAs.

Table 3.2: NIA partners

NIA	Partners Lead partner <u>**underlined in bold**</u>, Accountable body (when not lead) in *italics*		
Birmingham and Black Country	– <u>**The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country Ltd**</u> – Atkins Limited – Birmingham & Black Country BAP Partnership – Birmingham & Black Country Bat group (BrumBats) – Birmingham & Black Country Botanical Society – Birmingham & Black Country Geodiversity Partnership – Birmingham City Council – Birmingham National History Society – Birmingham Open Spaces Forum – Birmingham Public Health – Birmingham Trees for Life – Black Country Consortium Limited – Black Country Geological Society – Business in the Community – Campaign for the Protection of Rural England West Midlands – Canal & River Trust	– The Community Environmental Trust – CEEP – Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council EcoRecord – English Heritage Environment Agency – Forestry Commission – Friends of Cotteridge Park – Friends of Deer Leap Wood – Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve – Friends of Selly Oak Park – Friends of the Earth (West Midlands) – Friends of Thimblemill Brook – Future Health & Social Care Association – Groundwork West Midlands – Heantun Housing Association Ltd – Holloway Foo Architects – Land Care Associates Ltd – MADE	– Martineau Gardens – Natural England – People and Wildlife Services CIC – RPS Group plc – RSPB – Sandwell MBC (Leisure Services and also Strategic Planning) – Staffordshire Biodiversity Partnership (WT)University of Birmingham – Walsall MBC – Wardell Armstrong – Warley Woods Community Trust – The Waterways Trust – West Midlands Bird Club – West Midlands Friends of the Earth – West Midlands Regional Sustainability Forum – Wildside Activity Centre – Wolverhampton City Council – The Woodland Trust
Dark Peak	– <u>**RSPB**</u> – United Utilities – National Trust Peak District – Sheffield City Council	– Peak District National Park Authority – Sheffield Wildlife Trust – NT Marsden Estate	– British Mountaineering Council – Moors for the Future – Natural England
Dearne Valley Green Heart	– <u>**RSPB**</u> – Environment Agency – Natural England – Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	– Doncaster MBC (to be signed this year) – Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (to be signed this year) **Note:** these two partners are expected to sign an MoA to be partners in the Dearne Valley NIA in 2013	Support: – Groundwork Dearne Valley – S. Yorkshire Forest Partnership – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Greater Thames Marshes	– <u>**Thames Estuary Partnership Ltd**</u> – Essex County Council – London Borough of Havering – *Medway Council - Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway*	– RSPB – Buglife – The London Wildlife Trust – The Essex Wildlife Trust – The Kent Wildlife Trust	– Environment Agency – Natural England – NFU – CLA
Humberhead Levels	– <u>**Yorkshire Wildlife Trust**</u> – Natural England – Environment Agency	– Lincolnshire WLT – Ouse and Humber IDB – RSPB (Newcastle) – North Lincolnshire Council	– East Riding of Yorkshire Council – Nottinghamshire WLT – JBA Consulting
Marlborough Downs	– <u>**The Marlborough Downs NIA Ltd**</u> – Wiltshire County Council	– The Game and Wildlife Conservation Ltd	
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	– <u>**Shropshire Wildlife Trust**</u> – British Waterways – Butterfly Conservation – Cheshire East Council	– Cheshire Wildlife Trust – Community Council of Shropshire – Environment Agency – Natural England	– Harper Adams Community College – RSPB – Shropshire Council
Morecambe Bay	– <u>**Lancaster City Council**</u> – Arnside and Silverdale AONB partnership – Bay Tourism Association – Butterfly Conservation	– Cumbria Wildlife Trust – Environment Agency – Forestry Commission – Natural England – Lancashire Wildlife Trust	– Morecambe Bay Partnership – National Trust – RSPB Lancashire – Wyre Council
Nene Valley	– <u>**River Nene Regional Park**</u> – *Northamptonshire County* Council – The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire,	– Groundwork Northamptonshire – North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Authority	Support: – East of England Biodiversity Forum – West Northamptonshire Joint

NIA	Partners Lead partner <u>underlined in bold</u>, Accountable body (when not lead) in *italics*		
	Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire – East Northamptonshire Council – Nene Park Trust – Northamptonshire ACRE – Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership	– River Restoration Centre – RSPB, Oxford – The Rockingham Forest Trust – University of Northampton	Planning Unit – Peterborough City Council – Peterborough Environment City Trust – South-East Midlands LEP – Natural England – Environment Agency
Northern Devon	– **<u>Devon Wildlife Trust</u>** – Biosphere Partnership – Devon County Council	– Environment Agency – Forestry Commission – Woodland Trust	
South Downs Way Ahead	– **<u>South Downs National Park Authority</u>** – Arun and Rother Rivers Trust – Brighton & Hove City Council – Brighton University – Butterfly Conservation (Sussex Branch) – Eastbourne Borough Council – Environment Agency – Forestry Research – Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust – Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre	– Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust – Leeds University – Lewes District Council – Lewes & Ouse Eco-nomics Group – National Trust – Natural England – Portsmouth Water – Royal Botanic Gardens Kew – RSPB – Rural Economy and Land Use Programme (Newcastle University)	– South Downs Land Management Group – South Downs Network – South Downs Society – South East Water – Steyning Downland Scheme – Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre – Sussex Wildlife Trust – Winchester City Council
Wild Purbeck	– *Dorset County Council* – **<u>Dorset AONB Partnership</u>** – National Trust Purbeck – RSPB – CLA	– Dorset Wildlife Trust – Environment Agency – Forestry Commission – Natural England	– Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group Southwest – Kingston Maurward College – NFU

Source: analysis based on collated NIA information spreadsheet "NIA All Details FINAL July 2013" as provided by Natural England

A more complete analysis of the nature and structure of the NIA partnerships is proposed to be undertaken in Year 2 drawing on direct data gathering, for example through interviews with the NIAs. As noted in Section 4 it may be interesting to identify whether the partnerships can be categorised according to their governance characteristics. An initial typology of partnerships is included in Table 3.4, which also describes some of the characteristics of different types of partnership.

Table 3.3: Types of NIA partners

NIA	RSPB	Wildlife Trusts	National Trust	Local authority	LNP	NP/AONB	Academia	NFU / Land Managers	CLA	CPRE	Private Sector Business	Arms-Length Bodies	Other NGO	Other partners
Birmingham and Black Country	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	NE/EA/FC	BW	Housing Asscn.
Dark Peak	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					United Utilities - water co	NE/EA	moors4 future	British Mountaineering council
Dearne Valley Green Heart	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓				NE/EA/FC		Groundwork Dearne Valley, S/Yorkshire Forest Partnership
Greater Thames Marshes	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			NE	Buglife	
Humberhead Levels	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓			✓	NE/EA	WWT	Drainage board, Coop, JBA Consulting
Marlborough Downs				✓	✓			✓[1]			✓	NE/EA	GWCT	
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	NE/FC/EA	Butterfly Conservation, British Waterways	Community council
Morecambe Bay	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	NE/EA	Butterfly Conservation	Tourist association
Nene Valley	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	EA/NE/FC		Ent Pship, Reg'l Park, River Restoration Centre, Trust
Northern Devon		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓		Y/SW Water	EA/FC/NE	Woodland Trust	Biosphere Reserve
South Downs Way Ahead	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓[2]	✓	✓	✓			Portsmouth Water	EA/FC/NE	GWCT, Butterfly Conservation	RBG Kew
Wild Purbeck	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	NE/FC/EA		CEH, LEP, Schools

Source: analysis based on collated NIA information spreadsheet "NIA All Details FINAL July 2013" as provided by Natural England

Notes: * 35 farmers

Abbreviations: NE - Natural England, EA - Environment Agency, FC - Forestry Commission, EH - English Heritage, GWCT - Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, WWT – Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, BW – British Waterways

Exploring such governance aspects in more detail can provide valuable context in which to understand the functioning and relative successes and achievements, as well as enabling future evaluation work to tailor information gathering and analysis based on an understanding of the common working practices of each partnership and how they relate to wider stakeholders and communities.

Table 3.4: Typology of typical characteristics of different types of partnership

Type	Purpose	Description	Extent of power sharing
Contributory	Provide support: e.g. for obtaining new resources or funds	One or two organisations act as lead, inviting and co-ordinating input from others. No identifiable wider stakeholder group.	Lead partner(s) retains power, risk and ownership, others may propose or agree to objectives
Operational	Share work: to allow sharing of resources and work load and exchange of information	One or two organisations act as leads; partners participate in tasks through working or technical groups. No identifiable wider stakeholder group.	Lead partner(s) retains power but others can influence decisions via practical involvement [sharing risk and ownership]
Consultative	Advisory: to gain relevant input for developing policies , service design and delivery	Small core group of stakeholders (five or less) meet regularly to decide key issues; they consult with a wider group of stakeholders, e.g. a Strategy Group	Lead partner(s) retains power and risk but is open to input from others who help to legitimize policy [sharing ownership]
Collaborative	Decision making: joint decisions regarding policy development, implementation, evaluation and adjustment	Core group of stakeholders meet regularly to plan and make decisions together	Power, risk and ownership are all shared

As part of the application process for NIA grant funding, the NIA partnerships were required by Natural England to have formal partnership agreements in place prior to the submission of Business Plans. To assist the NIA partnerships in developing partnership agreements, Natural England produced a guidance note: *NIAs Working in Partnership*[21]. While this was not intended to provide a template for the NIA partnership agreements to follow, it did set out what Natural England "would expect the Agreement to include".

Each NIA has developed their own partnership agreements, based on Memorandums of Agreement (MoAs) between partner organisations (in the case of Birmingham and Black Country referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding). The MoAs of the 12 NIA partnerships were analysed and reviewed to assess whether they cover each of the 15 "expectations" set out by Natural England in their guidance. The results are presented in Table 3.5.

A review of the MoAs across the NIAs identified that all of the NIAs, apart from Birmingham and Black Country, followed a very similar structure and used the same headings. However, the level of detail in the completion of the MoAs differed, reflecting the different nature and requirements of each NIA partnership. The NIAs clearly considered carefully how to meet the expectations of Natural England in relation to their Agreements, for example some sentences, such as "The Partners will follow the Nature Improvement Area Terms and Conditions with regard to branding and publicity", were found in almost all of the MoAs.

Table 3.5 reveals that, despite the NIAs adopting the same structure, there are seen to be some common omissions in comparison to the Natural England guidance. For example, no NIA MoA mentions the right of the Lead Organisation to terminate the MoA in the case of Natural England suspending or terminating funding for the project. Also, no explicit mention was found to reflect that the NIA terms and conditions should take precedent over those in the partnership agreement in the event of conflict. Information was also not seen in any of the MoAs in terms of partnership sustainability: how the partnership will continue to support the long-term viability of the project

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[21] http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/NIA-guidance-partnerships_tcm6-26966.pdf [Accessed 28 June 2013]

within and beyond the length of the agreement, although there were statements on supporting the project during the agreement duration, and one NIA (Birmingham and Black Country) included a statement on the aspiration to partnership continuation past the agreement's expiration.

In relation to information on financial contributions there were apparent variations in level of detail on the timing and the method of payment. Communications information also varied between the NIAs. Almost all NIAs indicated communication would be 'at least quarterly', although some elaborated on this and stated a number of weeks between each meeting.

Policies and procedures, such as health and safety, equal opportunities etc., differed in terms of the stated actor who was responsible for this. A few NIAs said that it was both the Lead Organisation and the Partner Organisations' role to implement these, whilst others differed and specified the Lead Organisation as being responsible.

Table 3.5: Review of NIA memorandums or agreement against Natural England expectations

Natural England's expectations as stated in the "NIAs Working in Partnership" report	Birmingham and Black Country	Dark Peak	Dearne Valley	Greater Thames Marshes	Humberhead Levels	Marlborough Downs	Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands	Nene Valley	Northern Devon	South Downs Way Ahead	Wild Purbeck
Does the MoA do the following:												
Define the purpose of the partnership and describe how any potential conflicts of interest or misunderstandings should be resolved;	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Include the right of the lead organisation to terminate the agreement if for any reason the grant is suspended or terminated;	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖
Explain the responsibilities of the Lead Organisation, the Accountable Body (if different to the Lead Organisation) and those of the other partner(s);	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Refer to the terms and conditions of the grant and state that they will take precedent over the terms and conditions in the partnership agreement in the event of conflict.	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖
Does it include the following:												
Details of the parties in the agreement;	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Purpose of the agreement: a brief description of the project;	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Roles and responsibilities: who is delivering what and by when;	✔	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Financial contributions: what payments will be made to partners for services provided, how often payment will be made and what the method of payment will be;	✔	✔	✔	✔	⚠	✖	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Natural England's expectations as stated in the "NIAs Working in Partnership" report	Birmingham and Black Country	Dark Peak	Dearne Valley	Greater Thames Marshes	Humberhead Levels	Marlborough Downs	Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands	Nene Valley	Northern Devon	South Downs Way Ahead	Wild Purbeck
Communications: how often the project will be discussed by the partnership and by what method;	✔	✔	✔	(?)	✔	✖	✔	✔	✔	△	✔	✔
Branding and publicity: a statement that this needs to be in line with the NIA grant terms and conditions;	✔	✔	✔	(?)	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Dispute resolution: details on the process for resolving disagreements;	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Record keeping / monitoring and evaluation progress reports: what records will be kept and by whom;	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Policies and Procedures: details on all the ones required by law or relevant to the project e.g. health and safety, equal opportunities, and the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults;	✔	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✔	✔	✔
Duration of the agreement: how long the agreement will last and how it can be terminated or extended as necessary;	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Sustainability: clarity on how the partnership will continue to support the long-term viability of the project within and beyond the length of the agreement.	△	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖

Key: ✔ - indicates where the expectation was met or included in the NIA MoA; △ - indicates where it was partially met or included; ✖ - indicates where an expectation was not clearly met or included in the NIA's MoA; and (?) - there appeared to be a page missing from the MoA submitted by Greater Thames Marshes NIA and the sections missing have been represented with a question mark.

NIA community engagement and outreach

To develop an understanding of the nature of community engagement activities undertaken by the NIAs in Year 1, Business Plans, NIA Year 1 summary reports and quarterly Progress Reports for each of the 12 NIAs were reviewed. The results of this review are presented in Table 3.6.

It should be noted that the activities included in Table 3.6 are representative rather than an exhaustive list of all community engagement activities, which is beyond the scope of the Year 1 evaluation to complete. At the same time there is often an overlap between community engagement and volunteering activities. The review for this sub-section focused on NIA activities that were considered to belong to one of three types of engagement: transmit, collaborate and receive[22]:

- 'Transmit' engagement aims to inspire, inform, change, educate, build capacity and involvement, or to influence decisions, examples include festivals, exhibitions, newsletters, websites and site visits.

- 'Collaborate' engagement aims to collaborate, consider, create or decide something together with the public, examples of this include stakeholder dialogues, consensus workshops and steering groups.

- 'Receive' engagement aims to use views, skills, experience and knowledge of the public to inspire, change, educate or build your own capacity or decisions, examples of this include surveys, feedback forms, focus groups, public meetings and deliberative workshops.

Based on a review following this typology, in Year 1 all 12 NIAs have been actively involved in community engagement projects that were either 'one-off' events or part of a series of similar events.

One of the most prevalent types of community engagement was engagement with schools, which was seen in five NIAs: Dearne Valley, Meres and Mosses, Morecambe Bay, Northern Devon and Wild Purbeck. One-off events such as launch events, the Marlborough Downs NIA 'Spring Celebration' and the Northern Devon NIA's concert were also used as methods of community engagement. There were also more long-term projects such as 'Growing Local Flora' in Birmingham and the Black Country, the 'CONNECT' programme in Humberhead Levels, the 'sustainable tourism project' in Morecambe Bay and Past Arts in Wild Purbeck.

Other types of community engagement included the use of surveys by the Morecambe Bay NIA and the Nene Valley NIA, the Community Forum used by the Northern Devon NIA, attending public events such as the South Downs NIA and the stakeholder consultation run by Dark Peak NIA. Greater Thames Marshes NIA also developed their own website in order to engage with the community.

In Year 2 it is proposed to systematically compile and categorise NIA community engagement activities following the typology above, or a similar typology. Analysis following such a typology will enable a more robust evaluation of the overall picture of community engagement activities within and across the NIAs, and can also help understand the impact of these engagement activities.

In addition Natural England and Sciencewise are supporting a NIA public dialogue project[23]. This project will be working with three NIAs (Morecambe Bay, Meres and Mosses and Nene Valley) in delivering a programme of work for public dialogue and engagement activities, and using an online questionnaire (or similar) to capture views from the other NIAs on what they have been doing in relation to public dialogue including identifying any barriers and lessons learnt. Collaboration between the NIA M&E Phase 2 project and this Sciencewise public dialogue project is expected to provide a valuable exchange of information (both ways) and a potentially important input to the monitoring and evaluation of community engagement and dialogue in Years 2 and 3.

Table 3.6: Examples of community engagement activities in each NIA

NIA	Activity title	Description of engagement activity
Birmingham and Black Country	**Growing Local Flora (50 people)**	Projects supported through Growing Local Flora were undertaken at two Wildlife Trust education centres. These projects were undertaken to both diversify habitats on the sites and to act as NIA project demonstration sites.
	Additional Activities	These additional activities were reported in the Year 1 Summary: BOSOF Community Engagement Programme (100 people); Walsall Bat Box Scheme (25 people); Scythes & The Shire.

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[23] http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/ [accessed 29 August 2013]

NIA	Activity title	Description of engagement activity
Dark Peak	Stakeholder Consultation	In completing objective five on 'access and recreation', the NIA carried out extensive consultation with the key stakeholders and users to that they newly designed route on Moss Road would meet their needs.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Community Rangers	In November 2012 the RSPB recruited two part time Community Rangers. They work on behalf of the partnership to engage and lead practical conservation tasks with local communities.
	Hidden Gems (64 people)	Led five explorations that invited local people to visit and learn about their local landscape.
	School Outreach (10 schools)	RSPB Field Teachers have engaged and led activities in 10 schools in the NIA and encourage three schools to visit a site within the NIA. The teachers work closely with partners such as Ecoschools, Don Catchment Rivers Trust and Groundwork Dearne Valley. This group have also organised the 'Eels in Schools' project that has supplied local schools with tanks and elvers.
Greater Thames Marshes	Website	The website has been created to encourage a greater sense of community and support in the communication of NIA projects to communities and stakeholders.
	Promotional Events	The NIA has delivered presentations on their work at local and regional forums and at promotion events.
Humberhead Levels	The CONNECT programme	The CONNECT programme aims to get people involved in their local green spaces within the NIA and works across all partners' 10 Gateway Sites. The project is also promoting training of community leaders and other educators in leading fun and interactive environmental events. [NB: This is also an example of volunteering]
Marlborough Downs	Launch Event	In April 2012, a launch event was held.
	Spring Celebration	The Spring Celebration event was held on the 4th April 2013 and aimed to showcase Year 1 achievements and reward effort with the Marlborough Downs NIA Wildlife Champion award.
	Summer BBQ	A summer barbeque was held to bring partners and other interested people together. In spite of "hideous" weather it was deemed a "great success"!
	Seasonal supper	A Seasonal supper was convened with presentations by the NIA project manager and chair, Wiltshire Ornithological Society, and Environment Bank
	Publishing articles	Articles on the project were published in local parish magazines, *The Wroughton Monthly,* North Wessex Downs Farmland Bird Initiative newsletter, Wiltshire Ornithological Society newsletter and the Local Nature Partnership website amongst others.
	Communicating regular information	The NIA circulates a quarterly newsletter to around 200 people that includes farmers, partners and 'friends' of the project. They have also established a Facebook page that they regularly update.
	Farm walks	The NIA hosted a series of farm walks to showcase the project and demonstrate particular aspects of its delivery. This includes Natural England's Community of Practice visiting to learn about collaboration amongst farmers (June 2012), an introduction to target species (November 2012), and a demonstration of wild bird feeding techniques (December 2012).
	Presenting talks	The NIA presented talks on the objectives and delivery of the project at the Flora Locale Summer Meeting (June 2012), Chiseldon Parish Council (October 2012) and the Isle of Wight Recorder's Conference.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	School Outreach	The NIA delivered their first John Muir Award package for Tilston primary school in Cheshire.
	Steering Groups	Steering groups/ community consultation events have been held at Cole Mere and Brown Moss. A Down to Earth Steering group has been formed in Whixall, which will lead to recording local history, supporting the work of Natural England on Bettisfield Moss and working with a local business to provide Corporate Social Responsibility days.
Morecambe Bay	Visitor Survey	A visitor survey was carried out in Autumn 2012 and gathered valuable data to inform their nature tourism work.
	Schools Outreach	A schools assembly package to celebrate the outstanding wildlife of Morecambe Bay has been developed and piloted.

NIA	Activity title	Description of engagement activity
	Volunteer Day (80 volunteers)	This was held in Arnside and involved volunteers helping to manage limestone woodland and grassland at 4 sites around the village. This also included 20 local school children who planted trees and cleared scrub. [NB: This is also an example of volunteering]
	Public Dialogue Project	The NIA has been selected as one of the 3 official case studies in Natural England's recent successful £250,000 bid to Sciencewise, aimed at promoting and assisting public dialogue on ecological issues.
	Sustainable Tourism project	The NIA partnership successfully attracted £0.5 million from the Coastal Communities Fund for a two year Morecambe Bay sustainable tourism project. No further details were included in the first year summary.
Nene Valley	Online survey on community awareness	The online survey has been established to supplement on-site surveys and received 200 responses. This is part of the Sciencewise public dialogue project and will mean that the NIA will be working with specialists to engage the local communities in the work of the NIA.
Northern Devon	Schools Outreach	15 school groups visited the river Torridge with a storyteller to develop their own stories about the 'Giants in the Forest' art installation.
	Community Forum	A Community Forum was set up to engage local community activists and organisations in the work of the NIA.
	Concert	Beaford Arts organised a concert by a Norwegian ice artist relating to the NIA. There were ice chimes made from the River Torridge and a short film was made.
South Downs Way Ahead	Development of Tools	Lewes 'Big Benefits' Game developed and 'Naturegain poems' piloted as public engagement tools as part of the 'Town to Down' programme.
	Attending Public Events	Four public events were attended as part of the 'Town to Down' programme. The TTL 5th Anniversary (50 people), Lewes Railway Lands Summer Festival (1500 people), and two 'Naturegain walks'.
Wild Purbeck	Wild Purbeck Community Gateway	The gateway describes a series of activities that were delivered to maximise community engagement. They included wildlife gardening days, drop-in sessions for local communities and a "Bioblitz" wildlife day.
	Past Arts	Past Arts builds on the area's artistic heritage using past artworks to engage audiences in a dialogue about how landscapes change and how they may change in the future. It aims to deliver wide-ranging exhibitions, events and self-guided walks.
	Schools Outreach	The Schools Programme works with local schools to support the development of teacher training days focusing on the new earth sciences area of the curriculum, geology, wildlife, Jurassic coast and a site visit. Partners are also helping with the enhancement of the natural environment at Wareham Children's Centre.

Source: Selected information from NIA Business Plans, NIA Year 1 summary reports and quarterly Progress Reports

Encouraging / organising volunteering

To develop an understanding of the nature of volunteering activities undertaken by the NIAs in Year 1, Business Plans, NIA Year 1 summary reports and quarterly Progress Reports for each of the 12 NIAs were reviewed. The results of this review are presented in Table 3.7. It should be noted that the activities included in Table 3.7 are representative rather than an exhaustive list of all volunteering activities.

As noted in the NIA community engagement and outreach sub-section above, there is likely to be overlaps between volunteering and community engagement. To minimise duplication, the review carried out for this sub-section focused on NIA activities that explicitly refer to 'volunteering' in their description.

Table 3.7 indicates that volunteering activity is seen in Year 1 in all of the NIAs except Greater Thames Marshes, reflecting the importance of volunteering as a delivery mechanism (and objective) across the NIAs.

The examples identified indicate that many NIAs are seeking to develop the skills of their volunteers, such as through specialist training in surveying methods, leading groups and conservation activities. For example Meres and Mosses NIA have provided Otter survey training to volunteers, Wild Purbeck NIA is developing a woodland survey training programme for volunteers, and Greater Thames

Marshes NIA intends to train volunteers on how to conserve farmland wildlife. This personal and professional development has also enabled volunteers to run workshops as seen in the Birmingham and Black Country and Marlborough Downs NIAs.

Volunteers also take part in, and in some cases help to run, specialist schemes such as 'Hidden Gems' in Dearne Valley NIA, the 'CONNECT' project in the Humberhead Levels NIA, and the 'Winchester Conservation Skills' project in South Downs NIA. Volunteers are also important in providing support to specialist days, such as the 'Arnside Volunteer Day' at Morecambe Bay NIA, the restoration of Moss Road in Dark Peak NIA and volunteer days in Northern Devon NIA.

In Year 2 it is proposed to systematically compile and, if appropriate categorise NIA volunteering activities. A more complete picture of volunteering activities within and across the NIAs will help the evaluation understand and report on the impact the NIAs are having on local communities and individuals, and what impact volunteering is having on the delivery of NIA projects and objectives.

Table 3.7: Examples of volunteering activities in each NIA

NIA	Activity title	Description of volunteering activity
Birmingham and Black Country	Collection Work	Volunteer opportunities were created through the seed and propagule collection work, the Moseley Bog grassland enhancement project, the Hill Hook management days and the new Deer's Leap Wood weekly volunteer management days.
	Workshops	Two workshops took place in relation to the Freshwater Invertebrate Network (FIN) project.
Dark Peak	Heathland Restoration and Creation	Have been collecting Bell Heather seeds using volunteers and then spreading the dried seed in order to increase the diversity of Heathland at the RSPB's Dove Stone Reserve.
	Restoration of Moss Road	Restoration of Moss Road completed to reverse the erosion of the access route using volunteer working parties.
	Visitor surveys	A call for volunteers from partners and the general public to assist with visitor surveys was reported as receiving an "excellent response".
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Tree planting / conservation	The Trust of Conservation Volunteers and Volunteer Action Barnsley have provided volunteers for tree planning at Barnsley Main and other Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council sites. Volunteer Action Barnsley have been working closely with local residents to undertake practical conservation tasks on the Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council nature reserve known as Park Hill Brickworks. Over 2800 native trees have been planted at Barnsley Main by local conservation groups and volunteers.
	Hidden Gems	Following one initial trial at Rabbit Ings, Groundwork Dearne Valley has organised and led 5 explorations at a range of core sites within the NIA. Groundwork has recruited a regular volunteer who has assisted with the organisation and preparation of the explorations.
Greater Thames Marshes	-	No volunteering activities reported in Year 1.
Humberhead Levels	CONNECT	The CONNECT Project seeks to get people involved in their local green spaces. The project is also promoting training of community leaders and other educators in leading fun and interactive environmental events. [Also community engagement]
	Potteric Carr	A specific project: BOOM, is multi-objective, delivering 15ha of new BAP habitat, improved access and interpretation, and involving up to 50 volunteers in the development process.
Marlborough Downs	Training	Demonstration/training events to share best practice with farmers, volunteers and professionals held on topics related to supporting birds, bees and wildflowers. It is understood that some training has been delivered in Year 1.
	Workshops	Workshop held to train farmers and volunteers to prepare simple habitat maps. Two workshops held related to species surveys (one on identifying bird species, one on butterfly species) and two supplementary feeding workshops were held.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Surveying	Otter survey training provided and volunteers now monitoring Crossmere. Additionally, a contract has been let for a Phase 1 habitat survey to be conducted by volunteers.

NIA	Activity title	Description of volunteering activity
Morecambe Bay	Arnside volunteer day	A big volunteer day was held in Arnside at which about 80 volunteers took part in managing limestone woodland and grassland at four sites around the village. This included 20 school children from the local school who planted trees and cleared scrub. [Also community engagement]
	Wood share scheme	In Arnside and Silverdale AONB, volunteers registering to take part in a wood share scheme; event held to move about 7 tonnes of wood cut for conservation management to a community 'wood bank'.
Nene Valley	Breeding Bird Surveys	Volunteers have been recruited and trained to carry out breeding bird surveys in the Special Protected Areas.
	Practical Conservation Work Parties	A number of volunteers involved in practical conservation activities, including tree planting.
Northern Devon	Volunteer Days	Eight volunteer days were held on habitat management such as scrub clearance, otter holt building, swailing and hedge laying.
South Downs Way Ahead	Winchester Conservation Skills Project	The NIA Coordinator has been working with four volunteer groups training and hosting approximately 30 local volunteers engaged in practical habitat management, heritage restoration and livestock lookering.
Wild Purbeck	Cyril Diver Project	Volunteers contributing towards this project which is working to complete a comprehensive ecological survey of the Studland peninsula.

Source: Selected information from NIA Business Plans, NIA Year 1 summary reports and quarterly Progress Reports

Developing innovation and research

The evaluation in this sub-section is based on a review of the NIA Business Plans, Year 1 Summaries and quarterly Progress Reports for each NIA to identify NIA activities related to research or innovation. This review included examples of research identified in Business Plans (i.e. planned research activities) as these proposals for research and the allocation of funding for research are both important parts of the research process.

The results of this review are presented in Table 3.8. It should be noted that the examples of research and innovation included in Table 3.8 are based on information available and is not necessarily an exhaustive list.

The review found that a large number of NIAs are working with local universities and organisations to carry out research aiming to provide both parties with valuable data (e.g. NIA monitoring and evaluation data that also supports a PhD or post-doctoral research). Research identified is predominantly focused on aspects of ecosystem services, examples include: Nene Valley NIA and Northampton University, Northern Devon NIA and Exeter University, and the Dearne Valley NIA and Forest Research. Community impacts of the Northern Devon NIA are being explored with Exeter University, and research is being undertaken between Morecambe Bay NIA and Lancaster University. The South Downs NIA and Dearne Valley NIA both have students undertaking research, whilst a PhD student is preparing a research project in the Meres and Mosses NIA. The NIAs are also exploring innovative ways to use this data, with the Nene Valley NIA testing an ecosystem mapping tool called EcoServ.

The links between NIAs and academic institutions extend to partnerships for student learning. The Northern Devon NIA has a placement scheme for students at Plymouth University, whilst the Meres and Mosses NIA is engaging with local farms and colleges to develop farm apprenticeships.

The NIAs were also found to be sharing knowledge and exploring opportunities to develop innovative project ideas. The Meres and Mosses NIA were involved in the annual Meres and Mosses Forum that attracted academics and conservation practitioners to share examples of best practice. The Dearne Valley NIA was involved in the Eco-Expo Event that drew an international audience and shared examples of green communities and eco-developments across Europe. There are also

instances of international knowledge transfers, with Greater Thames Marshes NIA attending EU funding fairs in the Netherlands to promote their NIA projects and to seek European partners to develop innovative and transnational project ideas with.

In Year 2 it is proposed to develop a more systematic overview of research and innovation developed by the NIA partnerships. This will include an assessment of whether proposed research activities (i.e. those included in Business Plans) have been successfully launched, and will seek to evaluate the individual and collective impact of research activities, for example through improved or modified delivery programmes or wider interest and uptake of results or findings (e.g. from organisations outside the NIAs). Research and innovation activities will also be important in their influence on NIA outcomes, outputs and longer term impacts and will potentially link to social and economic impacts and benefits. These interactions will be further explored in Year 2.

Table 3.8: Examples of research and innovation in the NIAs

NIA	Activity title	Description of research or innovation activity
Birmingham and Black Country	Survey and Data Collection	Professor Ian Trueman and Dr Eleanor Cohn, of the University of Wolverhampton, have conducted considerable research at research sites located within the NIA. They provided technical advice for the survey and data collection activities.
Dark Peak	Moors for the Future (MFTF)	MFTF will work with the partnership to deliver the NIA's monitoring and evaluation programme.
	Phd research student	Dark Peak NIA have been approached by a Phd student from Birmingham University who is proposing to carry out research into how the NIA works as a partnership.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Integrated Habitat Network (IHN)	Dearne Valley Ecological Network modelling with Forest Research.
	Dearne Valley Ecovision	The planning working group will further enhance joined up working between partners on developing planning policy up until 2014 when the plan will be produced. The policies will sustain e vision for the valley in the long term.
	Eco-Expo Event	The first ever Eco-EXPO and Festival was staged in the Dearne Valley as part of a drive to secure the Dearne to be one of the greenest areas in Europe.
	Research student	A research student linked with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has undertaken water vole studies at Carlton Marsh.
	Aerial photography	The Dearne Valley NIA has commissioned aerial photographs of core sites within the NIA. These have proved invaluable in appraising the current situation, identifying opportunities for development, and demonstrating on-the-ground changes to partners and local resident alike.
Greater Thames Marshes	Wetting the Marshes	This project aims to improve the rate of breeding waders by working to build a more robust ecological network of grazing marsh habitat across the NIA. The work in the NIA will be building on research by University of East London.
	International Knowledge Transfers	The NIA has attended EU funding fairs in the Netherlands to promote the NIA projects and are seeking European partners to help develop innovative and transnational project ideas.
Humberhead Levels	Winter Storage Reservoirs	Funding delivered from the Environment Agency to explore role of winter storage reservoirs in promoting BAP Habitats.
Marlborough Downs	No specific activity identified	-
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Farm Apprentices	The NIA's farm advisor is engaged with local farms, in coordination with the Environment Agency and the NFU, and Walford & North Shropshire College and Reeseheath College to develop farm apprenticeships.
	The Annual Meres and Mosses Forum	The forum was delivered in September 2012 and attracted 42 academics and conservation practitioners. All of the local universities and agricultural colleges have been engaged and local senior schools were encouraged to take part in survey work.
	PhD Research	The PhD research project subject has been agreed and a tender document is being drafted (according to the Fourth Quarter Progress Review)

NIA	Activity title	Description of research or innovation activity
Morecambe Bay	Research Study	A research study has been commissioned to gather more information about the connectivity of the ecological network in the NIA.
Nene Valley	Research into ecosystem service (ES) provided by the area	Undertaken by Northampton University in association with UNEP-WCMC (United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre) and the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UKNEA) follow on project.
	EcoServ	The NIA are currently testing an ecosystem service mapping tool called EcoServ to represent spatially the biodiversity information they have collected to date.
Northern Devon	Research into ecosystem services	Research undertaken by Exeter University and the Devon Wildlife Trust has provided 'proof of concept' on the idea of understanding the value, using ecosystem services, of culm grassland in managing water quantity and flow within the catchment.
	Community Impacts Evaluation	The NIA worked with Exeter University to develop a meaningful evaluation of impacts for the project.
	Placement Scheme	A placement scheme was established with Plymouth University and enabled three students to work full-time with the NIA from June-December.
South Downs Way Ahead	Chalking Up The Benefits	A project timetable established for the South Downs Way Visitor Payback Scheme looking at what Lewes get from the local environment.
	Master's thesis	Master's thesis and reassessment of the breeding population of Corn Buntings and Skylarks in light of changing management of the arable ecosystem.
	Kew Gardens Seed Project	Research into seed collection, storage, and seed viability to support the practical application of the research to restore chalk grassland habitats.
Wild Purbeck	Landscape permeability planning	A two phase project: research & implementation. Research will identify existing high-value habitat networks and prioritise their extension and enlargement with more 'permeable' (i.e. semi-natural) land use.
	Climate change adaptation planning	The partnership will establish a monitoring group that will agree indicators, protocols and baseline data for the entire Wild Purbeck NIA and provide training for volunteers.
	Conservation and re-assessment of the Cyril Diver records	Cyril Diver (Director General of The Nature Conservancy in the early 1950s) made a ground-breaking systematic survey of Studland Dunes in the 1930s. The valuable archive is not well preserved and remains in paper format. This project will conserve the archive and translate it into modern, accessible records.

Source: Selected information from NIA Business Plans, NIA Year 1 summary reports and quarterly Progress Reports

Support to NIAs from Natural England, Defra and other agencies

In Year 2 it is proposed to include a summary and evaluation of the support provided to the NIAs by Natural England, Defra and other agencies (such as Forestry Commission and Environment Agency). For example, the role and nature of the support provided by Natural England local advisers will be assessed, perhaps through interviews with NIAs and Natural England advisers. Evaluating this support will enable an understanding of how significant this support is, and how important it is to the delivery of successful NIA outcomes. This is particularly important in the context of locally determined NIAs who may not receive a similar level of support, and to identify lessons learned in terms of any future plans to roll-out the NIA initiative more widely.

Information provided by Natural England indicates that the planned level of support for the NIA initiative includes: the equivalent of approximately three full time employees within the Natural England NIA programme; and a local Natural England adviser for each NIA intended to be equivalent to approximately 0.5 full time employee per NIA. In addition to this coordination and direct support, the NIA initiative is overseen by: a NIA Steering Group (with representatives of Defra, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Department for Communities and Local Government); 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.

The time-input and exact role of these groups and forums are not known, but could be explored more fully in the Year 2 evaluation to understand better the context in which the 12 initial NIAs are operating compared to potential new locally determined NIAs.

Overview of data / analysis that may be possible in Years 2 and 3

A number of areas where further data collection or additional analysis are proposed or may be possible in Years 2 and 3, under this theme have been identified. These include:

- The use of Natural England NIA progress appraisals in NIA quarterly Progress Reports, if these are completed systematically in Year 2 and 3.

- Exploring NIA management and planning in more detail, including aspects such as: the process of developing NIA Business Plans and Visions, in particular the level and nature of community involvement; evaluation of NIA level, and specific project management and planning; the extent to which constraints and opportunities are being assessed in each NIA.

- A more detailed analysis of the monitoring and evaluation activities of the NIAs, including for example exploring the selection of different numbers and types of indicators by NIAs.

- Analysis of the nature and structure of the NIA partnerships drawing on direct data gathering, for example through interviews with the NIAs. This may consider whether partnerships can be categorised using a typology, according to their governance characteristics.

- An analysis of NIA community engagement and volunteering activities to enable a more robust evaluation of the overall picture of such activities within and across the NIAs, and to help understand the impact of these activities. This will include drawing on information from the Sciencewise NIA public dialogue project[24] which is providing additional support to some NIAs.

- A more detailed analysis of research and innovation developed by the NIA partnerships, including an assessment of whether proposed research activities (i.e. those included in Business Plans) have been successfully launched.

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[24] http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/

Table 3.9: Indicators selected and completed by the NIAs

Notes:
- "Data entered" does not necessarily mean that data entry was completed, but that the online tool shows that some data were entered against the indicator
- It is possible that some NIAs have not entered data because they do not intend to proceed with a particular indicator, where this is the case the "number selected" totals may need to be revised down when this is confirmed (in Year 2)

| ■ Indicator selected and data entered |
| □ Indicator selected but data not entered |
| ☒ Indicator selected but subsequently deleted |

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
Biodiversity																		
Habitat	B01_H	Extent of habitat managed to improve its condition	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
	B02_H	Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
	B03_H	Extent of habitat in favourable or recovering condition	Optional					■				■	☒			2	2	0
	B04_H	Total extent of habitat	Optional		■	■		□	■	☒		■	☒			5	4	1
	-	Area of non-priority habitat created and managed as a result of NIA activity	Local			■										1	1	0
Species	B05_S	Extent of habitat managed to secure species-specific needs	Optional	■			■	□						■		4	3	1
	B06_S	Status of widespread species	Optional		□			□	■	☒						3	1	2
	B07_S	Status of focal species	Optional	■		■		■			■	■	■	■	■	8	8	0
Habitat connectivity	B08_C	Local indicator of habitat connectivity	Optional	■	□	■	□	□	□	□	■	■	□	□	□	12	4	8
	-	Measure of river habitat connectivity	Local		■	■										2	2	0
	B09_C	Local indicator of aquatic habitat connectivity	Local										□			1	0	1
Invasive species	B10_I	Control of invasive or other non-native species	Optional		■											1	1	0
Ecosystem Services																		
Cultural services	ES01_C	Local measures of extent of land managed to enhance landscape character	Optional								■			□	□	3	1	2
	ES02_C	Length of accessible PROW and permissive paths	Optional		■	■		□	■	■						5	4	1
	ES03_C	Condition of historic environment features	Optional		☒	☒										0	0	0
	ES04_C	Access to natural greenspace and/or woodland	Optional	■			■					■			☒	3	3	0
	ES05_C	Local indicator of cultural services	Optional										□			1	0	1
	-	The percentage of historic features managed positively	Local			■										1	1	0

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
		in the DVGH NIA																
Supporting services	ES06_S	Area of habitat supporting pollinators	Optional	☒												0	0	0
	ES07_S	Local indicator of riparian habitat under sympathetic management which benefits pollinators	Local										☐			1	0	1
	ES08_S	Local indicator of supporting services	Local											☐		1	0	1
	-	Local 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.	Local			■										1	1	0
Regulating services	ES09_R	Contribution to water quality	Optional	■	■	■	☐					☐	☐	☐	☐	8	3	5
	ES10_R	Contribution to carbon storage & sequestration	Optional		■	■		■		☐	■					5	4	1
	ES11_R	Local indicator of area of new habitat created for pollinators	Optional													0	0	0
	-	Area of new habitat created for pollinators	Local						☐							1	0	1
Provisioning services	ES12_P	Area of more-sustainable agricultural production	Optional		■	■	■	☐	■	■		■	☒	☐	■	9	7	2
	ES13_P	Percentage of woodland in active management	Optional	■	■	■		☐			■	■		■	■	8	7	1
	ES14_P	Woodland products	Local	■												1	1	0
Social and Economic																		
Social impacts & well-being	S&E01_S	Attitudes of local community to biodiversity, geodiversity & the natural environment	Optional	☐	■	■	■	☐				■				6	4	2
	S&E02_S	No. of educational visits	Optional			■		☐		■	■					4	3	1
	-	Number of educational activities in schools delivered by the DVGH NIA and its partners	Local			■										1	1	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		■			■		■						3	3	0
	S&E05_S	Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents	Optional	☐		■	☐									3	1	2
	S&E06_S	No. of volunteer hours on NIA activities	Core	■	■	■	☐	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	11	1
	-	Number of volunteer hours on activities within the DVGH NIA that support the broader objectives of	Local			■										1	1	0

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
		Business Plan																
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		■	■	■	□	■	□	■				■	8	6	2
	S&E09_E	Estimated value of ecosystem services in NIA	Optional	■									□	□		3	1	2
	S&E10_E	Local economic indicator	Optional											□		1	0	1
Partnership working																		
Mobilisation of resources	PW01_R	Project income	Core	■	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	11	1
	PW02_R	Financial value of help-in-kind	Core	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12	12	0
	-	Complementary funding secured in the area	Local			■										1	1	0
	-	Local measure of percentage of Local Planning Authority	Local		⊠	⊠										0	0	0
	PW03_R	Amount of funding contributed to NIA projects from development	Local													0	0	0
Efficient & effective delivery	PW04_E	Fulfilment of identified skills needs	Optional													0	0	0
	PW05_E	Attitudes of local community to NIA	Optional		■	■	■	■						□		5	4	1
	PW06_E	Assessment of partnership working	Optional	■		■			□	□	■	■			■	7	5	2
Leadership & influence	PW07_L	Audience reach	Optional				■	■			■					3	3	0
	PW08_L	Level of awareness of NIA in local community	Optional		■	■		□	■	□	■			□		7	4	3
	PW09_L	No. of enquiries	Optional	■											■	2	2	0
	PW10_L	Local indicator of delivery	Local										□			1	0	1
	-	Local measure of percentage of Local Planning Authority	Local			■										1	1	0
	PW11_L	Local indicator of leadership and influence	Optional										□			1	0	1
Number selected				17	21	28	15	23	14	14	14	18	14	15	14	207		
Number data entered				15	19	28	11	11	11	9	14	14	7	8	11		158	
Number selected but data not entered				2	2	0	4	12	3	5	0	4	7	7	3			49

4. Evaluation of the Contribution to Biodiversity Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts

Key messages from Year 1: Contribution to Biodiversity Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts by the NIAs

- The **focus of the monitoring in Year 1 has been on developing the baseline situation**, and at this stage there is limited information that has been entered in the online reporting tool to enable an evaluation of outcomes and change to be able to determine whether the NIAs are on trajectory to meet their conservation objectives.

- Many of the NIAs, however, have been engaged in **activities during Year 1 which have led to biodiversity outputs and outcomes across the habitat, species and connectivity sub-themes**. Typical activities include: habitat restoration, creation and enhancement for a variety of habitats; activities to improve the status of key species or species groups, such as bats, bees and farmland birds; and improvements to ecological networks through creation and restoration of habitats, buffers, corridors for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife .

- **All NIAs have reported on the Core indicators** and at least some of the optional indicators for biodiversity within Year 1, but **few have the data to make an annual return** against baseline figures obtained prior to or at the initiation of the programme. Natural England supplied national data (Single Habitat Layer and SSSI condition data) has greatly facilitated this reporting

- **The indicators on widespread and focal species are providing some measure of the response of selected species to conservation actions**; in addition the invasive species indicator has been selected by four NIAs that indicates actions to control non-native species. **The baselines for these indicators, the species included and trends are often uncertain at this stage**; NIAs have included local surveys to help to provide a more robust baseline and programme for monitoring, but typically these have been delayed in implementation.

- There is a recognition that the **baseline data for species (both focal and widespread) and habitats are often incomplete** and nationally collated sources may not provide the local NIA level focus. National level data have been used (e.g. in particular the Wetlands Bird Survey Counts, Butterfly Conservation records). These may not represent the local situations and therefore local surveys have been designed to provide a baseline and continuous monitoring programme, but typically these have been delayed in implementation.

- **Focal species selections are dominated by birds and invertebrates**, but the large numbers of plant species selected within Birmingham and the Black Country skew this representation.

- It has been **difficult for NIAs to develop local indicator of habitat connectivity** within Year 1 with only four of the NIAs generating measures. Each of the approaches used is different and there is little clarity of the frequency and sensitivity of repeat calculations to indicate connectivity outcomes from the NIA actions. It was recognised that the M&E protocols did not provide guidance that was as prescriptive as some other indicators, given the nature as a local indicator, which has led to some uncertainty within NIAs as to how to implement this measure. This also reflects that the science is unclear on connectivity and required further development and hence the limited progress and variety / local flavour. Further sharing of experience within the NIAs, and development of guidance is planned in Year 2.

- Collaborations with research institutions are adding to the input of survey and science in the planning and monitoring of NIA activity. Two of the NIAs note **specific research collaborations that are supporting the analysis of the species status** e.g. Dearne Valley water vole studies and South Downs for skylark and corn bunting. Some local historic studies and monitoring

programmes have provided a more robust basis for the assessment of status (e.g. marsh fritillary surveys in Northern Devon).

- Two NIAs (Nene Valley and Dearne Valley) have mentioned a **comprehensive habitat survey** being produced at the outset of the project to support future monitoring and planning and connectivity assessments. However, Dearne Valley has indicated that they have been unable to use this data within the context of the M&E framework. Other NIAs have been collating habitat information, using satellite-based mapping, Parish Biodiversity Audits and using volunteers to capture habitat information. Local contributions to mapping at Phase 1 level have involved local community, but may not have resulted in a consistent base map and the utility of the Priority Habitat Inventory (SHL) data needs review before Year 2.

- **Further developments of the biodiversity indicator protocols will be necessary** to facilitate robust monitoring and evaluation in future years and calls for further training and guidance should help to resolve issues faced by NIAs within Year 1.

- Under the Biodiversity theme and sub-themes, **there is evidence that the NIAs are currently contributing to ambitions set out in the *Biodiversity 2020* strategy** including Outcome 1 (Habitats and ecosystems on land), Outcome 3 (Species) and Outcome 4 (People), and Themes 1 (A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea) and 3 (Reducing environmental pressures).

Introduction

This section presents an assessment of the **Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts** steps in the evaluation logic model under **Biodiversity** (see below). It considers the biodiversity outputs, outcomes and impacts achieved by the NIAs to deliver their own objectives and the wider policy objectives of the NIA initiative in Year 1.
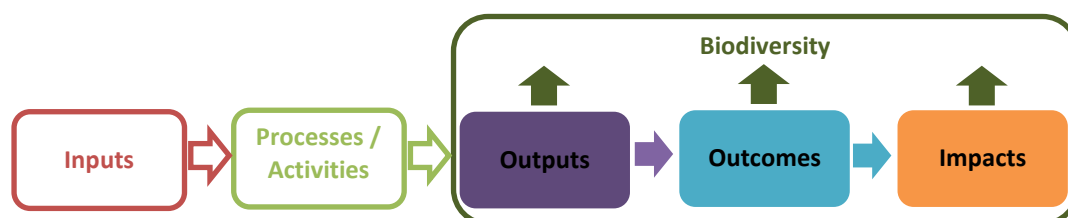
This section considers the four sub-themes under the biodiversity theme, however it is recognised that in practice many activities may contribute to more than one category (for example habitat restoration or enhancement activities may also be aiming to improve conditions for species populations and increase habitat connectivity).

- **Habitat** – including:
  - the collation and analysis of baseline data
  - the development and implementation of restoration or enhancement works on designated and non-designated wildlife sites
  - the creation of priority habitats.

- **Habitat connectivity** – including:
  - the collation and analysis of data and development and use of tools to identify ecological networks
  - actions to create or restore terrestrial or aquatic habitats or habitat features that increase ecological connectivity and reduce habitat vulnerability to future change.

- **Species** – including:

  o the collection, collation and analysis of species data

  o implementation of projects to increase the extent and status of individual key species or species groups.

- **Invasive species** – including:

  o development of approaches to control invasive species

  o actions to control invasive non-native species.

These are illustrated in the sections below with descriptions of relevant example activities that the NIAs have undertaken in Year 1.

Overview of data available

The evaluation in Year 1 of the biodiversity outputs, outcomes and impacts of the NIAs is based on a review and analysis of the following data sources:

- **Monitoring and evaluation framework indicators**, particularly under the biodiversity theme as entered into the NIA monitoring and evaluation online tool.

- **Data and analysis provided by Natural England for reporting on several indicators and BARS** – the M&E team extracted data from BARS to fill gaps where NIAs had not reported in Year 1.

- **Quarterly and annual progress reports** produced by the NIAs, which were a key source of information on the biodiversity activities undertaken in each NIA over the course of Year 1.

Data Issues

Within the context of Biodiversity indicators the population of the protocols has relied heavily on the national processing and tools provided by Natural England[25]. Both of the core indicators and three of the optional indicators have used the BARS database so it has a central role in M&E. BARS offers a lot to consistent reporting although a number of issues have arisen with the use of this data by NIAs this year.

For first year reporting the NIA's were strongly advised (within the protocols) to include all actions within the geographic NIA area because BARS did not have the functionality for project level reporting when the protocols were written. However, a general consensus among NIA's post reporting is that they would value being able to distinguish between *all* activity and that which is specifically being carried out by members of the NIA partnership. This would enable the reporting to be more reflective of the NIA achievements rather than perhaps reflecting actions of others also contributing to conservation objectives. In reality reporting separately on both NIA partnership promoted and other actions within NIA but by other programmes may be relevant. This ability would need to build on the organisational and project level reporting facility that was introduced to BARS in mid-April 2013 but with additional guidance, support and possibly training.

To better inform further development and benefit from project reporting abilities the NIAs will need guidance on how they should structure NIA 'projects' and 'collaboration' within BARS, but is likely to vary between NIAs due to their varied governance structures. Flexibility in structure of BARS is a good thing – but means that each NIA is doing something different and therefore is at the expense of consistency; it also reduces the options for NIAs to work as a federation, to support each other. As half the NIAs have not used BARS within Year 1 reporting it highlights the need for greater support

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[25] NIA Year 1 Reporting, April 2013 - Natural England Data and Analysis

for BARS – from the NIA M&E and from BARS (in terms of development to facilitate reporting). Not all NIAs have found this use of BARS very intuitive and need additional specific support, especially if they are to franchise this to other partners to report and enter their own actions tied to the NIA.

Adoption of the BARS has been patchy despite effective training, and in particular the reliance on training the trainer approach to transfer knowledge from the trainees to partner organisations has been limited by time and confidence in understanding aspects of BARS. Only six of the NIAs have used BARS to any degree and even these are generally incomplete (Table 4.1). It is clear that a number are not actively involved in recording their projects actions through this mechanism, but generally recognise the importance of doing so. It is acknowledged that this is the first time that the new version of BARS has been used to formally report and it is understood that Natural England has agreed to provide additional guidance. It has therefore been a learning curve for all involved as theory is put into practice and as with any information system of this sort, experience will largely grow from continued and regular use.

Table 4.1: Summary of use of BARS records and data structure adopted by each NIA

NIA	BARS projects	BARS organisation	BARS Actions	Total
Birmingham & Black Country	1 parent NIA project 47 child projects	1 NIA Partnership	11 owned 81 collaborated	92
Dark Peak	2 projects	1 NIA organisation	9	9
Dearne Valley	0	1 NIA organisation	0	0
Humberhead Levels	1 parent NIA project 8 child projects	1 NIA Partnership	8 owned	8
Nene Valley	1 NIA project	1 NIA Partnership 2 Collaborators	1 collaborated	1
South Downs	1 parent NIA project	1 Sussex BRC	72 owned	72

Source: National picture of use of BARS system within Year 1 derived from BARS Team, June 2013

Some NIAs have also taken to recording actions outside BARS (within spreadsheets), as a temporary measure. This leads to a skewing of the records within BARS in Year 1 with the anticipation that this will be resolved when they have more time. However, Natural England and Defra have acknowledged this as an issue from the outset, particularly for Year 1, as BARS is a new system.

There are some concerns voiced by NIAs about the duplications and errors inherent in the bulk upload of the BARS, especially in relation to the environmental stewardship options data. There was concern for example that where an environmental stewardship agreement was changed, both the original and the changed options are being reported, leading to a duplication of the area representations. It is noted that Natural England recommended a 'point in time' reporting during the BARS training to avoid this issue, which should overcome duplications, but further guidance may be needed for NIAs on the reporting limitations and caveats

There is confusion amongst some NIAs as to the advice not to include the 'completed' actions within the reporting and most have not taken this advice and included a full extraction of the BARS data for the habitats that they see as relevant. This is symptomatic of the fact that BARS is still developing and a pilot and everyone involved is learning. Selecting completed actions does not necessarily mean that the biodiversity objective has been delivered, but nevertheless there is need for clearer interpretation of guidance and potentially including actions by status. This advice will need to be reviewed and whilst it is necessary to make the best use of the system at the time it is being used, in the future lessons will need to be responded to and the approach adapted as the functionality develops. This will also be reflected in the M&E framework as a whole – it is testing new approaches.

Some NIAs have expressed that there is duplication of effort in exporting data from BARS to re-import into the online reporting tool that is perhaps unnecessary and have suggested an automated link between the two (BARS and online reporting tool). However, this is clearly someway off and would require BARS development (programmed for 2013/14 at the earliest) and the online reporting tool development (currently not programmed). This potential will be reviewed within Year 2.

The Single Habitat layer[26] (SHL) has been used to populate the Indicator '*total habitat area*', but the raw data has not yet been validated by the NIAs (one NIA has pointed out misclassifications and loss of detail within the mapping) as this analysis came out late within the Year 1. The current SHL represents the baseline, prior to the conservation actions of the NIAs (or others), but NIAs indicate that it may not be detailed enough to be used at the local scale and the limited resource available for validation exercises. To be employed effectively as an indicator NIAs will need to update this data, currently proposed to be achieved by sending mapped updates for entry by Natural England. This has not happened within Year 1; further guidance is needed to NIAs as to submission procedures to keep these as streamlined as possible so that records can be generated to allow for annual reporting. Note: the SHL data layer has been published under the name Priority Habitat Inventory subsequent to this processing.

Table 4.2: Sources of data used for the biodiversity indicators

Sub-theme	Indicator ref. no.	Indicator	Category	Sources used by NIAs
Habitat	B01_H	Extent of habitat managed to improve its condition	Core	BARS
Habitat	B02_H	Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat	Core	BARS
Habitat	B03_H	Extent of habitat in favourable or recovering condition	Optional	BARS, SSSI Unit condition data
Habitat	B04_H	Total extent of habitat	Optional	Single Habitat Layer
Species	B05_S	Extent of habitat managed to secure species-specific needs	Optional	various
Species	B06_S	Status of widespread species	Optional	various
Species	B07_S	Status of focal species	Optional	various
Habitat connectivity	B08_C	Local indicator of habitat connectivity	Optional	Various BARS, new habitat survey, existing habitat survey
Habitat connectivity	B09_C	Local indicator of aquatic habitat connectivity	Local	various
Invasive species	B10_I	Control of invasive or other non-native species	Optional	various

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[26] Single habitats' layer project outline Richard Alexander, 15 January 2013

Habitat

The evaluation will ideally consider under this sub-theme several questions:

- *To what extent have NIAs improved the condition (favourable or recovering condition) of existing designated wildlife sites (SSSIs, Local Wildlife Sites)?*
- *To what extent have NIAs improved the condition of non-designated wildlife habitat (e.g. areas of agricultural land, country parks, recreational parks) or brought these areas under conservation management?*
- *To what extent have NIAs expanded or restored the area of priority habitat or restored both as new restoration areas (new wildlife sites) and as extensions to existing wildlife sites?*

However in Year 1 there is limited information available and it is not possible to report in any detail on the initial NIA outputs / results have helped to improve habitat from the indictors added to online tool. However, there have been many activities undertaken by the NIAs in Year 1 which have contributed to the habitat improvements and expansion which will potentially contribute to outcomes and impacts reported in future years. Examples of the activities for habitat improvement of expansion undertaken by the NIAs are illustrated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Examples of habitat creation, restoration and enhancement activities in each NIA

NIA	Activity title	Description of habitat activity
Birmingham and Black Country	Woodland	Woodland management and enhancement projects undertaken at 13 woodlands covering 21.5ha
	Grassland	Restoration of grassland projects undertaken at 13 grassland sites cover 51.8ha. Works have included scrub, bramble and rank grass removal, sowing of yellow-rattle seeds and introduction of traditional management.
	Heathland	Heathland restoration projects undertaken at two sites covering 6.5ha involving removal of scrub, bramble, bracken and tall herbs and experimental turf stripping.
Dark Peak	Blanket bog restoration	Blanket bog restoration work undertaken on the High Peak Estate; 48 dams built blocking 350 metres of gullies. At Dove Stone lime, seed and fertiliser has been applied to the peat pan and degraded peat.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Floodplain habitat	Negotiations underway for the transfer of 42ha of land at Houghton Washland and for 19ha land at Wombwell Ings for creation of wetland habitat from arable reversion (projects also deliver improved connectivity and ecosystem services through flood alleviation.
	Carlton Marsh / Cudworth dyke	Habitat improvement by preventing contaminants from entering the watercourse.
	Land Management Advisory Service	Advice provided to farmers and landowners in relation HLS and Woodland Grant Scheme and to partner organisations for improved habitat management of sites.
	Barnsley MBC land	Reduction of grass cuts negotiated for Barnsley MBC land for biodiversity benefits on amenity grassland and highway verges.
Greater Thames Marshes	Farm conservation advice	Wildlife advice provided to farmers linked to Environmental Stewardship.
Humberhead Levels	Habitat creation	Rehabilitation of wetland habitats including 4ha of reedbed at Broomfleet; willow clearance to reinstate reedbeds and lowland raised mire completed at Oakhill and Eastrington; 9ha newly created wet grassland habitat on ex-gravel workings; and land purchased at Crowle Moors facilitating the creation of lowland raised mire.
	Sustainable water	Work ongoing with 19 local farmers and other landowners to achieve sustainable wetland management and habitat creation in the wider agricultural landscape.

NIA	Activity title	Description of habitat activity
	management	
	Restoration of lowland mire	Scrub clearance undertaken on Thorne and Hatfield Moors.
Marlborough Downs	**Wildlife Sites**	Surveys undertaken of 18 sites and those where assistance is needed to implement appropriate management have been identified.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	**Habitat management**	Conservation works, including tree and scrub removal, hedge planting and coppicing undertaken at several sites.
	Reduce diffuse pollution	Farm advice provided to landowners to identify means to mitigate diffuse pollution and identify opportunities for conservation work and habitat restoration.
Morecambe Bay	**Land management advice**	Advice and support provided to farmers and land managers to deliver enhancement and restoration of over 600ha priority wetland, woodland and grassland habitats via a range of mechanisms.
Nene Valley	**River restoration**	Desk studies completed on the issues for each of the 69 waterbodies in the Nene Catchment and on the ground investigations prioritised; one enhancement project is in progress at Duston, Northampton, where a 1.1km-long stretch of the River Nene is badly impacted by a weir, which causes sedimentation of the river, inhibits natural processes such as erosion and deposition, prevents fish movement and increases the risk of flooding.
Northern Devon	**Torridge catchment ecosystem**	Over 140 site visits to landowners completed and around 350ha of habitat restored through agri-environment agreements (mostly culm grassland) and through use of the machinery and grazing rings.
	Advisory service	A network of advisors was developed across the Culm Natural Character Area (covering the rivers Torridge, Taw and Tamar) to ensure joined-up and consistent advice on land and water management; and development of a 'first stop shop' approach to advice was started.
South Downs Way Ahead	**Chalk grassland habitats**	A detailed analysis of the current state of chalk grassland in the project area has been completed and action plans prepared to restore chalk grassland at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum and Chilgrove Down. RGB Kew harvested 28 high quality, genetically diverse South Downs origin founder collections for use chalk grassland restoration.
Wild Purbeck	**Habitat creation and restoration**	Saline lagoon created and research undertaken into colonisation of the new saline lagoon by aquatic fauna. Five ponds restored. Four wetland woodland schemes in development covering 2.5ha in the upper Frome catchment and 4.6ha on the Hooke, Wraxhall and South Winterbourne. 26ha conifer stands felled in Wareham and Affpuddle Forests.

Source: Based on a review of Year 1 quarterly and annual Progress Reports

This sub-section presents largely baseline information both drawn from the data entered by the NIAs into the online tool and especially in this first year given the ongoing development of the online tool from nationally available datasets. It is divided into several parts focusing on the extent of priority habitats, habitat condition and habitats management.

Priority habitats

Figure 4.1 shows the area and distribution across the NIAs of 23 priority habitat types[27], although it should be noted that the category of 'deciduous woodland' includes not only lowland mixed deciduous woodland but also upland birchwoods, upland oak woodland and wet woodland.

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[27]   JNCC   (2011)   UK   Biodiversity   Action   Plan   Descriptions   (updated   2011).   Available   at: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/UKBAP_PriorityHabitatDesc-Rev2011.pdf

Collectively woodland habitats cover the largest area and are the most frequently occurring, being found within all 12 NIAs. Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh is the second most extensively occurring habitat and is found in eight NIAs with the majority falling within Morecambe Bay NIA followed by Greater Thames Marshes NIA. Some habitats cover a large area but are restricted to one or a few NIAs; blanket bog, is characteristic of just one NIA, Dark Peak, upland heathland while predominantly within Dark Peak is also found in Morecambe Bay[28] and mudflats mainly occur within Greater Thames Marshes NIA. Lowland meadows, on the other hand, are widely distributed across the NIAs, although covering a relatively small area. The newly produced Single Habitat Layer, and its proposed updates, should assist in future reporting of priority habitats targeted; baseline figures may need re-issuing based on this 2013 layer, and historic versions retained to provide for annual analysis of change.

Figure 4.1: Priority habitats within all the NIAs
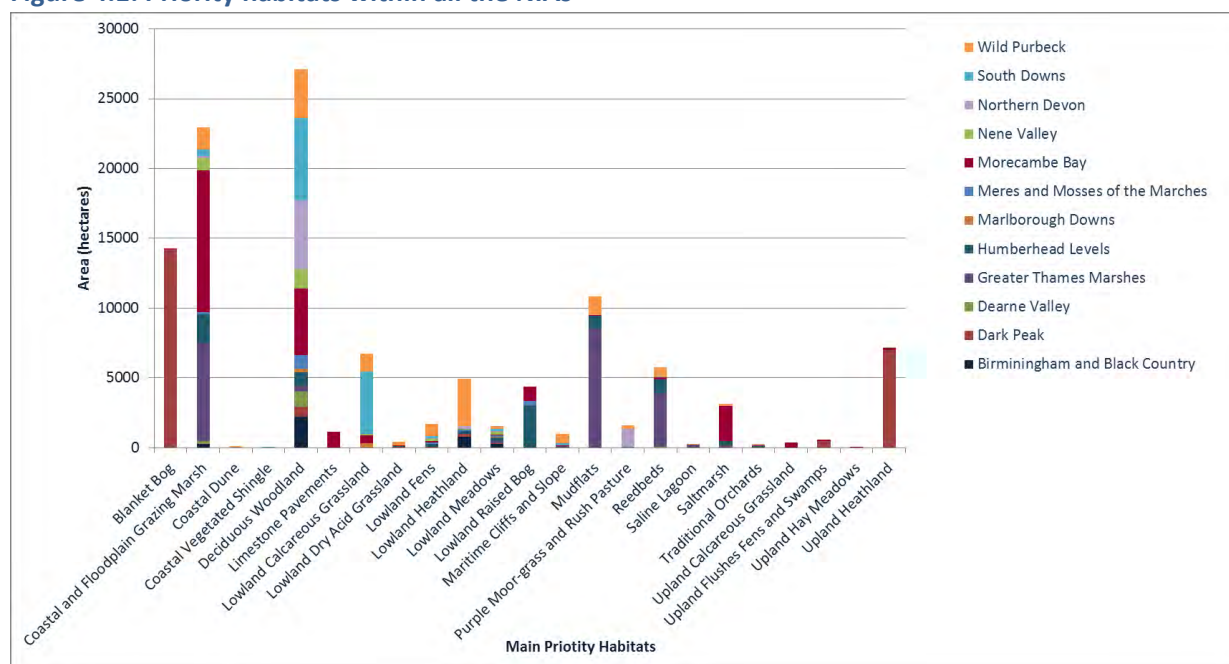
Source: Data derived from Single Habitat Layer created for NIAs by Natural England, May 2013

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[28] Note that the SHL data in fact indicate some area of upland heathland in Northern Devon. This is however an error in these data which classify lowland heathland as upland heathland in a few locations. These data therefore need to be checked and corrected in future.

Figure 4.2: Priority habitats in each NIA
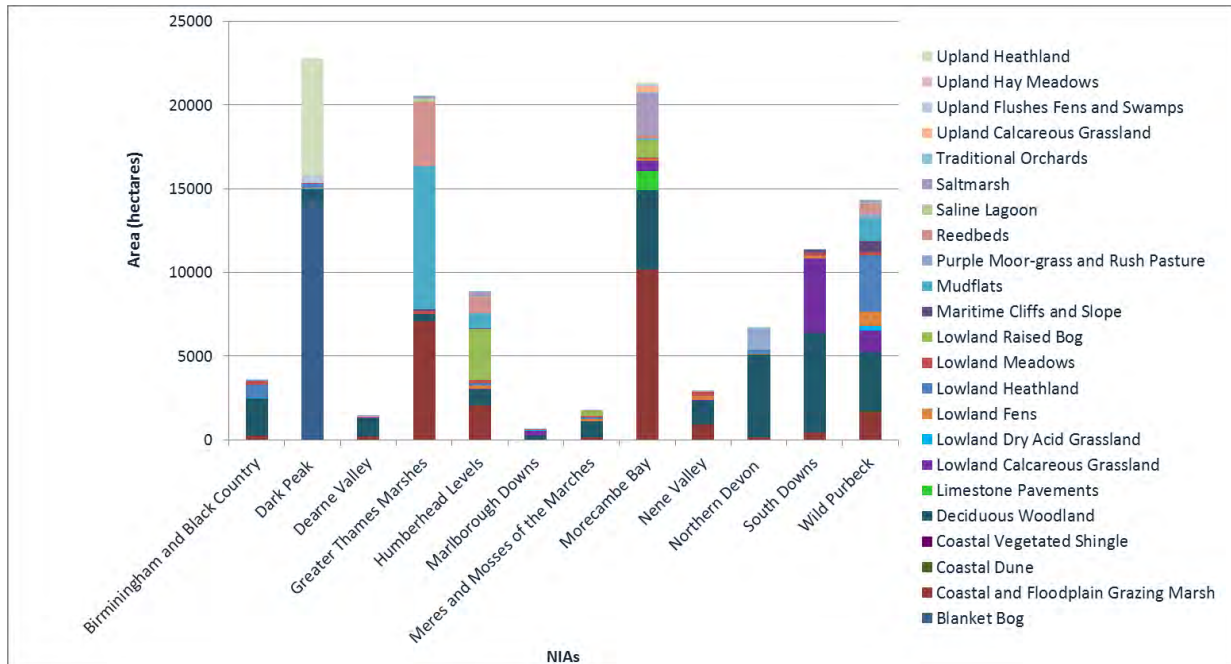
Source: Data derived from Single Habitat Layer created for NIAs by Natural England, May 2013

Habitat management

There are two core habitat indicators which consider habitat management:

- *Extent of habitat managed to improve its condition*
- *Extent of areas managed to restore/create habitat*

'*Extent of habitat managed to improve its condition*' is supplied by extraction of the reports from BARS records, based on the filters of action type: habitat management, Biodiversity objective: '*to maintain the extent of habitat and improve its condition through appropriate management*'. This may include 'completed', 'underway' or 'planned' actions and generally these have all been reported separately by the NIAs. The reporting filters also allow for this to reflect actions that 'overlap' with the NIA or just those actions that are 'within' the NIA. This creates a situation where there are different selection criteria for each NIA, enabling NIAs to decide which is more appropriate for their area.

'*Extent of habitat managed to create / restore habitat*' is also based on BARS reports and has the same issues as the condition indicator in terms of the inclusions and project status, which can make the individual NIA reporting variable. In this instance the filters require two runs of the reporting outputs and summation of the 'restore' option (To increase habitat resource by restoring features using appropriate management) and the habitat 'creation' options (To increase habitat resource by creating new areas using appropriate management).

In both instances these indicators cover habitats that the NIAs have targeted for action and reporting, rather than all habitats that may occur within the NIA area.

Data have generally been reported either as a baseline figure or an annual figure and only one NIA (Humberhead Levels) has included both baseline and annual, with the baseline being the current amount recorded within BARS and annual figures generated from their own records of additional areas created / managed. A substantial component of the data within BARS is the national upload of the Environmental Stewardship data. It is noted that in respect of Year 2 online reporting that it will be important to be able to standardise the recording of additions or losses of habitat, and therefore

NIAs may be best advised to provide standardised reporting of the new total area figure of habitat / actions, rather than just the change in habitat (which might otherwise risk being interpreted as a habitat loss).

An option (to be investigated by the M&E evaluation team) for Year 2 reporting would be for national reporting direct from BARS to standardise the reporting filters and compare the 'within' and 'overlapping' actions to see what impact this has on the condition and create and restore metrics. This will also allow a systematic treatment for the inclusion of both the 'create' and the 'restore' conservation options. This would allow the assessment of the contribution of other, non-NIA, activities reported within BARS that may be complementing NIA biodiversity targets. For example, within the reporting Marlborough Downs NIA has selected one priority habitat type on which to report these core indicators (Lowland Calcareous Grassland) which reflect the focus of the NIA objectives, but within the BARS reports there are actions addressing habitat management of Broadleaved, Mixed and Yew Woodland, Lowland Meadows, and Arable and horticultural options. This wider assessment allows the achievements of the NIA to be set in the context of the wider activity within the NIA, but not delivered as part of the project.

The data collated for the core biodiversity indicators are variable and difficult to represent collectively for all NIAs as the data comprises different sources and levels of completeness and includes completed, underway and planned actions. The results also reflect how far the NIAs have got in terms of reporting their records of actions within BARS, whether they have augmented records with local information not currently included within BARS and whether they have entered planned actions.

The two figures (Figure 4.3 and 4.4) therefore illustrate the data per NIA (examples are for Birmingham and the Black Country and Dearne Valley) for conservation actions that are underway for both the habitat condition improvement and the create/restore indicators for the baseline (as per the date of extraction from BARS. Dearne Valley included a large number of additional habitats but with '0' values and these have been excluded from this graph. Zero ('0') may represent a valid baseline value for underway, but in this case there should be 'planned' action records for those habitats, but in Dearne Valley case there are none and hence these habitats have been excluded within this year's reporting. This illustrates the contrasts between Birmingham and the Black Country which emphasises actions on creation/restoration (principally of lowland heathland) whereas Dearne Valley is predominantly managing sites to improve condition, particularly of lowland woodlands. Further analysis of this data per habitat per activity status will support national reporting of achievements within Year 2 – but the quality of this relies heavily on effective integration of BARS into the NIA recording strategies.

Figure 4.3: Summary of habitat create / restore and improve condition for specific habitats for Birmingham and the Black Country NIA
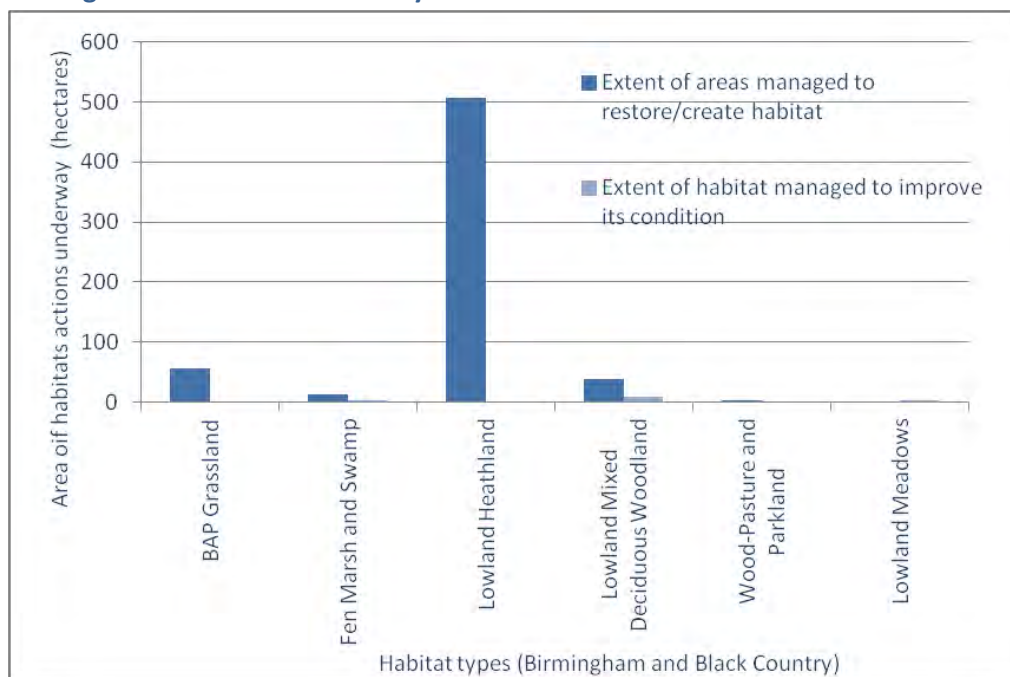
Source: Data derived from BARS records – generated by the NIA (2013)

Figure 4.4: Summary of habitat create / restore and improve condition for specific habitats for the Dearne Valley NIA
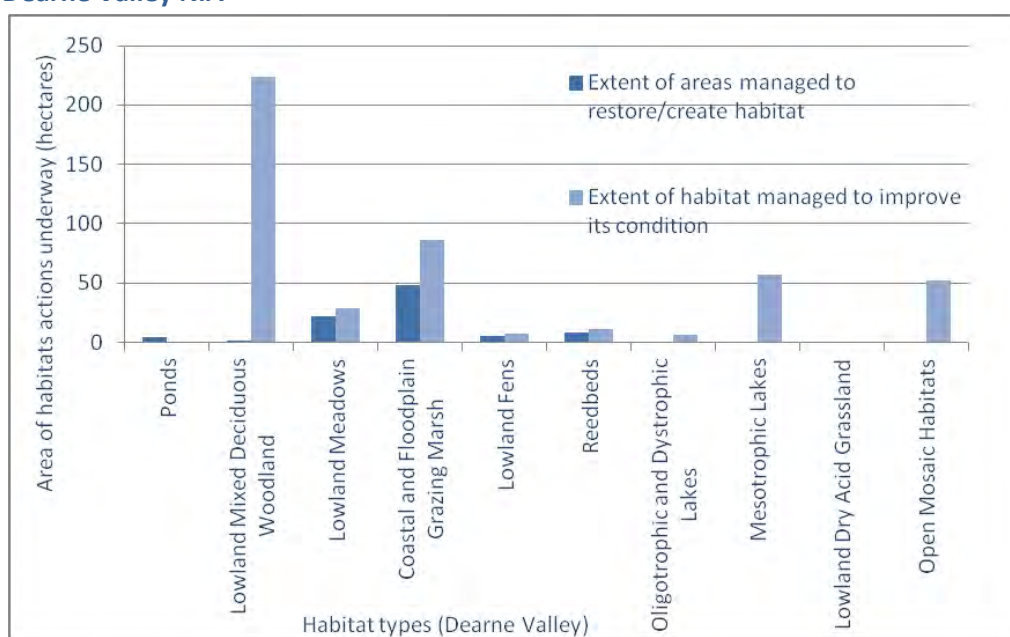
Source: Data derived from BARS records – generated by the NIA (2013)

Examples of activities undertaken by NIAs to restore or create areas of priority habitat:

- Over 6.5ha of new woodland created within the Birmingham and Black Country NIA.

- 9ha newly created wet grassland habitat on ex-gravel workings within Humberhead Levels NIA.

- Around 350ha of purple moor grass and rush pasture, and 29.62km of hedgerow restored through agri-environment schemes and through use of machinery and grazing rings in Northern Devon NIA.

- Blanket bog restoration works undertaken within Dark Peak NIA.

- New saline lagoon created within the Wild Purbeck NIA.

Examples of activities undertaken by NIAs to improve the condition of priority habitats:

- Enhancement works undertaken for 13 woodland sites covering 21.5ha, 13 grassland sites covering 51.8ha and two heathland sites covering 6.5ha within the Birmingham and Black Country NIA.

- Condition of watercourses improved by preventing pollution by contaminants within the Dearne Valley Green Heart NIA.

- Advice and support provided to farmers and land managers to deliver enhancement and restoration of over 600ha priority wetland, woodland and grassland habitats via a range of mechanisms in Morecambe Bay NIA.

Habitat condition of SSSIs plus condition from BARS

This subsection considers the optional indicator of the '*Extent of habitat in favourable or recovering condition*' which reports on the condition of SSSIs and the BARS actions to maintain extent of habitat in good condition.

Only three NIAs selected this indicator, with two entering data in year 1 (Nene Valley and Humberhead Levels). The supply of this data at the national level allows reporting on the SSSI condition at the start of the NIA programme although this data may have been collected prior to the NIA inception so its value in tracking change is uncertain and would require additional analysis. There are various caveats that need to be recognised in using the SSSI condition assessment data. The first is that the SSSI condition assessment relates to the condition of notified features and not specifically to priority habitats alone. The second is that condition assessment is undertaken at least once every six years which means that assessments may be out of date at the time of NIA reporting; as a consequence this indicator is designed for the longer term view although may be useful (as a proxy) within shorter, 3 year, time scales. In time, habitat surveillance methodologies may come on stream which could be adopted and used in reporting.

The extent of SSSI within the NIAs also varies greatly, from the extensive (almost complete) coverage in Dark Peak and extensive coverage in Wild Purbeck to the very sparse coverage of SSSIs in North Devon and Marlborough Downs for example. By way of context, Table 4.4 presents the number of SSSIs completely within each NIA and the number of SSSIs partly within each NIA, along with the total area of SSSIs within each NIA. Figure 4.5 Illustrates the extent and condition of SSSIs with three NIAs. This shows how some NIA like Dark Park are nearly entirely within SSSIs, whereas only a small proportion of others like Birmingham and the Black Country are SSSIs.

**Table 4.4: SSSIs within the NIAs**

NIA	SSSIs completely within NIA (number)	SSSIs partly within NIA (number)	SSSI within NIA Area (Ha)
Birmingham and Black Country	15	4	1,093.3
Dark Peak	1	6	23,568.5
Dearne Valley Green Heart	3	3	73.8
Greater Thames Marshes	5	9	22,015.0
Humberhead Levels	9	7	7,276.6

NIA	SSSIs completely within NIA (number)	SSSIs partly within NIA (number)	SSSI within NIA Area (Ha)
Marlborough Downs	5	0	394.6
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	21	4	845.8
Morecambe Bay	43	3	10,668.5
Nene Valley	10	6	1,964.8
Northern Devon	18	4	853.3
South Downs Way Ahead	15	22	3,967.7
Wild Purbeck	32	10	10,580.9
Total	**177**	**78**	**83,302.8**

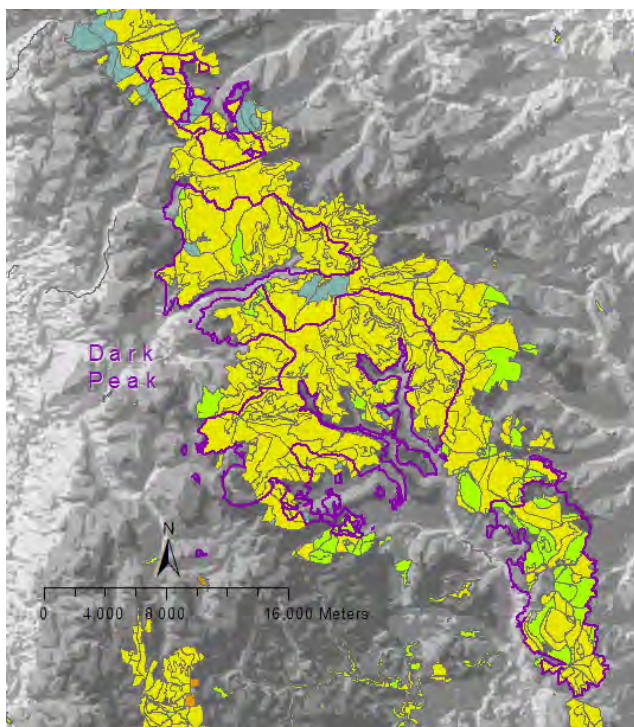**Source:** NIA designation statistics provided by Natural England (August 2013)

Figure 4.5: Illustrations of extent and condition of SSSIs within three NIAs
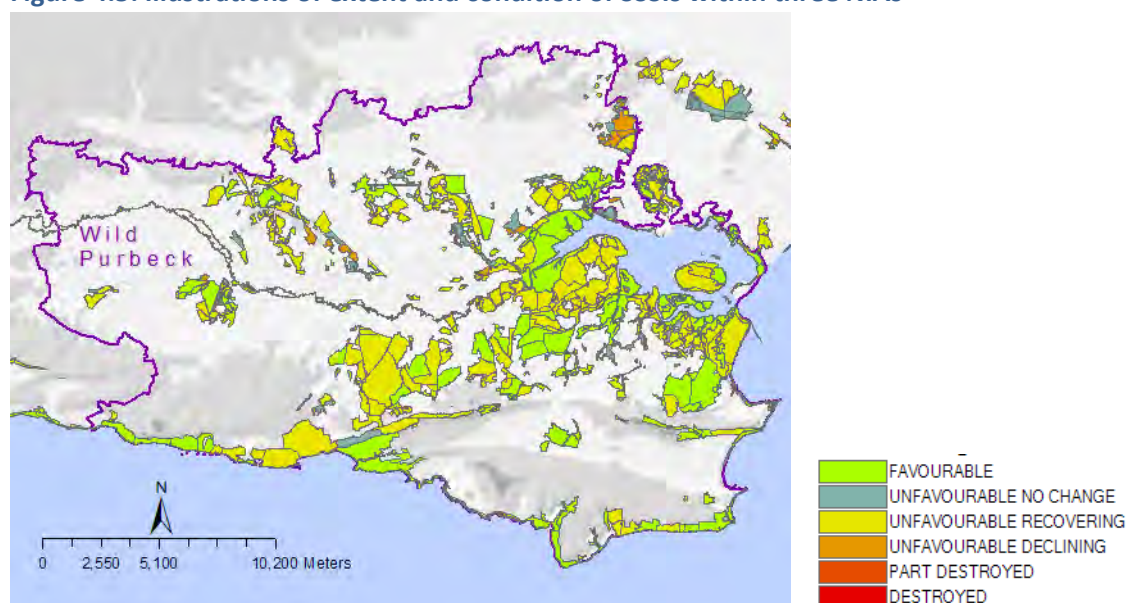
Wild Purbeck - extent and condition from NIA designated as SSSI
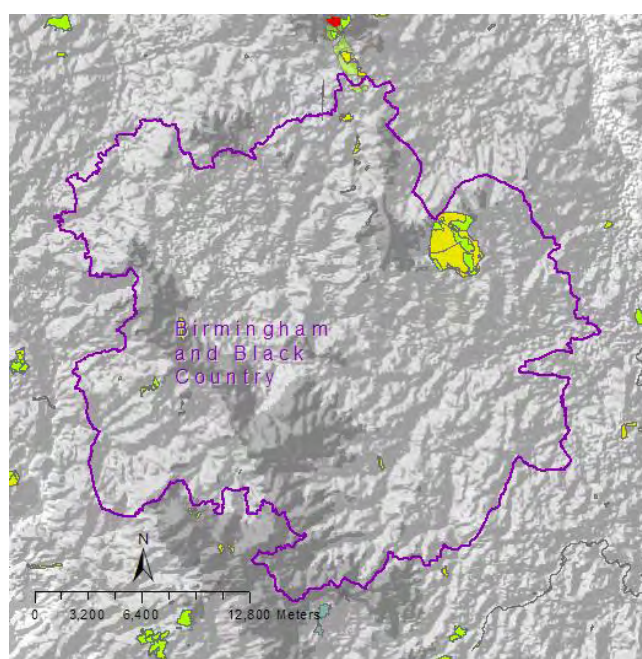
Birmingham and Black Country - extent and condition of NIA that is designated as SSSI
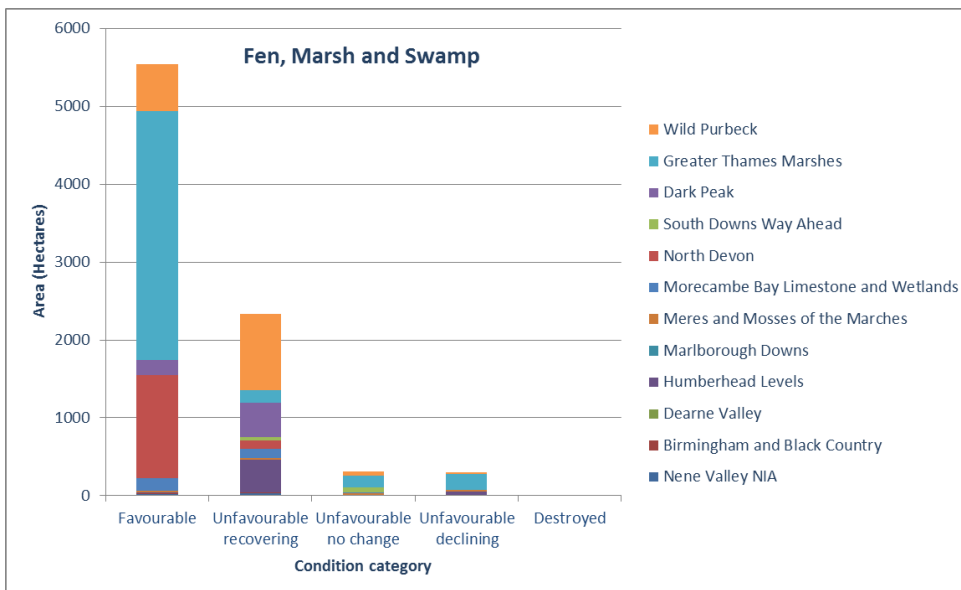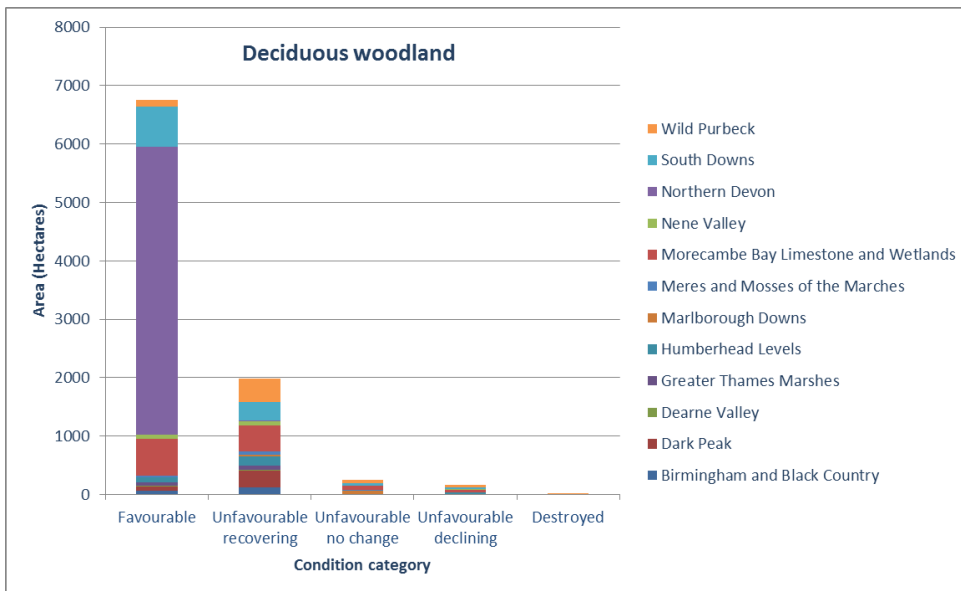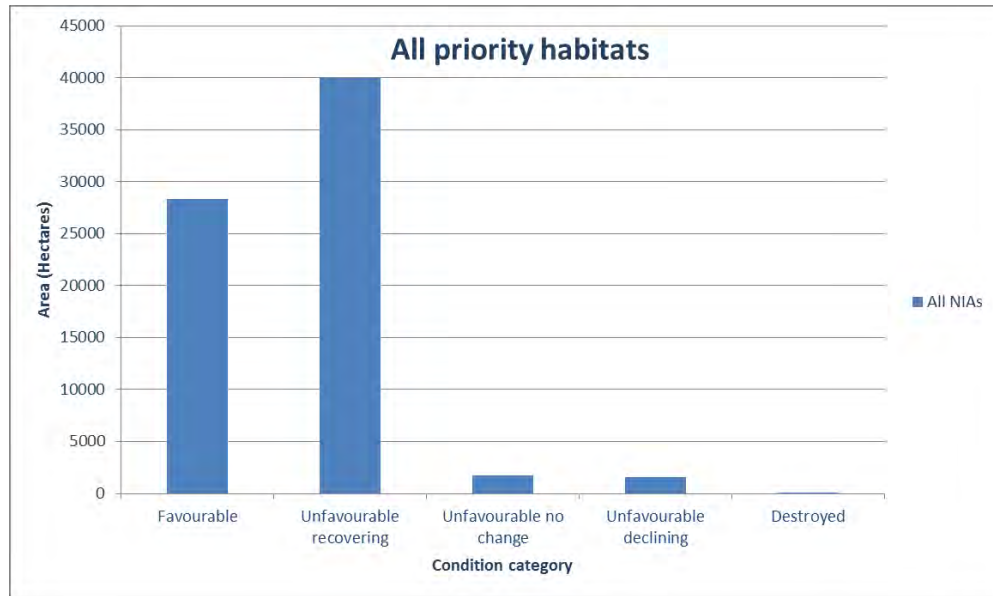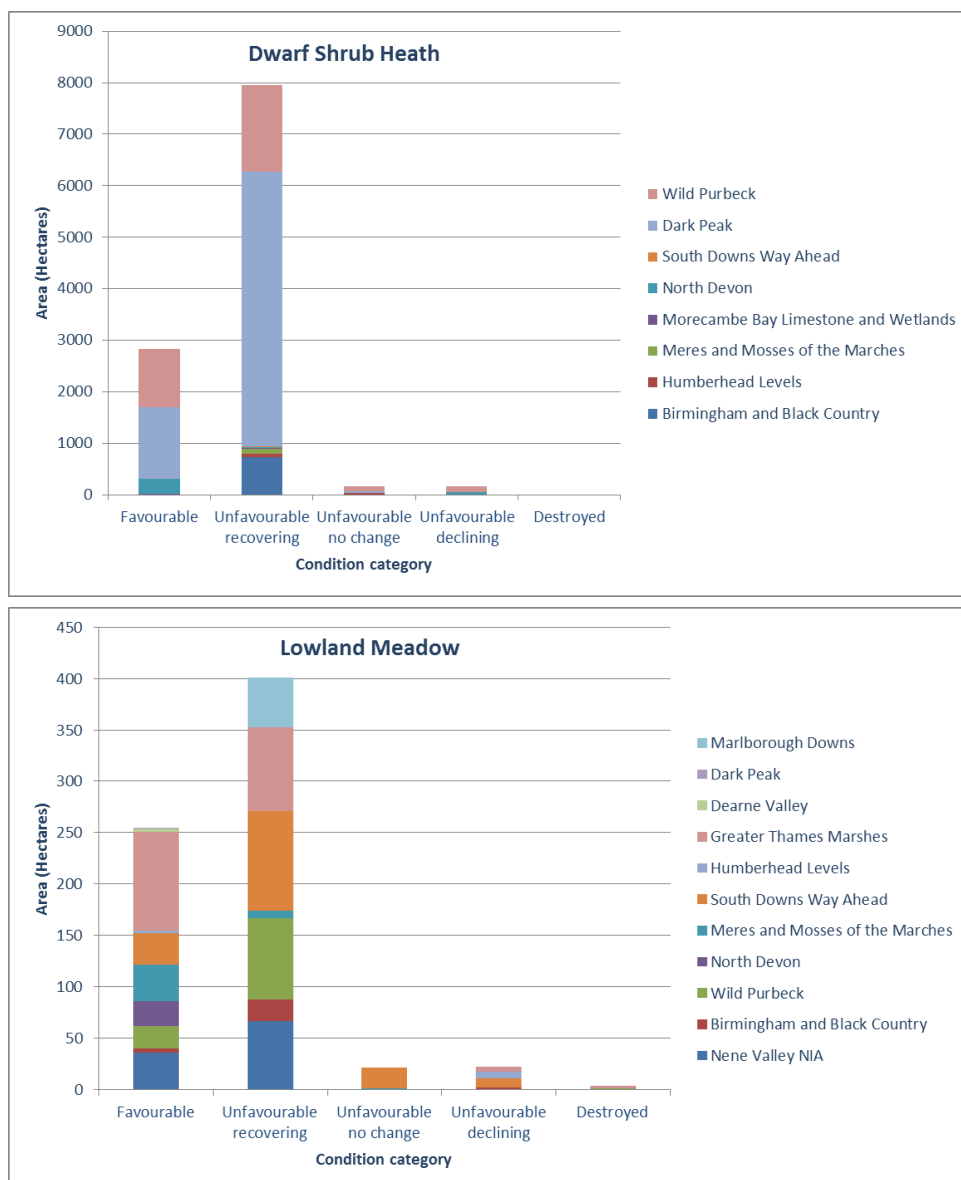
Dark Peak – extent and condition of NIA area designated as SSSI

The condition of the majority of SSSI habitats within the NIAs is either 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' (see Figure 4.6). Although a far greater area of habitat across all NIAs falls within 'unfavourable recovering', this category indicates that appropriate mechanisms or management are in place to achieve favourable condition. The small area of SSSI habitat in 'unfavourable no change' or 'unfavourable declining' are the categories for which the NIAs might target some of their effort and for which a change might be detected in future years. However, it is possible that the reasons that SSSI land falls within these categories is due to issues that are difficult to resolve in the short term.

The proportion of habitat that is in 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition differs when considering the habitats separately. For deciduous woodland and fen, marsh and swamp, the majority of habitat by area is in 'favourable' condition, while with dwarf shrub heath and lowland meadow most is in 'unfavourable recovering' condition; however it might be that these habitats have not been covered by the assessment as (bearing in mind the caveat) the purpose of condition assessments is to report on notified features rather than priority habitats.

Figure 4.6: Status of all SSSI condition reporting within the NIAs

Dwarf Shrub Heath

Legend:
- Wild Purbeck
- Dark Peak
- South Downs Way Ahead
- North Devon
- Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands
- Meres and Mosses of the Marches
- Humberhead Levels
- Birmingham and Black Country

Lowland Meadow

Legend:
- Marlborough Downs
- Dark Peak
- Dearne Valley
- Greater Thames Marshes
- Humberhead Levels
- South Downs Way Ahead
- Meres and Mosses of the Marches
- North Devon
- Wild Purbeck
- Birmingham and Black Country
- Nene Valley NIA

Source: SSSI management unit condition data, derived by Natural England for each NIA

Notes:
Fen, Marsh and Swamp combines: Lowland Fens, Purple Moor-grass and Rush Pasture, Reedbeds, Upland Flushes Fens and Swamps. Dwarf Shrub Heath combines: Lowland Heathland and Upland Heathland.
SSSI condition assessment relates to condition of notified features and not specifically to priority habitat alone.

Habitat connectivity

The evaluation will ideally consider under this sub-theme several questions:

- *To what extent have NIAs created or restored the area of habitat, or extent of other habitat features, which increase ecological connectivity and reduce habitat vulnerability to future change?*
- *To what extent have NIAs improved terrestrial habitat connectivity?*
- *To what extent have NIAs improved aquatic habitat connectivity?*
- *To what extent have NIAs undertaken other on the ground activities to increase ecological connectivity?*
- *To what extent have NIAs undertaken actions to plan for ecological connectivity?*

However in Year 1 there is limited information available and it is not possible to report in any detail on the initial NIA outputs / results have helped to increase habitat connectivity. The nature of the

habitat connectivity as a *local* indicator emphasises the experimental role of the NIAs, allowing local approaches to be developed a tested.

Connectivity of habitat is a central component of the biodiversity objectives addressing the 'more joined up' coherent ecological network proposed by the Lawton et al 2007, the NEWP and the *Biodiversity 2020* strategy and 2020 indicator 3 ('connectivity in the wider countryside'). However, and although broad principles of this ecological network approach are widely appreciated and practiced in the context of landscape-scale ecological actions (through core sites, stepping stones, corridors etc), there is little appreciation of how to effectively measure this as an indicator or indeed monitor annual change within an ecological connectivity indicator.

Within the M&E protocols this indicator has been left to local determination for the NIAs to generate their own local measures and interpretation of these measures, which aims to reflect their local priorities. Despite this freedom to develop these it has not been possible for most of the NIAs to calculate metrics in this year, for a number of reasons. The availability of data from which to reliably calculate meaningful measures and the lack of knowledge and technical resource have limited progress, the calculation of metric based assessments of connectivity rely on land cover mapping, with consistent cover, appropriate resolution and classification that can be updated. Generally, these data are not available within the NIAs and in only two cases has specific land cover mapping been reported, although Northern Devon NIA is progressing with Parish Biodiversity Audits to deliver a complete map by March 2015. Natural England have developed a proxy for these maps within the Single Habitat Layer that has been used to populate selected indicators; but is unlikely to fulfil the needs for the connectivity analysis. One NIA has used a partner organisation (Forest Research) with established expertise and tools to develop measures, three other NIAs have utilised a national dataset (the National Climate Change Vulnerability Model (NCCVM) outputs) and one is in the process of completing a permeability assessment for both reporting on connectivity and for action targeting. Current development of this indicator have constrained both the Year 1 M&E reporting and integration of connectivity into action planning:

- There is a reported lack of skill sets within NIAs to run the proposed protocols. The threads on Huddle and within the online reporting tool caveats indicate that there are resource limitations (staff, skill sets and training needs and software) need to be addressed to make use of this indicator. A lack of suitable land cover data from which to calculate metrics are also highlighted in discussions with NIAs.

- The connectivity protocol (AEA, 2012[29]) was less prescriptive than the NIAs needed to operationalize and understand the nature of the datasets that would be used in the analysis and the meaning of the outputs. The protocols have suggested to NIAs that further guidance would be forthcoming.

- None of those NIAs made effective use of the prescribed connectivity indicator measures built into the online reporting tool features (number of patch, patch size, habitat area and nearest neighbour distance) preferring to add their own features. The original feature options were not explained within the protocol and the role and interpretation of these measures in directing activities has not been clear to the NIAs.

- Two NIAs have used the NCCVM for their Local connectivity indicator, namely the Nene Valley and Greater Thames Marshes. This approach uses the data generated as inputs to a climate change modelling and is based on the Habitat inventory data and other habitat data rather than the Single Habitat layer (which was not available at the time). Each NIA had been visited by Natural England to discuss the role of climate change in their proposed

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[29] M&E framework protocol for local indicator of habitat connectivity: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/B_local-connectivity_tcm6-33579.pdf

actions and discussions on the NCCVM were proximity measures have been generated across the country in various forms at 200m grid interval. The outputs of this model include inter alia a permeability metric available for the whole country, but the relevance of this measure to the NIAs needs interpretation and how to operationalize updates for annual metrics has not been developed.

- Three of the NIAs have or are commissioning separate analysis for the indicator. Dearne Valley has commissioned Forest Research ecological network analysis which offers perhaps the most sophisticated analysis so far; Wild Purbeck has undertaken a habitat permeability project which will also help to direct activities, Morecambe Bay commissioned study on ecological networks which is yet to report. Dark Peak is working with a Masters student from York University to develop a protocol for this indicator (and will presumably run the indicator). Two NIAs state that the indicator is under development or awaiting the further advice anticipated from the review of the metric (Marlborough Downs/Northern Devon), which is an output of the M&E programme.

- The Dearne Valley / Forest Research approach has been to develop an Integrated Habitat Network tool for the Dearne Valley NIA and reports on connectivity measures for seven habitat types related to indicator species within these habitats and also a summary probability measure of total functional connectivity. This tool is both helping to design the conservation actions within the NIA and providing M&E outputs. This development notes the caution with which such landscape metrics need to be used; there is potential for fragmentation of habitats to falsely represent greater connectivity and issues of edge effects within the calculations. The constraints on analysis have also led to only core condition areas and patches being used in the modelling with loss of small/linear areas from the analysis.

- One NIA here has developed a surrogate approach using BARS data filtered to indicate the habitat connectivity as all 'completed' actions (by number) that either link or enhance core areas, whilst recognising that they will be further developing the indicator. Such approaches are interesting within the context of reviewing the connectivity indicator, but are recognised as an interim assessment needing development in Year 2.

Three NIAs have introduced additional indicators of connectivity, although only two (Nene Valley, Dearne Valley) have entered figures in Year 1, with Marlborough Downs indicator in development. Different NIAs have treated these either as biodiversity indicators or ecosystem service (supporting / regulating service indicators). The additional connectivity indicators in Nene Valley and Dearne Valley are related to the aquatic environment, while in Marlborough Downs the indicator relates to habitat for pollinators:

- Local indicator of aquatic habitat connectivity (Nene Valley) Biodiversity Indicator

- Local indicator of riparian habitat under sympathetic management which benefits pollinators (Nene Valley) Ecosystem Services indicator

- Measure of river habitat connectivity (Dearne Valley) Biodiversity indicator

- Area of new habitat created for pollinators (Marlborough Downs) Ecosystem Services indicator

Despite their similarities to the *local indicator of habitat connectivity* these indicators have to be treated separately, as the measures of the indicators and the calculations differ. The aquatic, riparian and river habitat potentially represent different habitat areas, and but essentially they may be taken to represent the same biodiversity / ecosystem service actions related to enhancements of river corridor connectivity.

Examples of the activities undertaken by the NIAs for improved connectivity are illustrated in Table 4.5. These examples are taken from the Year 1 Summary Reports and the quarterly Progress Reports. Further work on developing the approaches to the monitoring and evaluation of habitat connectivity and provision of support to the NIAs is planned in Year 2.

Table 4.5: Examples of connectivity activities in each NIA

NIA	Activity title	Description of connectivity activity
Birmingham and Black Country	Corridors	Corridor improvement projects have been undertaken at 10 sites covering 19.5km of watercourses, hedgerows and avenues. Projects have included naturalisation of rivers and canals, hedgerow restoration/creation, restoration of an historic avenue of trees linking bat foraging sites and the installation of bat boxes in a 2.7km long canal tunnel.
Dark Peak	Woodland habitat restoration for connectivity	Woodlands at North Lees Estate have been restructured with removal of larch to create more open grounds and coppicing of alter to create glades; plantation at Crowden being felled to be replaced with broadleaf trees; and 60 holly trees planted at Stanage Edge to create a scrub layer and Rowan planted to increase the food source for ring ouzel.
	Grassland habitat restoration for connectivity	Activities in progress include: restoration of 13.5ha of species rich meadows with spreading of yellow rattle seed; enhancement of 42ha of semi-improved grasslands at the Longshaw Estate and on Eastern Moors by spreading green hay or seeds collected from other local flower rich meadow sites; and 1.5ha species rich grassland restoration by removal of scrub.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Houghton Washland	Negotiations underway for the transfer of 42ha of land at Houghton Washland which would connect two existing core area nature reserves along a river corridor and arable reversion would enhance connectivity via the creation of wetland habitat.
	Integrated Habitat Network	Development of an Integrated Habitat Network tool to guide conservation works to reduce the effects of habitat fragmentation. A suite of habitats and species have been mapped and habitat networks developed using least-cost modelling.
Greater Thames Marshes	Biodiversity mapping	Interactive pdf atlas produced which combines existing biodiversity value, designations, land uses and anticipated pressures for change (such as climate change vulnerability, water resource issues and strategic housing); the maps help to plan delivery of an ecological network and identify areas for action.
Humberhead Levels	Sustainable water management	In addition to habitat creation, sustainable wetland management also delivers improved connectivity.
Marlborough Downs	Chalk grassland corridors	Native wildflower /grass seed purchased to enable farmers to create 6.44ha of semi-natural habitat to become a 5.73km wildlife corridor.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Linking core sites	Habitat restoration and water level monitoring works underway on five non-designated peatland sites and wildlife sites and habitat restoration and a feasibility study to tackle water quality are underway on the catchments of two SSSI meres.
Morecambe Bay	Land management advice	Advice and support provided to farmers and land managers to improve functional connectivity for priority habitats and species.
	Species corridors and buffers	Corridors created for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly by connecting habitat patches; capital works undertaken to buffer a core Butterfly Conservation reserve at Myers; and woodland edge habitat created along with 4ha of habitat to link and buffer Arnside Knott and Far Arnside SSSIs.
Nene Valley	Land management	Land management advice provided to landowners with regard to HLS applications to deliver over 1,500ha habitat restoration, including species rich grassland, fen habitat and floodplain grazing marsh with enhancements for farmland birds and waterfowl.
Northern Devon	Torridge catchment ecosystem	Connectivity and targeting within the project area explored and developed, including modelling on the risks posed to habitats by climate change.

NIA	Activity title	Description of connectivity activity
South Downs Way Ahead	**Chalk grassland ecological network**	Development of the chalk grassland ecological network work programmes for the five NIA Focal Areas (Winchester, Harting & Midhurst, Worthing, Brighton & Hove and Lewes and Eastbourne) and South Downs Way Corridor involving 44 individual sites in progress; and extensive habitat management and restoration works started.
Wild Purbeck	**Landscape permeability**	Report produced on 'Mapping landscape permeability within the Dorset AONB'.

Source: Based on a review of Year 1 quarterly and annual Progress Reports

Species

The evaluation will ideally consider under this sub-theme: '*To what extent have NIAs increased the extent and status of individual key species or species groups?*' There are three potential measures from the indicator protocols: i) *Extent of habitat managed to secure species specific needs*, ii) *Status of widespread species* and iii) *Status of focal species.* In addition, an indicator on the *Control of invasive or other non-native species* is discussed below.

For those actions under the management for specific species the data can be derived from BARS reporting (using the BARS filter '*to introduce certain features that meet the niche requirements of a particular species by undertaking specific management within or across a habitat*'), although not all NIAs reporting this indicator have used BARS as a recording mechanism. Delayed uptake of BARS may mean that the baselines reported are an underestimate of the activity and achievements. The data from BARS represents a measure of all activity across the NIA and not necessarily directly attributable to the NIA-funded delivery. At least one indicator for species has been used by the 12 NIAs; one NIA has selected all indicators, two NIAs selected two indicators and nine NIAs selected just one indicator (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Indicators for species selected by the NIAs

NIA	Management for species specific needs	Status of widespread species	Status of focal species
Birmingham and Black Country	Birds, Bats	Not used	57 plant species 4 bat species
Dark Peak	Not used	Not yet defined	Not used
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Not used	Not used	8 bird species 3 mammals 1 fish
Greater Thames Marshes	Biodiversity 2020 strategy listed species	Not used	Not used
Humberhead Levels	Not yet defined	Not yet defined	5 bird species 1 mammal (water vole) 3 insects
Marlborough Downs	Not used	11 bird species 30 butterfly species	Not used
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Not used	Axiophyte (species not specified or reported in Year 1)	Not used
Morecambe Bay	Not used	Not used	4 Butterfly species
Nene Valley	Not used	Not used	1 bird species (golden plover)
Northern Devon	Not used	Not used	1 Mollusc species 1 butterfly species
South Downs Way Ahead	Duke of Burgundy butterfly	Not used	1 bird species (corn bunting not reported in Year 1)
Wild Purbeck	Not used	Not used	5 bird species

Dearne Valley also seeks to report on groups of species under UK BAP themes (bats, butterflies, amphibians and reptiles, mammals, bats) and also collective measures of pollinators, butterflies and moths. The species selected within these measures have been both specific targets for action but also as representative of other bird populations (e.g. farmland birds, wetland bird assemblages).

Within Year 1 there is limited information available and it is not possible to report in any detail on the initial NIA outputs / results have helped to improve species.

Examples of activities undertaken by NIAs to increase the extent and status of individual species or species groups are illustrated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Examples of species activities in the NIAs

NIA	Activity title	Description of species activity
Birmingham and Black Country	Growing Local Flora project	Seed and propagules collected as part of the Growing Local Flora project allocated to projects or grown at EcoPark wildflower nursery as stock plants for future NIA projects.
	Bats	Bat boxes installed in three Walsall woodlands and in the Netherton Canal Tunnel
Dark Peak	Heathland species	Bell Heather seeds collected using volunteers and seed mix purchased; dried seed spread to increase the diversity of Heathland at the RSPB's Dove Stone Reserve and plug plants planted. Wet heath beads (containing species associated with a wet heath mix) purchased and spread at Hayden Brook and plant plugs of devils-bit scabious planted.
Greater Thames Marshes	Bumblebees	Work undertaken across a network of sites for three bumblebees species: Shrill Carder Bee, Brown-banded Carder Bee and Red-Shanked Carder Bee.
	Breeding waders	Focussing on improving the rate of breeding waders, work is in progress to build a more robust ecological network of grazing marsh habitat across the NIA with the initial focus on Higham Marshes.
	Invertebrates	Baseline habitat assessments for invertebrates undertaken at eight sites and recommendations made for management.
Marlborough Downs	Wildlife crops	Seed provided to establish a 3.6ha wild bird see plot to support tree sparrows and other farmland birds; seed provided to enable planting of 1.5ha nectar mix; 8 tonnes of grain scattered to feed to farmland birds
	Feeding & nesting stations	Planted five new tree sparrow 'villages' and erected 70 tree sparrow nest boxes and installed five kestrel boxes and one barn owl box.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Otters	Otter survey training delivered for volunteers to monitor at Crossmere.
Morecambe Bay	Duke of Burgundy butterfly	Corridors created for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly.
Northern Devon	Torridge catchment ecosystem	Action plans drawn up for the two priority species within the NIA, the marsh fritillary butterfly and the freshwater pearl mussel.
South Downs Way Ahead	Chalk grassland species	An analysis is underway of butterfly and plant data. Royal Botanic Gardens Kew provided advice on harvesting single species seed collections and has cultivated six chalk downland plant species which are currently either unavailable or unaffordable.
Wild Purbeck	Lapwing	2,000m predator exclusion fencing installed at Arne Moors for nesting lapwings.
	Cyril Diver project	Progress underway with the preservation of the Cyril Diver records of Studland; whole archive at Dorset History Centre catalogued and over 1000 maps scanned. Working groups established for the four main taxonomic groups (vertebrates, invertebrates, lower and higher plants) and field work started on resurveying Studland.

Source: Based on a review of Year 1 quarterly and annual Progress Reports

Invasive species

The evaluation will ideally consider under this sub-theme '*To what extent have NIAs helped control invasive or non-native species?*' and '*To what extent have NIAs improved habitat management to secure specific species needs?*'.

The actions to support the 'Control of invasive or other non-native species ' are noted in a number of NIA business plans and key objectives are defined to target control but only Dark Peak NIA has selected this as an indicator. This lack of reporting limits the M&E assessment of the extent to which NIAs are addressing control of invasives, but it seems likely that this has been interpreted as non-native invasives rather that other invasives native species (scrub, bracken control etc) . There are clearly opportunities for other NIAs to add this indicator in future, even if there is no baseline currently described this is the case for a number of other indicators. In Year 1 there is limited information available and it is not possible to report in any detail on the initial NIA outputs / results have helped control invasive or non-native species.

Reporting from Year 1 for the Dark Peak includes 0.5ha of control over a target of 1.2ha within the project life, so is on target. This has not been recorded within BARS at present, but there is benefit in doing so in future so that these measures can be reported alongside other actions and other invasive control measures within the area. There is scope within the species action recording to report on the control of invasive and other non-native species, which would fit the reporting needs and can accommodate both native and non-native invasion.

Table 4.8: Examples of invasive species control activities in each NIA (from Business Plans), only those NIAs with some action are shown

NIA	Activity title	Description of activity
Birmingham and Black Country	To enhance the quality of existing habitats across the NIA	Targeted control of invasive species.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	Objective 3 improve the connectivity of priority habitats through restoration and creation of 210ha of sessile oak woodlands and scrub, involving 16 new or existing woodlands, by 2015	1.2ha of rhododendron clearance and eradication. Note that other activities control native species that are 'invading' habitat, but this indicator seems to have been taken as only related to exotic invasive (e.g. control of bracken and birch scrub removal is treated a habitat management).
Greater Thames Marshes	None assigned specifically to this action	Colonisation by invasive species is noted in the business plan as a specific pressure but not explicitly explored in the objectives or reported in M&E. Removing invading scrub is noted as an action within Objective 2.
Marlborough Downs	Objective 4: To deliver best practice in wildlife management	Control of invasives within ponds, control of non-native Species in woodlands.

Source: Review of NIA Business Plans

Within Year 2 all NIAs could be introduced to the recording options within the BARS system so that this is reported more effectively. Currently, none of the NIAs have used the recording structure for species / control invasives, which would provide an effective route to reporting. Careful training is needed to ensure that the partner organisations within the NIAs understand the possibilities for classification of actions (for example the 'research on invasive impacts' may also be relevant to those NIAs that are undertaking invasive control).

Examples of the activities identified from the Year 1 Summary Reports and the quarterly Progress Reports undertaken by the NIAs to help control invasive non-native species are listed in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Examples of invasive species activities in each NIA

NIA	Activity title	Description of invasive species activity
Birmingham and Black Country	Habitat enhancement	Project design undertaken for invasive species control.
Dark Peak	Bracken	Bracken control undertaken at Stanage Edge and Blacka Moor.
	Rhododendron	Restoration of native woodland at Blacka Moor by rhododendron removal.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	Rhododendron control	A community volunteer group has been tackling Rhododendron at Cole Mere.

Source: Based on a review of Year 1 quarterly and annual Progress Reports

Overview of data / analysis that may be possible in Years 2 and 3

A number of areas where further data collection or additional analysis are proposed or may be possible in Years 2 and 3, under this theme have been identified. These include:

- As part of Work Package 2, the project team will be liaising with all the NIAs and their advisers, Natural England and the Project Steering Group on the proposals for the habitat connectivity indicator development and support in Year 2, including review of existing approaches used by some NIAs, national programmes etc. This will also involve reviewing with the NIA to see how proposals match with their approaches developed where they may already have taken actions, identifying the data needs and potential dataset/s the NIAs might use for these indicator/s, supporting the operation of the approach and proposing modifications to the online reporting to be tailored to the revised specification, and updating the protocols based on the outcomes of this task.

- Updated guidance on BARS and project and organisation structure within the system will allow more effective and specific reporting outputs from BARS that relate to the NIA and their partners, rather than aggregating all activity within the area. BARS has a central role to play in M&E through core and other indicators and quality and confidence in the data is central to effective M&E reporting.

- Greater guidance on the filters within BARS for reporting on the indicators could, if considered appropriate, allow a common approach to be used for the inclusion of actions 'within' and 'overlapping' the boundary of the NIA. There is logic in including actions that overlap (as these represent actions on the wider matrix (which does not artificially stop at the boundary of the NIA). If the measure is to look at overall activity by NIAs, whether within or overlapping with the NIA boundary, then there is no issue about comparison of the extent of habitat indicator. However, if all activities but only within the NIA boundary is required, these cannot then be represented against the measures of the extent of habitat, where this is uncertain within the overlapping area. More local measures of activities, managed outside BARS, may provide more detail, but limit the comparability between NIAs so a compromise is needed.

- NIAs are only using a part of the BARS tool functionality that relates to the Biodiversity – but there are more BARS options on research and engagement than on biodiversity – there is great potential to integrate BARS into more of the recording for NIAs but that these aspects have not been introduced to them and are not mature within the BARS system (few existing records). Use of the wider recording objectives within BARS offers opportunities to

standardise other attributes that BARS can accommodate – but risks changing approaches already undertaken within these social and economic indicators; an understanding of how social and economic indicators could be measured against what BARS currently offers could form the basis for scoping the potential for the future use and development of BARS.

- The Single Habitat Layer[30] (SHL) has now been renamed the Priority Habitats Inventory, and is now accessible to the NIAs. The NIAs need to be introduced to this layer so that future updates can be captured and integrated for Year 2 analysis by Natural England. Rather few NIAs have actually used the indicator (Total extent of habitat) but access to Priority Habitat Inventory is needed for the NIAs to validate this dataset.

- The Single Habitat Layer data includes 'additional habitats' that occur within the parcel classified by the main habitat, but these additional classes are not accounted for within the reporting as this would generate over-estimates and double-counting. Use of SHL data is therefore indicative of change but does not provide the detail of all habitat changes that repeat land cover mapping would. This creates complexities for monitoring year-on-year changes that is central to using this as an indicator. Refining the quality of the SHL needs to be avoided within year (and only updated with the NIA level actions – or the original dataset retained) so that change monitoring can be undertaken. This indicator will be reviewed within Year 2.

- Use of effective protocols for habitat connectivity and the review of the connectivity indicators proposed offer the opportunity to standardise some measures and review the implications of the selection of land cover data for calculating indicator changes.

- Some of the protocols and options features do not match the requirements and outputs that the NIAs have developed – and thus these are less comparable between NIAs than might have been envisaged, in particular the connectivity indicator. Update to the protocols and online reporting tool are needed to streamline the reporting for Year 2.

- The data created for the Environmental Stewardship or recorded under 'BARS Actions' within BARS could be used to capture the activities that affect the extent and or quality of the matrix of habitats and semi-natural habitats that may be a proxy measure of the connectivity. This approach has been applied by one NIA using completed actions that contribute to connectivity, but greater discussion and clarification of the contributory measures is needed and will be undertaken by the M&E evaluation team within Year 2.


[30] Single Habitat Layer document

5. Evaluation of the Contribution to Ecosystem Services Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts

Key messages from Year 1: Contribution to ecosystem services outputs, outcomes and impacts by the NIAs

- **All of the NIAs are using the concept of ecosystem services** to support the identification and rationale for their projects.

- However, **only some are framing specific projects around ecosystem services** and using the language and concept explicitly. This difference is largely semantic.

- Those projects that are targeted at increasing the provision of services are fairly evenly distributed across **provisioning, regulating and cultural ecosystem** services. There are limited examples of NIAs focussing on supporting ecosystem services.

- The indicator data provided through the online reporting tool provides some useful insights, but as would be expected in Year 1 is somewhat limited by **the lack of baseline information**. Therefore it is largely not possible to provide accurate indications of the outcomes and impacts of the NIAs on ecosystem services in Year 1. A key focus of work under the Phase 2 project in Year 2 will be on developing methods and approaches to monitoring and evaluation of ecosystem services, which will include consideration of the extent to which a baseline can be established.

- It is acknowledged that the monitoring and evaluation indicators and protocols within the ecosystem services theme **require further development to enable outcomes and impacts of the NIAs on ecosystem services to be robustly evaluated**. However, lessons can be learnt from several of the NIAs that have already started developing their approaches to measuring ecosystem services.

Introduction

This section presents an assessment of the **Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts** steps in the evaluation logic model under the **Ecosystem Services** theme (see below). It considers the ecosystem services outputs, outcomes and impacts achieved by the NIAs to deliver their own objectives and the wider policy objectives of the NIA initiative in Year 1.
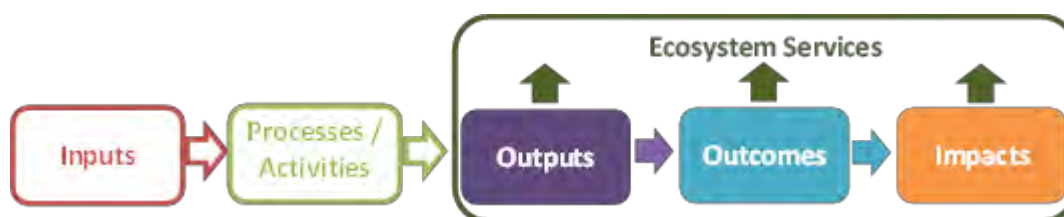
This section considers the four sub-themes under this theme covering the different types of ecosystem services:

- **Cultural services** – non material benefits from the natural environment.

- **Supporting services** - the services that are necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services.

- **Regulating services** - the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes,

- **Provisioning services** – the products obtained from ecosystems.

It is noted that there are clear overlaps between the evaluation of ecosystem services and that of social, economic and wellbeing aspects (see Section 6). This distinction reflects the structure of the M&E framework as developed during Phase 1 of the M&E project. During Year 2 the M&E Phase 2project will be researching and developing, with NIAs as far as possible, approaches to measure and evaluate delivery and outcomes in both of these thematic areas. In doing so, careful consideration will be given to how to reflect the overlaps that exist while developing meaningful reporting in both themes.

Overview of data available

As discussed in Section 1, the NIAs are intended to test approaches and many of the M&E indicators and protocols (especially in the ecosystem services theme) are work in progress which requires further research and refinement. Therefore the indicators and data provision in Year 1 via the online reporting tool has not been limited (see Table 5.1 below).

Other sources drawn on for information include the Business Plans and quarterly Progress Reports provided by the NIAs.

Table 5.1: Examples of ecosystem services activities in each NIA

Sub-theme	Indicator ref. no.	Indicator	Category	Comments
Cultural services	ES01_C	Local measures of extent of land managed to enhance landscape character	Optional	No information provided in Year 1.
Cultural services	ES02_C	Length of accessible PROW and permissive paths	Optional	Five NIAs provided partial information in Year 1.
Cultural services	ES03_C	Condition of historic environment features	Optional	No information provided in Year 1.
Cultural services	ES04_C	Access to natural greenspace and/or woodland	Optional	Three NIAs provided partial information in Year 1.
Cultural services	ES05_C	Local indicator of cultural services	Optional	No information provided in Year 1.
Supporting services	ES06_S	Area of habitat supporting pollinators	Optional	No information provided in Year 1.
Supporting services	ES07_S	Local indicator of riparian habitat under sympathetic management which benefits pollinators	Local	No information provided in Year 1.
Supporting services	ES08_S	Local indicator of supporting services	Local	Information provided, but only some limited relevance to ecosystem services.
Regulating services	ES09_R	Contribution to water quality	Optional	Three NIAs provided partial information in Year 1.
Regulating services	ES10_R	Contribution to carbon storage & sequestration	Optional	Four NIAs provided partial information in Year 1.
Regulating services	ES11_R	Local indicator of area of new habitat created for pollinators	Optional	No information provided in Year 1.
Provisioning services	ES12_P	Area of more-sustainable agricultural production	Optional	Seven NIAs provided partial information in Year 1, however nationally available data on Environmental Stewardship drawn on for Year 1 (see below).
Provisioning services	ES13_P	Percentage of woodland in active management	Optional	Four NIAs provided partial information, however nationally available woodland data drawn on for Year 1 (see below).
Provisioning services	ES14_P	Woodland use for energy production	Local	One NIA provided partial information in Year 1.

The table above refers to three locally developed indicators. These are:

1. The percentage of historic features managed positively in the DVGH NIA – Dearne Valley (cultural).

2. Area of new habitat created for pollinators – Marlborough Downs (regulating).

3. Local measure of percentage of Local Planning Authority Local Development Framework (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).

Data for the first should inform the evaluation in future years. Some data for the third local indicator was provided in Year 1, but it was felt to be of relatively limited relevance to ecosystem services, dealing as it does with planning policy that refer to the NIA and not to ecosystem services generally or to any specific ecosystem services[31].

Overview of NIA activities in Year 1 related to ecosystem services

Generally the NIAs have used the language and concepts of ecosystem services across their Business Plans and activities in Year 1. This tends to be used to provide a rationale for specific interventions or projects that aim to improve certain aspects of the natural environment and / or to get more people to experience the natural environment.

Some, but not all, of the NIAs have taken this further and have, or are planning to, undertake specific projects that explore detailed aspects of the ecosystem services concept within the context of their NIA. Examples of these sorts of activities are presented in Table 5.2 below.

It should be noted that the NIAs below who do not have any specific project activities listed are still using the concept of ecosystem services in their work but they are not framing their work around ecosystem services. This is of course largely a semantic difference and almost all of the NIAs' activities, if successful, are expected to deliver some increase in ecosystem services.

Table 5.2: Examples of ecosystem services activities in each NIA

NIA	Activity title	Description of activity and status
Birmingham and Black Country	**PEOPLE**	The Business Plan indicates that increasing the provision of ecosystem services is a priority. The only specific activity linked to ecosystem services is an estimation of the 'value of ecosystem services in the NIA' which is referred to in the Business Plan. Within the progress report for quarter four there is no additional detail provided or progress update on this specific aspect of the NIA.
Dark Peak	-	The Business Plan indicates priority ecosystem services and their relative functionality, this prioritisation informs a number of projects but there are no activities specifically framed around ecosystem services within the quarterly reporting. The Business Plan indicates that the NIA will explore the potential for PES but again this is not followed up in the quarterly reporting.
Dearne Valley Green Heart	-	The use of the term ecosystem services is not explicitly seen in the Dearne Valley Business Plan, progress reports or Year 1 summary. However the NIA aims help restore ecological functionality of the river, its floodplain and its link to habitats on surrounding sandstone and limestone hills. Furthermore linking nature and regeneration is a key feature of the NIA programme. As a result the principle of an ecosystem services approach is evident throughout the NIA activities.

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[31] Reflecting this potential lack of relevance to ecosystem services, Dearne Valley NIA have requested guidance on whether this indicator should instead be placed under a different M&E theme. This is to be followed up in Year 2.

NIA	Activity title	Description of activity and status
Greater Thames Marshes	-	The language of ecosystem services is used regularly within the Business Plan but no specific projects are based on ecosystem services.
Humberhead Levels	-	Within the Business Plan the NIA refers to potential opportunities to explore ecosystem service provision with York University, but this does not appear to have been further developed.
Marlborough Downs	-	There are references to the concept in the Business Plan, including to Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES). However based on information available in quarterly progress reporting no specific ecosystem services orientated projects have, as yet, been developed, although the NIA Business Plan notes that the nature of the initiative in Marlborough Downs supports a number of ecosystem services.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	-	Ecosystem services is an important concept in the NIAs Business Plan. They refer to the use of proxies to understand ecosystem services and this may explain the lack of explicit reference to ecosystem services in the quarterly reports.
Morecambe Bay	Demonstrate ecosystem services benefits	The Business Plan refers to using an ecosystem services toolkit developed by Cambridge Conservation Initiative to assess the benefits delivered by the network of sites within the NIA. The lack of references to this in the quarterly reporting indicates that this work is behind the originally planned schedule.
Nene Valley	Investigate the potential to market the ecosystem services provided by the Nene Valley	This project is one of the five objectives of this NIA and as such is a high profile output. The project seeks to understand and map the provision of ecosystem services in the NIA area to support the planning and delivery of the NIA over time. The project is based on ecological data that will be combined and mapped via the Wildlife Trust's EcoServ tool, supported by other mapping as required. The NIA are coordinating with numerous ecosystem service related research programmes and projects. Progress is slightly behind where the NIA had hoped due to a later start than planned.
	PhD at the University of Northampton	Project title is "landscape-scale conservation of pollinating insects in the lowland British countryside" and it will entail understanding pollinator habits in the Nene Valley area with an aim to understand pollinator ecosystem services.
Northern Devon	Cultural ecosystem services	This project seeks to support Objective three of this NIA and to understand how communities within the NIA value their natural environment. Progress is good and is being driven forward by the work of Exeter University who are looking at developing a case study around cultural ecosystem services, which was expected to report in July 2013.
	Development and delivery of ecosystem services education support materials	Due to start in quarter five, so no information on progress is currently available.
	-	Three of the NIA's objectives include reference to ecosystem services and the concept is fundamental to the work of the NIA, particularly through the NIAs work in relation to water quality in the Torridge catchment. For example NIA objective 2 (Realise the Torridge catchment ecosystem's potential to deliver high quality ecosystem services), which has a particular focus on improving water quality.
	-	Activities relating to the monitoring and evaluation of ecosystem services is due to start in the second year
South Downs Way Ahead	Town to Down (TtD)	Project that seeks to map and improve the provision of ecosystem services. In particular it hopes to improve physical and intellectual access to and an understanding of the value of chalk down-land to the Lewes Community generally and to socially excluded groups in particular. Progress on this project is described as satisfactory and in line with original milestones.
	(sub-project to TtD) Farm education days	Working with the Game and Country Wildlife Trust this NIA seeks to increase the understanding of ecosystem services within the NIAs communities. Progress towards this is good and in line with original milestones.

NIA	Activity title	Description of activity and status
	(sub-project to TtD) **Farm education days**	The RSPB are looking to work with the NIA to get a greater appreciation of the ecosystem services provided by farms. It is not clear what progress has been made.
	(sub-project to TtD) **Raised awareness**	The Lewes District Council are undertaking some education and engagement through events, workshops and activities. It is due to start in the second year so there is no progress to date.
	(sub-project to TtD) **Chalking up the benefits**	This project seeks to work with the community to explore and document the benefits to wellbeing in Lewes from the local environment (with a focus on the chalk downs) and to raise and spread awareness of the gains for the Lewes local economy from locally provided ecosystem services. A number of outputs have been delivered and the progress is described as good and in line with original milestones.
	Valuing the Chalk (VtC)	This relates to one of the objectives of the NIA and seeks to attribute an environmental, economic and social value to the benefits and services provided by chalk downland.
	(sub-project to VtC) **Bringing the Downs into the city**	This research project looks at the potential ecosystem services that can be delivered by green roofs in Brighton and Hove. Progress is completed and has been reported on.
	PES	The quarterly progress report refers to putting in place some of the mechanism to support PES, this is a longer term aim and one that will be explored in the second year of the NIAs.
Wild Purbeck	**Developing the green economy, income streams and skills.**	This is one of the objectives of the NIA and with regard to ecosystem services it seeks to make use of provisioning services notably from woodlands. Progress on this project is described as good and in-line with the original milestones.
	-	In the second year the NIA intends to produce an Ecosystem Services Plan – the exact content and nature of this is unclear but it is understood that it will support wetland creation and water quality.

Source: Selected information from a review of NIA Business Plans, quarterly Progress Reports and Year 1 Summary Reports

Cultural services

The evaluation will consider the extent to which initial NIA outputs / results have: *Improved cultural services*. In particular this will mean looking at efforts the NIAs have made to improve for example: access to green spaces; the quality of experience at green space; and, understanding of the natural environment. The potential key data sources for this include the M&E indicators in the cultural services sub-theme as well as the NIAs' self-reported work.

The Northern Devon NIA has called round all of the NIAs to discuss their approach to understanding cultural ecosystem services and how they were, or were not, including it within their reporting. The result of this activity was an understanding that many of the NIAs were not that comfortable with the language around cultural ecosystem services and were unsure around how the concept could be applied. This was felt to be partly a result of the natural sciences bias of the NIA leads, meaning that they were less familiar with the related ideas and techniques which tend to emerge from the social science or arts and humanities. As above this is primarily a semantic challenge as all of the NIAs understand the value of activities that increase cultural ecosystem services, but not necessarily the language of the concept.

Perhaps as a result of the difficulty described above, as well as the need to develop approaches further, only a limited number of NIAs have selected cultural ecosystem services indicators and entered information in the online reporting tool in Year 1 (only three NIAs provided any information, there were only 10 entries in total and only one indicator in one NIA has both a baseline and Year 1 figure).

Improvements to accessibility of green space

As described limited information is available in Year 1, but information recorded in the tool shows that the Meres and Mosses have improved the accessibility of 437km of public right of way (PROW) (from a baseline of 30.82km). The Dearne Valley (6.14km), Marlborough Downs (6.7km) and Dark Peak (3.6km) also provide baseline figures for improve accessibility of PROW suggesting this might be a priority.

Improvements to the quality of experience in green spaces

A number of NIAs are seeking to improve the quality of green spaces and the use of the areas, but are not reporting within the scope of this section.

The North Devon NIA is running a research project to understand how local people value their local environment, specifically framed around cultural ecosystem services. This project is being run by University of Exeter researchers and is at an advanced stage, no reporting has been provided at the time of writing.

Improved understanding of the natural environment

As shown in Table 5.2, a number of specific projects are looking at improving individual and community understanding of the value of the natural environment. For example, the farm education days being run by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and RSPB in the Way Ahead NIA seek to get local community members to understand all the benefits that are delivered by agriculture. Within the same NIA, Lewes District Council is planning on undertaking some awareness raising work around the same issues.

The Northern Devon NIA is also developing and delivering ecosystem services education support materials to schools in the area.

Supporting services

The evaluation will consider the extent to which initial NIA outputs / results have: *Improved supporting services*. In particular this will mean looking at efforts to increase pollination.

The potential key data sources for this include the M&E indicators in the supporting services sub-theme as well as the NIAs' self-reported work. None of the NIAs provided information into the tool for the 'area of habitat supporting pollinator indicator' in Year 1 (Marlborough Downs who selected this indicator is currently evaluating data sources, suitable connectivity models and associated costs).

The Nene Valley NIA has a PhD student who is looking at the existing baseline of pollinator friendly habitats with the intention of using this information to improve decision making. In addition, some of the activities being supported via higher-level stewardship potentially support pollinators, but exact figures are not available.

Regulating services

The evaluation will consider the extent to which initial NIA outputs / results have: *Improved regulating services*. In particular this will mean considering changes to flood storage potential, carbon sequestration and water quality.

The potential key data sources for this include the M&E indicators in the regulating services sub-theme as well as the NIAs' self-reported work.

Limited information was provided via the online reporting tool in Year 1. Three of the NIAs have provided some information on carbon sequestration:

- The Dearne Valley NIA reported that through the creation of woodland they have sequestered 1,424.34 tonnes of CO_2.

- Morecombe Bay NIA have expanded the size of their priority habitats (lowland raised bog in this instance) and in doing so stored 607.2 tonnes of CO_2.

- Humberhead Levels NIA has re-wetted 950ha to improve carbon storage.

There is no information provided via the online reporting tool in Year 1 on the water quality indicator.

As described in Table 5.2 above the NIAs have undertaken numerous activities relevant to regulating services. For example, within the South Downs they are looking at the regulating benefits that can be delivered by green roofs, notably relating to flood storage and climate regulation.

The references to PES in Marlborough Downs, South Downs and Dark Peak are largely based around regulating services such as flood regulating, carbon storage and water quality although Marlborough Downs business plan also refers to biodiversity, recreation, sense of tranquillity and history and pollination in relation to PES. None of these PES projects have been realised to date so it is not possible to report further in Year 1.

The Upstream Thinking model used within the Northern Devon NIA has been looking at the potential to support the delivery of water firms' objectives through improvements to the natural environment and agricultural practices. This approach can be considered to be a form of PES but one that is focussed on water quality primarily.

Provisioning services

The evaluation will consider the extent to which initial NIA outputs / results have: *Improved provisioning services*. In particular this will consider changes to the productivity of agricultural and forestry systems as well as efforts to make more uses of environmental or natural products.

The potential key data sources for this include the M&E indicators in the provisioning services sub-theme as well as the NIAs' self-reported work.

The NIAs have provided limited information via the online reporting tool in Year 1, but it is clear that there are a number of relevant activities on-going. For example:

- The Wild Purbeck NIA is looking to use woodland products to deliver jobs and skills as well as a sustainable source of energy.

- The Nene Valley NIA also hopes to identify opportunities to use the natural products produced within the NIA area.

- The Northern Devon NIA has run a number of events and activities to support the creation of a 'local woodland economy' to make use of woodland materials created within the NIA area. They have developed a NIA Woodland Forum who are developing this part of the work.

Looking into the information provided via the online reporting tool, some potentially useful baselines have been developed that could provide meaningful analysis in Years 2 and 3.

Area of more-sustainable agricultural production

Information is presented in Table 5.3 below on the extent of higher and entry level stewardship areas within the seven NIAs that provided information via the online reporting tool in Year 1. This shows the area and percentage of the NIAs in Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) and Entry-Level Stewardship (ELS). Monitoring the extent of HLS and ELS as well as the mix of options will be priorities for Years 2 and 3. Consideration will also need to be given to the implications of the transition to the New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS) in 2015.

Table 5.3 is derived from the data submitted by the NIAs to the online reporting tool and reports the baseline for the area (ha) based schemes (HLS and ELS schemes). The data in Table 5.3 does not include point (e.g. ponds) and linear scheme options (e.g. metres of hedgerows), which some NIAs have also reported on. There were some inconsistencies in reporting the difference between baseline and annual figures and this needs resolution if these data are to be used for comparative analysis in Year 2 and are to an effective indicator of more sustainable agricultural production.

**Table 5.3: Selected NIAs and coverage of higher and entry-level stewardship schemes**

NIA	Higher-level/targeted schemes (ha)	% of NIA in HLS	Entry-level type schemes (ha)	% of NIA in ELS
Dark Peak	4472.0	15.7	-	-
Dearne Valley	340.2	2.1	115.8	0.7
Greater Thames Marshes	5180.0	9.5	958.3	1.8
Marlborough Downs	621.0	6.0	263.7	2.5
Meres and Mosses	1458.3	3.6	1970.9	4.9
Nene Valley	1131.1	2.7	5662.6	13.7
Wild Purbeck	7725.9	16.7	2465.6	5.3

Source: Analysis based on data recorded by NIAs on HLS and ELS scheme coverage in the online reporting tool

Percentage of woodland in active management

Woodland is a major land use in five of the twelve NIAs (i.e. those that have a woodland cover higher than England's average of 10%)[32]. Figure 5.1 below shows that in those give NIAs with high woodland cover, just under half of the woodland areas are in active management. In those seven NIAs where woodland is a less significant in terms of area, the ratio of managed to un-managed woodland tends to be lower.

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[32]Defra (2013) Government Forestry and Woodland Policy Statement [Online] Available from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181809/pb13871-forestry-policy-statement.pdf.pdf

Figure 5.1: Percentage of NIAs that are woodland and percentage of woodland that is managed
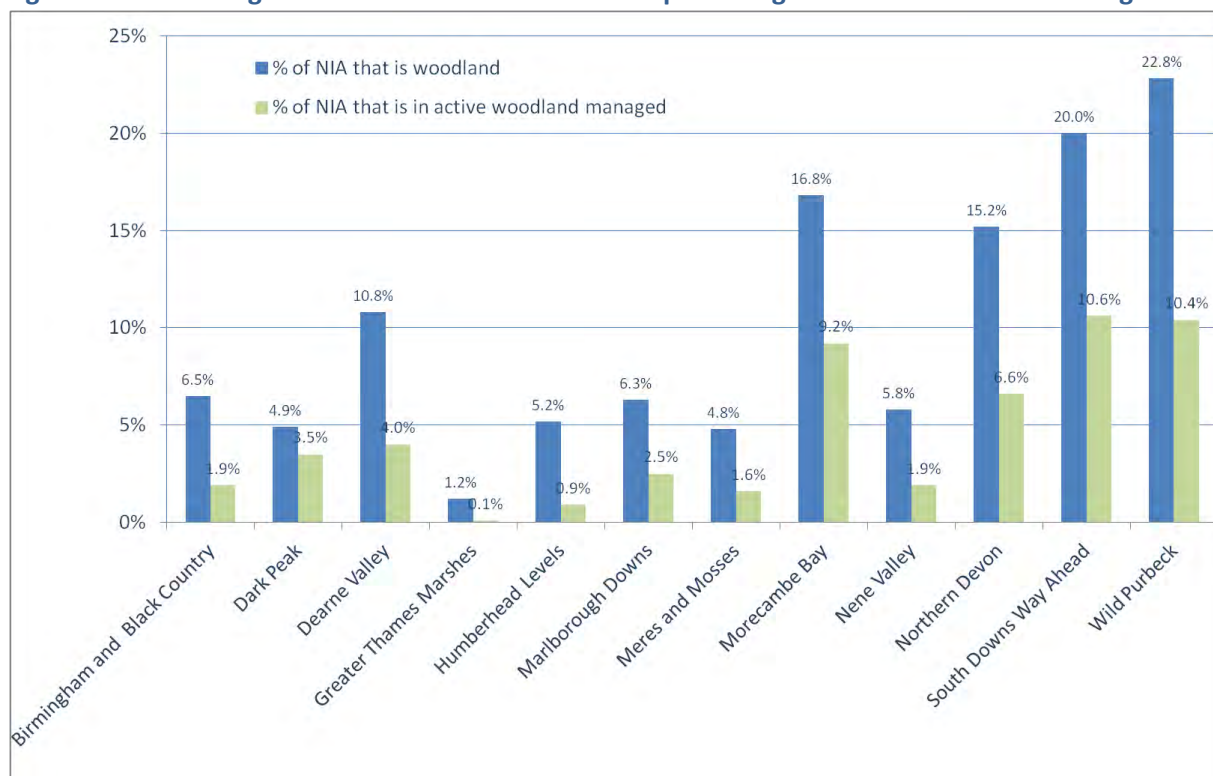
Source: Analysis provided by Natural England - Woodland in management area calculation through combination of: FCE's "Woodland in management" performance indicator (FC Product E managed woodland); and National Forest Inventory England

The table below shows that across all the NIAs woodland cover is slightly above the national average and that approximately 44% is in actively management. Observing how this information changes over time will be a useful indicator to understand the provisioning services provided by the NIA programme.

Table 5.4: Woodland cover and extent of managed woodland across all the NIAs

Total NIA Area (ha)	Total Woodland (ha)	% of NIAs that is woodland	Area of actively managed woodland (ha)	% of total woodland actively managed
513,144	53,580	10.4%	23,486	43.8%

Source: Analysis provided by Natural England - Woodland in management area calculation through combination of: FCE's "Woodland in management" performance indicator (FC Product E managed woodland); and National Forest Inventory England

Woodland products

Birmingham and Black Country was the only NIA to select the woodland use for energy products indicator, although the title of this indicator was subsequently changed to woodland products, reflecting the wider scope of ecosystem services being measured. In Year 1 they provided the following data via the online reporting tool:

- Volume of wood used for biodiversity 81.3 m^3.

- Volume used for energy production 26.7 m^3.

- Volume of wood used for other purposes (e.g. education and arts) 13.6 m^3.

- Total volume of harvested woodland products 121.6 m^3.

Although there is no baseline information for the preceding year (2011/12), the information above will provide a useful baseline for Years 2 and 3.

Overview of data / analysis that may be possible in Years 2 and 3

A number of areas where further data collection or additional analysis are proposed or may be possible in Years 2 and 3, under this theme have been identified. These include:

- As part of Work Package 2, the project team will be liaising with all the NIAs and their advisers, Natural England and the Project Steering Group on the proposals for ecosystem services indicator development and support in Year 2, including review of existing approaches used by some NIAs, national programmes etc. This will also involve reviewing with the NIA to see how proposals match with their approaches developed where they may already have taken actions, identifying the data needs and potential dataset/s the NIAs might use for these indicator/s, supporting the operation of the approach and proposing modifications to the online reporting to be tailored to the revised specification, and updating the protocols based on the outcomes of this task.

- Address some of the caveats and issues emerging from individual NIAs reporting.

- The main issues with the data provided are the absence of baseline making meaningful analysis not possible in Year 1, but it is hoped that this will be improved for Year 2. As noted above a key focus of work in Year 2 (Work Package 2) will be on developing methods and approaches to monitoring and evaluation of ecosystem services, which will include consideration of the extent to which a baseline can be established.

- Work with those NIAs that are developing their ecosystem approaches and indicators on ecosystem services, notably Northern Devon and South Downs.

- Exploring changes in the extent and various options of HLS and ELS within certain NIAs will also be considered, along with the implications of the transition to NELMS in 2015..

- Liaising with the Northern Devon NIA and the Principal Investigators of Work Package 4 of the National Ecosystems Assessment (NEA) Follow on Project to explore synergies between their work looking at indicators for cultural ecosystem services and the potential data collection that can be undertaken in Year 2 of this evaluation.

6. Evaluation of the Contribution to Social and Economic Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts

Key messages from Year 1: Contribution to social and economic outputs, outcomes and impacts by the NIAs

- The **limited evidence currently available** supports the finding of the Phase 2 Work Package 3 literature review that the range of potential social and economic benefits associated with the natural environment is significant.

- The findings of the literature review undertaken as part of the NIA M&E Phase 2 project[33] have supported the use of the concept of wellbeing, as reflected in this monitoring and evaluation theme (social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing) but suggests this might be interpreted more broadly and used conceptually to bring together the range of social and economic benefits and the categories used to consider these benefits: **health, education and learning, social development and connections, symbolic/cultural/spiritual significance and economy**.

- These categories are one possible way of making sense of social and economic benefits. **Further work is needed to explore potential approaches in order to develop and agree a framework for their evaluation** and discussion. This will be ongoing in Year 2. Consideration will also be given to overlaps between social and economic benefit categories and ecosystem services and the extent to which these can be considered separately.

- The information provided by the **NIAs' Progress Reports has been a valuable source of examples** of different categories of benefits: e.g. health and economic benefits. Basing the description of wellbeing benefits on practical examples will ensure that the benefits categories are meaningful.

- It may be necessary to **focus on those benefits that are felt to be more relevant to the NIAs**, rather than seeking to capture all the benefits.

Preamble to Section 6

A key ongoing activity of the M&E Phase 2 project (Work Packages 2 and 3) is the development of approaches relevant to social, economic and human wellbeing outputs, outcomes and impacts of the NIAs. Work Package 3 will carry out research into the social and economic benefits and contributions to wellbeing associated with NIAs and will propose an appropriate approach to capturing outcomes and impacts where indicators are not appropriate or sufficient. This work is intended to be carried out during Year 2 (2013 – 2014) of the three-year NIA programme.

As this work is in an early stage (literature review completed in June 2013), a complete evaluation of social and economic outputs, outcomes and impacts has not been attempted in Year 1, and the findings presented in this section should be seen in this context.

It is also noted that there are clear overlaps between the evaluation of social, economic and wellbeing aspects and ecosystem services. This distinction reflects the structure of the M&E framework as developed during Phase 1 of the M&E project. During Year 2 the M&E Phase 2project will be researching and developing, with NIAs as far as possible, approaches to measure and evaluate delivery and outcomes in both of these thematic areas. In doing so, careful consideration

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[33] Literature Review: Social and Economic Benefits Associated with Natural Environment Initiatives and their Contribution to Wellbeing (Draft, June 2013)

will be given to how to reflect the overlaps that exist while developing meaningful reporting in both themes.

Introduction

This section considers the **Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts** steps in the evaluation logic model under **social and economic benefits and wellbeing theme** (see below).
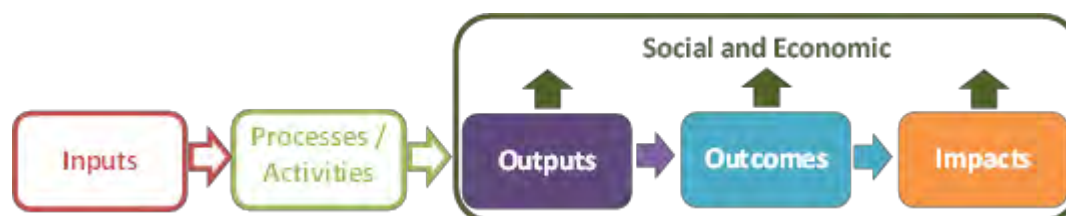
The M&E framework includes indicators within the social and economic benefits and contributions to well-being theme. These indicators address some of the key areas of potential social and economic benefits of NIAs, in particular benefits related to social cohesion through volunteering activities, understanding and awareness of the natural environment, social inclusion in terms of the mix of people using the NIAs and the health benefits of outdoor activities; the economic indicators consider both ecosystem services as well as more conventional economic measures of increased employment and spending in the local economy.

However, as noted, further development of the approach to monitoring and evaluation under this theme is included as a work stream within the NIA M&E Phase 2 project (Work Package 3) with the work being scheduled predominantly in Year 2 of the NIA delivery (2013 – 2014). This work is enabling a thorough review of the relevant literature and the current work on the NIAs' social and economic benefits. This will ground the development of this theme in the reality and practice of the NIAs and will include working with the NIAs in using appropriate indicators to better understand and develop the synergies between improvements to the natural environment and enhanced wellbeing. As noted the evaluation of social and economic benefits and wellbeing theme is limited in its scope to consider the outputs, outcomes and impacts achieved by the NIAs to deliver their own objectives and the wider policy objectives of the NIA initiative in Year 1, but more detailed analysis is expected to be possible in Years 2 and 3.

Developing the evaluation questions

The initial questions and sub-questions for this theme are shown in the table below. Where the current M&E framework indicators could be used to answer these questions, they are shown in the right hand column. Core indicators are shown in bold type.

Table 6.1: Initial questions on social, economic and wellbeing benefits

Questions	Sub-questions	Indicators
What resources have the NIAs used / required and to what extent have the NIAs attracted additional funding and resources?	What has been the total resource requirement of the NIAs? What is the nature of these resources (e.g. direct funding, contributions in-kind, volunteering of time etc)?	
	Have the NIAs attracted additional public sector resources?	
	Have the NIAs attracted private sector resources, including volunteering, landowner support and other private investments?	• **No. of volunteer hours on NIA activities** • Financial value of help-in-kind

Questions	Sub-questions	Indicators
	Has the NIA partnership approach represented an effective means of managing resources to meet natural environment objectives?	
	Are the NIAs considered viable after their initial funding ceases?	• Estimated value of visitor expenditure to local economy
Have the NIAs delivered social and wellbeing benefits for local communities?	Have the NIAs produced health benefits?	
	Have the NIAs enhanced wellbeing for local communities?	• Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents
	Have the NIAs produced social benefits?	• Estimated value of ecosystem services in NIA
		• No. of educational visits
		• No. and social mix of visitors to NIA sites
		• No. and social mix of people involved in NIA activities and events
		• No. of volunteer hours on NIA activities
What economic benefits have the NIAs produced either directly or indirectly?	What impact have the NIAs had on their local economy?	• No. of people employed in NIA activities • Fulfilment of identified skills needs
	Have the NIAs supported particular sectors or economic activities? Please describe.	
	To what extent does the economic benefit of NIA activities and outcomes contribute to the wider regional / national economy?	

NIA criteria

The NIA General Guidance Notes and other documents include some general pointers to criteria that can be used to identify and assess social, economic and wellbeing outputs, outcomes and impacts (e.g. benefits to urban areas and communities, enhanced experience of the outside world). However, these criteria were intended to guide the NIA applicants not the M&E and are therefore not surprisingly too general to add further depth or insights to this evaluation. The focus has therefore been on developing a better understanding of the range of social, economic and wellbeing benefits through Work Package 3 of this project. A literature review has recently been completed and its findings inform the rest of this section.

Literature review of social and economic benefits associated with natural environment initiatives and their contribution to wellbeing

The WP3 literature review examined the literature on social and economic benefits associated with natural environment initiatives. This review has suggested a using a framework for this theme which makes wellbeing the overarching concept, with social and economic benefits forming a part of that.

The literature and examples examined as part of the review show the wide range and scale of social and economic benefits associated with natural environment initiatives. Some of the challenges for measuring these benefits were also identified:

- **Measuring the type and scale of social and economic benefits**. It will be important to define the character of interactions with nature in order to understand the relevance of the

resulting benefits. The literature review uses the terms 'indirect', 'incidental' and 'intentional' to describe such interactions.

- **Focusing on priority benefits**. It would be impossible and unnecessary to attempt to measure the full spectrum of wellbeing benefits within each of the NIAs, therefore approaches need to be developed for agreeing what benefits to focus on within the NIA programme, or within individual NIAs.

- **Classifying wellbeing benefits**. There are different ways of grouping wellbeing benefits. The literature review identifies two studies[34] that have developed a similar classification and suggests that these could be combined to provide an appropriate set of categories for this evaluation. The literature review also recognises and reflects the ongoing work of the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in relation to wellbeing including the development of a framework for understanding and measuring national well-being[35].

In order to explore the possible application of learning coming out of the literature review, the classification of wellbeing categories suggested in the review has been used to outline some new questions in order to consider the extent to which the initial activities of the NIAs have contributed to wellbeing benefits. The table below shows a possible set of wellbeing categories and the new questions, with the existing indicators for this theme matched to these.

Table 6.2: Wellbeing categories and questions

Wellbeing Categories	Questions	Existing indicators
Health	• Improved physical fitness of local people? • Improved mental health of local people?	• Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents
Education and Learning	• Promoted education and learning related to the natural environment?	• No. of educational visits
Social Development and Connections	• Helped to reduce health inequalities in the NIA area? • Contributed to individual and community social capital and networks?	• **No. of volunteer hours on NIA activities** • No. and social mix of visitors to NIA sites
Symbolic / Cultural / Spiritual Significance	• Increased the symbolic, cultural and spiritual benefits from the natural environment?	
Economy	• Led to economic benefits, through: recreation and tourism activities, regeneration, increased land/property values, increased ecosystem services?	• Estimated value of visitor expenditure to local economy • No. of people employed in NIA activities • Financial value of help-in-kind • Fulfilment of identified skills needs

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[34] (a) O'Brien, L. and Morris, J. (2013) Well-being for all? The social distribution of benefits gained from woodlands and forests in Britain. *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, 1-28. (b) Keniger, L.E., Gaston, K.J., Irvine, K.N. and Fuller, R.A. (2013) What are the Benefits of Interacting with Nature? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* **10**: 913-935.

[35] For example: ONS (2011) Developing a Framework for Understanding and Measuring National Well-being (Alison Spence, Matthew Powell and Abbie Self)

Overview of data available

The evaluation in Year 1 of the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the NIAs in terms of wellbeing is based on a review and analysis of the following data sources:

- **Monitoring and evaluation framework indicators** under the social and economic theme as entered into the NIA monitoring and evaluation online tool.

- **Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) NIA data** on selected questions. Responses to two monitoring questions were available for some NIAs (responses to one question were available for six NIAs; responses to a second question were available for three NIAs).

Table 6.3 lists the available indicators, including MENE indicators, organised by proposed Wellbeing categories. The Notes column indicates the source and limitations of the data for each indicator. In some cases, indicators have been covered in other sections of the report and are therefore not discussed in this section. Where indicator rows are *italics*, the quality of the data is considered insufficiently robust to include in the evaluation.

Table 6.3: Existing indicators for social impacts and wellbeing

Sub-theme & Wellbeing Category	Indicator ref. no.	Indicator	Category	Notes
Social impacts & wellbeing: Health	S&E05_S	Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents/Time spent out of doors	Optional	From MENE – nationally provided data for the three NIAs that chose this indicator.
Social impacts & wellbeing: Education and Learning	S&E02_S	No. of educational visits	Optional	Four NIAs chose this indictor
Social impacts & wellbeing: Social Development & Connections	*S&E03_S*	*No. and social mix of visitors to NIA sites*	*Optional*	*Only Humberhead Levels NIA provided data.*
Social impacts & wellbeing: Social Development & Connections	*S&E04_S*	*No. and social mix of people involved in NIA activities and events*	*Optional*	*Three NIAs chose this indicator. Data was collected using different methods. See Box 6.1 below*
Social impacts & wellbeing: Social Development & Connections	S&E06_S	No. of volunteer hours on NIA activities	Core	Used as an input in Section 4.
Social impacts & wellbeing: Symbolic/ Cultural/Spiritual Significance	S&E01_S	Attitudes of local community to biodiversity, geodiversity & the natural environment	Optional	From MENE – nationally provided data for the 6 NIAs that chose this indicator.
Social impacts & wellbeing: Economy	*S&E07_E*	*Estimated value of visitor expenditure to local economy*	*Optional*	*No NIAs completed*
Social impacts & wellbeing: Economy	S&E08_E	No. of people employed in NIA activities	Optional	Considered as an Input in Section 4.
Social impacts & wellbeing: Economy	*S&E09_E*	*Estimated value of ecosystem services in NIA*	*Optional*	*Only three NIAs chose this indicator and 2 were not able to report this year. See Box 6.2 for illustration of what one NIA is doing to value Ecosystem Services.*
Social impacts & wellbeing: Economy	*S&E10_E*	*Local economic indicator*	*Optional*	*No NIAs completed*

The indicators provide limited data on social impacts and wellbeing for Year 1. There are a number of reasons for this:

- **Some aspects of wellbeing are not currently being considered**. Some of the new wellbeing categories are not covered by the existing indicators; for example, none of the existing indicators cover the category: Symbolic/Cultural/Spiritual Significance. For many other categories, the existing indicators provide limited information.

- One NIA reported that they had **difficulty in analysing, interpreting and summarising results from community and partnership questionnaires**, and that as a result further social data is available but a lack of capacity to analyse these data means that it has not been possible to report on this.

- **Low numbers of NIAs providing information on the majority of indicators**. Only one of the relevant indicators is a core indicator. The numbers of NIAs providing data on optional indicators is too small to be meaningful.

- **Where NIAs did provide data on indicators relevant to wellbeing, there were sometimes problems with the methods used to generate the data**. Development of robust methods and support for NIAs in collecting wellbeing information will be needed to develop data for this theme in years 2 and 3. The example in Box 8.1 illustrates this issue.

Quarterly Progress Reports and the **annual summary Progress Reports** produced by the NIAs, which were a source of information about wellbeing outputs as these include self-reporting on activities, progress and challenges within each NIA.

Box 6.1: data available on number and social mix of people involved in NIA activities and events

This is an optional indicator. Three NIA partnerships (Humberhead Levels, Meres and Mosses of the Marches and Dark Peak) chose to report against this indicator. The Meres and Mosses NIA only reported on the number of people involved, not on their social mix; the NIA has now implemented a system for gathering data about social group and will be able to report on this indicator in Year 2.

Data was collected by different methods. Several key limitations of the data are noted:

- **Baseline**: there is no baseline against which to compare the data; Year 1 is sometimes taken as the baseline. One NIA partnership suggested that 'Once the MENE results showing distribution of postcodes within the NIA and buffer zone is available that could act as a proxy for the baseline demographic of the potential audience/visitor.' Another NIA noted that the potential to track significant changes in an NIA using the MENE data is quite slim and has requested support in analysing and presenting these data.

- **Size of survey**: two of the three surveys covered 110 or fewer people. This is a very small sample.

- **Methods for attributing socio-economic grouping**. One NIA used postcodes to derive socio-economic grouping; when the tool (http://www.checkmyarea.com/) gave a range of groupings for a given postcode, the response was ascribed to the middle of the range for that postcode. Another NIA relied on the Project Manager 's records of attendance at events, cross-checked against claims forms for travel expenses; socio-economic grouping was attributed by the Project Manager on the basis of an 'educated guess'. The third NIA did not collect information about socio-economic class in Year 1 but has implemented a system to collect this data in Year 2.

Health benefits

Data about recreation outputs can be used to measure NIA's contribution to health benefits. The Work Package 3 literature review referred to above identified a range of studies that provide evidence that contact with the natural environment can have benefits for people's physical health as a result of increased exercise and other medical and health-related benefits. A study by Natural England (2009) indicated that if people have good perceived and/or actual access to green space, they are 24% more likely to be physically active than if they have no access to green space. The study goes on to make the case that this increase in physical activity will lead to a reduction in the incidence of certain health problems (cardiovascular heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes) and of the costs associated with their treatment. The association between these factors is: Improved access to open green space > Increase physical activity > Delay or prevention of onset of recognised medical conditions.

One of the optional NIA indicators provides information on outdoor activity by NIA residents. Three NIAs (Birmingham and the Black Country, Dearne Valley Green Heart and Greater Thames Marshes) chose to report against the indicator: '*Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents*'. MENE was used as the source of nationally-provided data for this indicator. The data obtained illustrates one way in which health outputs might be measured, but also highlights many of the problems of using a single indicator to describe a complex phenomenon. In particular, the data provides no indication of the quality of the interaction with the natural environment. Table 6.3 presents the data for the three NIAs that chose this indicator.

Table 6.3 MENE data for the indicator: Level of outdoor recreation by NIA residents

Average number of times spent out of doors away from home, over the last 12 months (%)			
	Birmingham and the Black Country	**Dearne Valley Green Heart**	**Greater Thames Marshes**
More than once per day	0.5	3.3	0.8
Every day	6.2	8.9	7.4
Several times a week	18.5	20.4	18.0
Once a week	16.6	20.8	19.4
Once or twice a month	18.5	23.4	24.6
Once every 2-3 months	11.1	6.3	9.3
Once or twice	9.8	8.2	10.3
Never	18.9	8.6	10.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Number of people interviewed	**615**	**269**	**785**

Source: MENE data - http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/research/mene.aspx

It is worth noting that there are also problems with the methods used for collecting and analysing the data. The NIAs are very aware of these issues. Birmingham and the Black Country NIA added the following caveat to its submission: '*Because the analysis has been undertaken for the geographical area of the NIA and a 10km buffer the findings should be taken with care. The impact of the NIA partnership on recreational activities and opportunities for residents within that 10km buffer is very limited because usually people access greenspace within 500m from home.*' It is understood that the 10km buffer was used because the sample size without it was too small for some NIAs.

Quarterly and annual progress reports

Information about volunteering included in the NIA's progress reports suggests that volunteers often undertake physical activity, including: collecting and spreading seeds (Birmingham and the Black Country), planting (Dark Peak, Dearne Valley, Morecambe Bay), restoring access roads (Dark Peak), scrub clearance (Northern Devon, Morecambe Bay, South Downs), otter holt building, swailing and hedge-laying (Northern Devon), moving wood (Morecambe Bay). Volunteers also carry out monitoring and surveying work which is likely to involve walking and spending time in natural environments. The amount of time spent on these activities could potentially be derived from data on volunteering, but currently the data does not differentiate between volunteering time spent of different kinds of activities. There will also be a need to find ways of explore the outcome of this kind of activity.

Education and Learning

This section looks at the benefits in terms of increased knowledge, learning and skills provided by interaction with natural environments. This does not refer solely to learning about the natural environment but also to the way that learning in nature can be used to enhance other skills and capacities (e.g. language and communications, art, science, etc).

While schoolchildren are the focus of much of the NIAs' work in relation to education and learning, many are also providing opportunities for learning for adults, through training and public events.

Monitoring and evaluation framework indicators

Four NIAs chose to report on the optional indicator '*Number of educational visits*' (Dearne Valley, Humberhead Levels, Meres and Moses of the Marches and Morecambe Bay). Humberhead Levels NIA did not provide data for this indicator.

The indicator measures educational visits. Morecambe Bay NIA interpreted this as number of people attending NIA events, while Dearne Valley NIA used data obtained from organisations operating sites within the NIA (Forestry Commission and RSPB) and Meres and Mosses NIA provided data collected by Education Teams from the Cheshire and Shropshire Wildlife Trusts. It is therefore possible that the NIAs measured slightly different things for this indicator.

In terms of the baseline, only Dearne Valley NIA had baseline data and as this does not cover all the sites of interest, the number of sites monitored could be extended in the future. There was no baseline for this NIA's Hidden Gems explorations as this activity has been developed by the NIA. Collecting data about participation in the Hidden Gems exploration will be a useful way of providing information about an impact that can be directly attributed to the NIA.

There was a reduction overall in the number of education visits and participants for the Dearne Valley NIA. The NIA attributed this to two main factors: unexpected cancellations (perhaps associated with bad weather conditions mentioned in another entry) and events at one site being stopped because of problems associated with illegal horse grazing.

Quarterly and annual progress reports

Further qualitative and quantitative information about the kinds of educational activities being organised by the NIAs is provided in the progress reports. Some of these are clearly new activities (creation of a hide and learning centre) but this is harder to say in the case on ongoing activities like field trips and courses.

Four different types of education and learning outputs can be identified from the Progress Reports:

- Creation of infrastructure for educational activities - the Meres and Mosses NIA has completed a new hide and learning centre.

- School field trips (Dearne Valley NIA)

- Creative activities - 15 school groups visited the River Torridge Giants in the Forest art installation with a story teller and wrote their own stories of the river and its environment (Devon NIA).

- Environmental training
    o Humberhead Levels NIA ran 11 training courses on natural history identification skills.
    o Marlborough NIA ran an introduction to target species and how the project is supporting them and a demonstration on wild bird feeding techniques, as well as organising two workshops related to species surveys (one on identifying bird species, one on butterfly species) and two supplementary feeding workshops.

Social Development and Connections

Reducing social inequalities

Of the three indicators relevant to the sub-theme 'Social Development and Connections', two are similar to each other (*Number and social mix of visitors to NIA sites*; *number and social mix of people involved in NIA activities and events*). These indicators measure the extent to which the NIAs are able to break down barriers between social groups and provide opportunities for involvement for people from groups with a lower social-economic classification. The indicators are so similar, in fact, that Humberhead Levels NIA provided the same information for both indicators.

The Meres and Mosses NIA did not collect data on socio-economic grouping as it had no method for doing this. The NIA reported that a system for gathering information about socio-economic grouping as now been implemented and therefore it will be possible to report on this indicator in Year 2.

Dark Peak NIA did no use a systematic process for gathering data on socio-economic grouping. Where no data had been collected, the Project Manager made a judgement about socio-economic grouping. The NIA recognised that the resulting data was not robust: '*There has to be a lot uncertainty, as [the Project Manager] is not always able to ask the questions that would give a definite answer to the social group. In these cases [he] has had to use an educated guess of which group they would fall into.*'

It is not possible to make any comments about the mix of socio-economic groupings in the people participating in NIA activities or visitors to NIA sites.

Volunteering

The third indicator that is relevant to the sub-heading Social Development and Connections is '*the number of volunteer hours on NIA activities*'. This is a core indicator. The data for this indicator has been presented in Section 2 in the discussion of the resources invested in the NIAs. Here we will consider the role of volunteering in allowing individuals to create new social relationships and strengthen existing ones, which can lead to an increase in social support and a reduction in social isolation (Reynolds, 2000); it can also bring together people from different organisations and subsequently lead to expanded social networks with wider pools of resources.

Reporting against the indicator provides quantitative information about volunteering:

- Overall the NIAs have mobilised significant volunteer capacity: the Nene Valley is the NIA reporting the highest number of volunteer days (more than 3,300 during Year 1) with two other NIAs reporting 1,300 volunteer days each.

- There is a wide range in the number of volunteer days reported. Greater Thames Marshes NIA reported having no volunteer input during Year 1 while Northern Devon NIA reported only 13 volunteer days.

However getting partners and volunteers to record their input has proved to be problematic:

- *'This indicator is grossly under-recorded as it has become increasingly difficult to persuade people (farmers, other volunteers) to complete and return timesheets. The justification given is that while people are happy to give up their time to contribute to the project they are not keen on the associated paperwork. This has become increasingly the case as fewer and fewer volunteers accurately record their time and submit timesheets.'* (Marlborough Downs)

- *'.. it is possible the increase [in volunteer hours] also includes an element of improved understanding and increased familiarity of the claim process by partners'.* (Dearne Valley)

Considering the different types of social development and connections benefits which it might be expected that volunteering would provide, the NIA Progress Reports give an indication that some social development and connections outputs and outcomes may be being achieved (see Table 6.4). Further work on the approach to evaluating social, economic and wellbeing benefits being undertaken in Work Package 3 will make it possible to explore these aspects of the NIAs' work further in Years 2 and 3.

Table 6.4: Types of contribution to social development and connections

Allowing individuals to create or develop social relationships: • *We're also running projects which are explicitly working to* **target as yet unreached community groups and volunteers** (BBC)   • **The Coordinator has been working with four volunteer groups** *training and hosting approximately 30 local volunteers engaged in practical habitat management, heritage restoration and livestock lookering* (South Downs)
Expanding social networks which leads to access to wider pools of resources: • *Volunteer helping to move 7 tonnes of wood to a community wood bank and* **signing up for a wood share scheme** (Morecambe Bay)
Increasing trust between individuals and organisations   • *The Eastern Moors Partnership has restored the Moss Road, reversing the drastic erosion that has occurred on this access route over the last few years.* **This work was carried out with extensive consultation with the key stakeholders and users, so that the newly designed route would meet their requirements. These stakeholders and users then formed work parties to carry out a large proportion of the work themselves …** *the success of this meant that NIA money was available to restore an adjoining bridleway.* (Dark Peak)   • *Volunteer Action Barnsley is working closely with local residents to undertake practical conservation tasks on the Barnsley MBC nature reserve known as Park Hill Brickworks,* **with a local community group recently becoming constituted.** (Dearne Valley)

Source: NIA Year 1 annual Progress Reports / Summaries

Symbolic/Spiritual/Cultural Significance

The literature on green spaces provides many examples of how experience of the symbolic, spiritual and cultural aspects of nature and natural environments enhances human wellbeing. Further work is planned as part of the ongoing Phase 2 project work in Work Package 3 to explore whether and

how it might be possible to assess changes in these aspects of natural environments through the NIAs' interventions. It is recognised therefore that the current evaluation and reporting possible in this area is limited. However, although this is an area which needs further development, there is some evidence in the data already being generated on the NIAs that is likely to be relevant.

Attitudes of local community to biodiversity, geodiversity and the natural environment

Nationally-available data from the MENE includes responses to a set of questions about the degree to which respondents are in agreement with the following statements about biodiversity and the natural environment:

- Having open green spaces close to where I live is important

- There are many natural places I may never visit but I am glad they exist

- I am concerned about damage to the natural environment

- Spending time out of doors (including my own garden) is an important part of my life

Possible responses are: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree.

While all four statements describe general attitudes towards the natural environment, only the second is clearly about its spiritual or symbolic value; responses to the other three statements could potentially reflect the use value of the natural environment (people may value 'having open green spaces close to where I live' because they provide places to exercise or because they increase property values, as much as for their own sake).

Data on responses is available for six NIAs (Birmingham and the Black Country, Dark Peak, Greater Thames Marshes, Humberhead Levels, Nene Valley, Dearne Valley). The percentage of respondents strongly agreeing with this statement range from just over 30% (Nene Valley) to just under 60% (Dark Peak). Almost 100% of respondent in Dearne Valley, Humberhead Levels and Birmingham and the Black Country agree with the statement (either Agreeing or Strongly agreeing), whereas about 90% agree in Dark Peak, Greater Thames Marshes and Nene Valley.

On its own, this data is not very useful, because there is a need to understand the factors that respondents are taking into account in giving their answers. However, developing a framework for assessing wellbeing benefits might suggest ways of linking this kind of quantitative data to more qualitative information in Year 2. Some examples from the NIA progress reports suggest ways in which symbolic and spiritual significance is being enhanced. These kinds of activities might be the focus of more targeted review in Year 2:

- Hidden Gems Project: The explorations invite local people to visit and learn about their local landscape. Integral to the explorations is the capture of local stories and traditions – that give the NIA a true sense of place. (Dearne Valley)

- Past Arts: This project builds on Purbeck's artistic heritage, using past artworks in a touring exhibition to engage audiences in a dialogue about how landscapes change, and how they may change in the future. (Wild Purbeck)

Economy

Monitoring and Evaluation framework indicators

Three NIAs chose to report on the optional indicator: *Estimated value of ecosystem services in the NIA*. Two subsequently advised that they would not be able to report on this indicator in Year 1. Box 6.2 illustrates the work that one NIA is currently doing to value its ecosystem services, revealing the difficulties involved in developing baseline data and the uncertainties associated with that data.

The only other relevant indicator on economic benefits is *the number of people employed in NIA activities*. Six NIAs reported on this indicator (Dearne Valley, Marlborough Downs, Morecambe Bay, Dark Peak, Greater Thames Marshes and Wild Purbeck). The number of people employed ranged from 1.05 (Marlborough Downs) to 10 (Greater Thames Marshes), with the remaining four NIAs employing an average of 4.5 people each.

Some of the NIAs provided breakdowns of the type of employment offered, under the following categories: General unskilled labour, Specialist skilled trained labour, Specialist services and Professional services.

This indicator provides a limited understanding of the economic benefits that could potentially be associated with the NIAs. Again, the NIA progress reports suggest a much wider range of benefits, with examples such as:

- A local farmer is managing amenity grassland, from which a hay crop is harvested annually, providing feed for local livestock (Dearne Valley).

- The Project officer is investigating and trialling production techniques of seven different types of biomass fuel products. The resulting fuel may have the potential to be sold in the local area. (Humberhead Levels)

- A new nature tourism business network has been launched with four business networking events held in March 2013 involving over 30 businesses. The partnership has attracted £0.5 million from the Coastal Communities Fund for a two-year Morecambe Bay sustainable tourism project. Four jobs, one internship and one apprenticeship have been created. (Morecambe Bay)

Box 6.2: Valuing Ecosystem Services in NIAs - Birmingham and Black Country

In 2011 the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country published a study of the ecosystem services provided by woodland, heathland and wetland. The study covers the ecosystem services: fresh water supply; climate change mitigation; moderation of extreme weather events; water quality improvement; habitat for species; and aesthetic appreciation. The study used a benefit transfer approach, i.e. findings from other primary valuation studies were transferred to the Birmingham and the Black Country context. For more details about the methodology see Section 1.4 in the original study.

Stating the best guess, the 2,422ha of green infrastructure (GI) covered within the study provide an annual value of at least £20.78 million which results in £1.09 billion capitalised over 100 years. Figures are stated in 2010 prices. Relevant data and primary valuation studies are limited so that only a selection of ecosystem services could be valued. Therefore findings are likely to underestimate the real value of ecosystem services provided by the GI in Birmingham and the Black Country.

This provides baseline values for 2010/11. Some of the limitations of the evidence are:

- Imperfections in Willingness To Pay (WTP) techniques.

- Weaknesses in the benefit transfer approach, particularly because of differences between the initial study site and the Birmingham and the Black Country site which means that some socio-economic variables such as income or population density as well as the physical characteristics of the site and the context need to be adjusted.

For more details see: Hölzinger, O. 2011. *The Value of Green Infrastructure in Birmingham and the Black Country - The Total Economic Value of Ecosystem Services provided by the Urban Green Infrastructure*. Study prepared for the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. CEEP,

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Birmingham. http://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/valuing-green-infrastructure

This study will be updated in 2015 to evaluate changes in the provision of ecosystem services and related values during the three year NIA funding period. An annual update is not possible considering the complexity of the assessment and limited time and resources.

Overview of data / analysis that may be possible in Years 2 and 3

The range of social and economic benefits associated with the natural environment is significant. The categorisation and division of these benefits is not necessarily straightforward but there are existing options that allow for their effective identification and analysis. Benefits can be 'understood' or measured in different ways and any assessment of the range of benefits needs to be flexible to account for these differences.

Measuring, quantitatively or qualitatively the type and scale of any social and economic benefits is not a straightforward process. The WP3 literature review has proposed a way of defining interactions with the natural environment and provides a platform for identifying benefits for the M&E Phase 2 project.

The use of the concept of wellbeing allows the consideration of social and economic benefits in the following categories: health, social development and connections, education and learning, symbolic/cultural/spiritual significance and economy. These definitions and clarifications – for example, the distinction between direct, indirect and incidental interactions with the natural environment – offer possible ways of categorising social and economic benefits and providing a framework for their evaluation and discussion.

These categories will be used to develop a more precise identification of the benefits from the NIAs in the M&E Phase 2 project.

The broad scope of the NIAs activities means that potentially a huge range of benefits could be relevant. Understanding and measuring the full spectrum of benefits within each of the NIAs is beyond the scope of this project. As such there is potentially a need to consider what benefits to prioritise within the NIA programme or within individual NIAs. It might be necessary to focus on those benefits that are felt to be more relevant to the NIAs, rather than seeking to capture all the benefits.

Different methods and tools have different strengths and weaknesses and require different types and quantity of information. Understanding these issues will be necessary when shaping any evaluation within the M&E Phase 2 project.

It appears that some of the benefits from the NIA programme will necessarily have to be considered outside of the existing M&E framework, particularly as it may not be appropriate to increase the monitoring and evaluation burden on the NIA partnerships. This will be considered in more detail in Work Package 3 Task 3.2 of the M&E Phase 2 project.

It is also noted that there are clear overlaps between the evaluation of social, economic and wellbeing aspects and ecosystem services. This distinction reflects the structure of the M&E framework as developed during Phase 1 of the M&E project. During Year 2 the Phase 2 M&E project will be researching and developing, with NIAs as far as possible, approaches to measure and evaluate delivery and outcomes in both of these thematic areas. In doing so, careful consideration will be given to how to reflect the overlaps that exist while developing meaningful reporting in both themes.

7. Evaluation of the Contribution to Partnership Working Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts

> **Key messages from Year 1: Contribution to partnership working outputs, outcomes and impacts by the NIAs**
>
> - **Most of the Year 1 evidence on NIA partnership working related to inputs and process / activities** and has been discussed in Sections 2 and 3, however a review of the NIAs' quarterly Progress Reports reveal a **small amount of evidence of partnership working leading to improved NIA outcomes**, for example in terms of greater integration of actions to improve biodiversity and ecosystem services and more effective delivery of actions.
>
> - The limitations on Year 1 evidence on partnership working are considered to have two main causes: on the one hand, the majority of **effort NIAs in the first year has gone into setting up structures and processes**, which may be expected to produce outputs in Years 2 and 3; on the other, **outcomes of partnership working was not a significant focus of reporting** in the M&E framework.
>
> - A number of questions have been identified which could be used to **focus the collection of additional evidence on partnership working in Years 2 and 3**, probably through direct communication with NIAs.

Introduction

This section looks at how the NIAs' activities and processes in the first year contributed to **Outputs / Outcomes / Impacts** for **Partnership working,** as reflected in the diagram below.
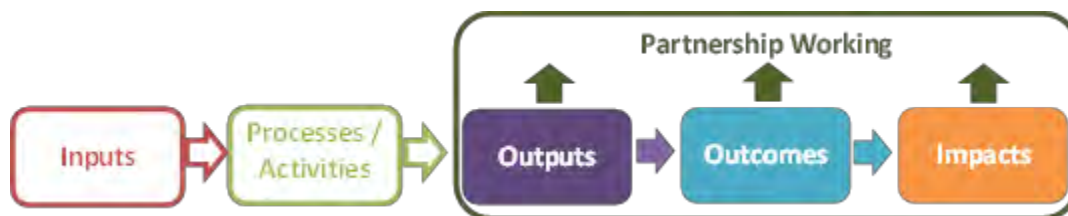
Note that Sections 2 and 3 provide analysis and evaluation of the partnerships as an Input (i.e. existing governance arrangements) and as a Process or activity (i.e. the number and type of partners, partnership agreements, and whether different NIA partnerships can be categorised). The relationship between what is considered an Input, Process, Activity or Output/Outcome for partnership working and how this is framed in the evaluation still needs to be fully considered as this could be interpreted in a number of ways. The approach to evaluating partnership working will therefore be reviewed and potentially revised in the Year 2 evaluation.

In this section the evaluation seeks to understand how Inputs and Processes / Activities have led to or might lead to partnership working Outputs and Outcomes. Given the significant limitations of the information available to evaluate these partnership working Outcomes and Impacts in Year 1, the main focus of this section is on describing what aspects of partnership working it would be valuable to better understand, and setting out some key evaluation questions that it is proposed can be used in Years 2 and 3 to structure information gathering and analysis in this area. In this context effective partnership working is likely to be a key contributing factor to all aspects of the NIAs' work as effective collaboration between partners should:

- **Ensure better integration of planning and action by key stakeholders across each NIA** – The NIAs have been asked to agree shared visions. This should be the basis for partners to work

towards common goals and targets, perhaps through the agreement of joint strategies or action plans. The problems facing biodiversity and ecosystem services are complex and require a range of coordinated measures generally involving multiple actors. NIA partnership working should allow the different organisations and interests to be coordinated and integrated across the NIA area so that the actions of individual partners support each other and as a result have more significant outcomes and a greater long-term impact than they would if each partner was working in isolation.

- **Make it possible to mobilise greater resources of all kinds** – Resources include: financial resources through project funding; payment for ecosystem services or other forms of financing; volunteer input to a range of tasks; and contributions in kind (e.g. meeting space, materials, use of equipment). Partnerships can combine their own resources to achieve a greater impact and also access a wider number of sources of funding because they cover a range of sectors, expertise and experience.

- **Facilitate information sharing and learning** (and supporting effective monitoring and evaluation) – Partnership working should facilitate formal and informal information sharing, giving partners access not just to more information but also to more varied information, perhaps because data has been collected for different purposes (e.g. increasing biodiversity, reducing risks, generating social and economic benefits) or because those involved come from different scientific backgrounds. By building on this shared information and developing common understanding, the partnership should find that its capacity to resolve complex or 'wicked' problems is increased.

- **Efficient and effective delivery** – Partnership working that involves co-delivery of outputs by at least some of the partners can be the basis for more efficient and effective action. This is partly as a result of the pooling of resources and information, as discussed above, but also because partners develop a better understanding of how others work, their priorities and capabilities, and are therefore better able to coordinate actions effectively. An outcome in this area might be a reduction in time spent dealing with challenges or disputes between partner organisations over the implementation of measures affecting biodiversity and ecosystem services.

- **Leadership and influence** – An increase in the resources, knowledge and scope of delivery of the partnership, as a result of the processes described above, should result in an increase in influence on other decision-making processes and an increased capacity to provide leadership. One example could be that as a result of the NIA's partnership-building activities, local authority members develop a joint statement on integrating planning mechanisms related to biodiversity protection and a forum for addressing the need for integration begins to work (outputs); the authorities take steps to align biodiversity protection measures (outcomes); and improvements in biodiversity are observed in areas covered by the new measures (impacts).

Overview of data available

The evaluation in Year 1 of the outputs, outcomes and impacts of partnership working in the NIAs is based on a review and analysis of the following data sources:

- **Monitoring and evaluation framework indicators**, particularly under the partnership working and social and economic themes as entered into the NIA monitoring and evaluation online reporting tool. Potential indicators included: *project income; financial value of help-in-kind; amount of funding contributed to NIA projects from development; fulfilment of identified skills needs; attitudes of local community to NIA; assessment of partnership working; audience reach; level of awareness of NIA in local community; number of enquiries;*

local indicator of delivery; local indicator of leadership and influence. Of these, project income and value of help-in-kind have been considered in Section 2 as an input. Of the remaining indicators only two have data for more than four NIAs (assessment of partnership working and level of awareness of NIA in local community) and for these the 'features' entered differed across each NIA.

- **Financial reporting data** submitted by the NIAs to Natural England and collated by them. This data was used to provide the basis for the evaluation of financial resources in Section 2, however no comparative data is available as yet, to allow an assessment of outputs, outcomes or impacts.

- **Quarterly and annual Progress Reports** produced by the NIAs provide an important source of information on partnership working outputs and outcomes as these include self-reporting on activities, progress and challenges within the NIA, which throw light on the partnership-working sub-themes. However, as this is self-reported, the information tends to be partial and incomplete.

Table 7.1: Existing indicators relevant to partnership working

Theme and sub-theme	Indicator ref. no.	Indicator	Category	Comments
Mobilisation of resources	PW01_R	Project income	Core	10 NIAs entered data for this indicator in the online tool. However, the information on project income used in Section 2 was submitted by the NIAs to Natural England and collated by them, rather than data from the online tool. This has been treated as an input rather than an output / outcome / impact indicator.
Mobilisation of resources	PW02_R	Financial value of help-in-kind	Core	11 NIAs entered data for this indicator. However, the information on project income used in Section 2 was submitted by the NIAs to Natural England and collated by them, rather than data from the online tool. This has been treated as an input rather than an output / outcome / impact indicator.
Mobilisation of resources	PW03_R	Amount of funding contributed to NIA projects from development	Local	No NIAs entered data for this indicator in Year 1. This would be treated as an input rather than an output / outcome / impact indicator.
Efficient & effective delivery	PW04_E	Fulfilment of identified skills needs	Optional	No NIAs entered data for this indicator in Year 1. This would be treated as an input rather than an output / outcome / impact indicator.
Efficient & effective delivery	PW05_E	Attitudes of local community to NIA	Optional	Four NIAs chose to report against this indicator. Two did not enter data in the online tool in Year 1.
Efficient & effective delivery	PW06_E	Assessment of partnership working	Optional	Seven NIAs chose to report against this indicator. Five provided data and two did not in Year 1.
Leadership & influence	PW07_L	Audience reach	Optional	Three NIAs entered data for this indicator.
Leadership & influence	PW08_L	Level of awareness of NIA in local community	Optional	Six NIAs chose to report against this indicator. Five provided data and one did not in Year 1.
Leadership & influence	PW09_L	No. of enquiries	Optional	Two NIAs entered data for this indicator.
Leadership & influence	PW10_L	Local indicator of delivery	Local	One NIA chose to report against this indicator but did not provide data in Year 1.
Leadership & influence	PW11_L	Local indicator of leadership and influence	Optional	One NIA chose to report against this indicator but did not provide data in Year 1.

Mobilisation of resources

The Input and Activities aspects of the mobilisation of resources have been addressed in Sections 2 and 3 respectively. The added value achieved by the NIAs in Year 1 (the amount of additional funding, in-kind and other support attracted, over and above the government grant) has been considerable, and is evaluated in Section 2: Resources invested in the NIAs. Section 2 also presents data and analysis relating to the amount of volunteering mobilised by the NIAs in Year 1, and Section 3 explores activities undertaken by these volunteers in relation to NIA delivery.

In this sub-section the aim is to understand how the NIAs have been able to mobilise additional resources (over and above their core grant funding) to enhance their actions. To do this the evaluation will seek to explore the process by which partners work together to obtain and manage new resources as well as the results of this work, in terms of the amount and type of resources mobilised. This could be interpreted as seeking to understand the extent to which the existence of an NIA partnership has generated additional 'spin-off' resource mobilisation and delivery that would not have happened if the NIA were not being implemented, but are not a direct part of the NIA project.

Some of the evaluation questions to be explored could include:

- *Does the NIA partnership have a strategy for obtaining funding / mobilising resources?*

- *What methods has the partnership used to mobilise resources?*

- *Has any additional funding for NIA-relevant activities been obtained by the partnership, over and above that foreseen in NIA Business Plans and Funding Agreements? What other additional resources has the partnership mobilised (e.g. contribution of time by partners, stakeholders, volunteers; materials and other contributions in kind; services)?*

As noted, from the perspective on Inputs and Activities, many of these questions are or will be answered in Sections 2 and 3. To understand the wider mobilisation of resources outcomes generated by partnership working will require information which is generally not currently available.

Greater Thames Marshes provided information on an 'ideas workshop', presumably organised to allow partners to put forward ideas about possible projects for which funding might be sought. There is not much detail about how this process worked, but it seems to be an interesting approach to building trust between partners and using the shared capacity in the partnership to (for example) develop better funding proposals.

More information is needed to understand how the partnerships are seeking new resources: is this done as part of a joint strategy or do partners apply for funding separately? If partners are involved in seeking funding and resources, what is their role? (e.g. joint project development and shared delivery roles? Accrediting the delivery partner? Provision of technical advice?).

The approach to understanding mobilisation of resources as and output/outcome will be explored further in Year 2. When an approach is agreed it is likely that direct data collection from NIAs will be required to gather relevant information to inform evaluation in this area.

Efficient and effective delivery

In order to understand how partnership working has contributed to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of NIA delivery, the evaluation will need to understand how working in partnership has changed the way that delivery is organised and implemented and the extent to which these changes have improved delivery overall. Some relevant evaluation questions for this sub-theme include:

- *Is the NIA partnership meeting the targets it set in different areas?*

- *Is financial management effective?*

- *Have any problems emerged as a result of the NIA's work*

- *How well has the NIA managed risks?*

The NIAs' Year 1 summaries provide information about achievements against their own objectives and these achievements are discussed in Section 8. However, the summaries focus on achievements and include little discussion of the process of delivery or areas in which problems have been encountered or progress has been slow. Similarly, there is no discussion of how the NIAs have achieved the progress described, for example in terms of the financial or risk management tools used.

Box 7.1 lists examples of relevant information on efficient and effective delivery obtained from the Year 1 summaries.

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 2. When an approach is agreed it is likely that direct data collection from NIAs will be required to gather relevant information to inform evaluation in this area.

Box 7.1: Example of outputs in relation to effective and efficient delivery

- Birmingham and the Black Country: Seed and propagules collected as part of the Growing Local Flora project allocated to projects or grown at EcoPark wildflower nursery as stock plants for future NIA projects. Creating a single source of seeds, propagules and stock plants for the NIA should allow efficiencies.

- Meres and Mosses: Website development near completion. Having a single website for the NIA is likely to be more efficient as all NIA relevant information can be found in a single place, avoiding duplication across a number of different sites; it is also likely to be more effective as stakeholders and potential users should be able to find all the information they need on one site.

- South Downs: Criteria development for local Ecosystem Services (ES) valuation underway with key parts of local environment providing ES identified and ES described. Broad valuation criteria for each identified and detail developed for Lewes Downs. Developing shared decision-making tools increases efficiency as once they are agreed, the same criteria can be applied to different decision processes.

Leadership and influence

To understand the leadership and influence outputs and outcomes achieved by the NIA partnership the evaluation will need to examine questions such as:

- *How has the NIA partnership provided leadership and increased awareness?*

- *What are the characteristics of factors that contribute to the NIA's capacity for leadership and influence?*

- *To what extent is leadership and influence associated with the NIA as a whole or with individual or organisation members?*

- *To what extent has the NIA been able to achieve its aims and targets through its ability to influence others outside the partnership rather than through partners' own efforts?*

There are existing (optional) indicators in the M&E framework which could help answer some of these questions (i.e. 'Level of awareness of NIA in local community' and 'Number of enquiries'), however at the end of Year 1 the data from these indicators is not consistent enough to enable

effective evaluation. In addition these indicators appear to relate more specifically to awareness of and interest in the NIA rather than the leadership role the NIA partnership may have in an area. It is hoped that this will be addressed to some extent through indicator protocol and online reporting tool improvements planned in Year 2.

There is also little information in the Year 1 summaries on the NIAs' achievements in terms of influencing decisions or providing leadership on issues relevant to them. This is may reflect the early stage in the three Year NIA programme and that some NIA partnerships may have not yet established a strong presence which would give them influence and leadership capacity (although most NIAs build on existing partnerships – see Section 2 – so some leadership and influencing capacity would be expected).

However, some evidence of progress can be found, for example the mention in the Year 1 summary for Dearne Valley NIA of the agreement of a Draft Guidance Note for developers by Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster MBCs with the aim of producing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) for developments in the valley; the organisation by the Dearne Valley NIA of a best practice network event on planning; and Birmingham and the Black Country NIA's submission of comments on 29 planning applications to recommend that specific developments deliver habitat contributions to the NIA.

The approach to understanding how partnerships are delivering leadership and influence in their NIA areas will be will be explored further in Year 2. When an approach is agreed it is likely that direct data collection from NIAs will be required to gather relevant information to inform evaluation in this area.

Integration of planning and action

There are no indicators within the M&E framework related to the extent to which NIAs have been successful in integrating partners' planning and action to achieve their common objectives. This is also not a topic on which NIAs have been asked to report in their quarterly and annual Progress Reports. Nevertheless, this is an important way in which partnership working can contribute and some NIAs did mention in their Year 1 summaries some of the ways in which they are increasing integration. Examples are shown in Box 7.2.

Box 7.2: Examples of NIA outputs and outcomes in terms of integration of planning and action

- Birmingham and the Black Country: Woodland Working Group formed to identify markets for woodland products and additional funding sources resulting in more economically sustainable woodland management

- Marlborough Downs: Four delivery groups established: Community and Outreach; Access; Wildlife Sites; and Downland Species.

- South Downs: Project working group convened and timetable established for the South Downs Way Visitor Payback Scheme.

- Wild Purbeck: Wildfire Working Group established; fire management plan in production and maps have been produced.

The approach to understanding how partnerships are integrating planning and action will be will be explored further in Year 2. When an approach is agreed it is likely that direct data collection from NIAs will be required to gather relevant information to inform evaluation in this area.

Information sharing and learning

Opportunities for sharing information, learning from this exchange and from working together are clearly a feature of partnership working. In order to get a better understanding of the extent to which this contributes to improve the outcomes of the NIAs, the evaluation will need to address question such as:

- *In what ways has partnership working improved the access to data of individual partners?* (by making available a greater amount of information; by making available information from a greater range of sources, by making more reliable data available, by making information available more quickly or at lower/no cost, etc).

- *How has improved access to information impacted on the NIAs' planning and delivery?*

- *What learning have partners obtained from working together and what factors have contributed to facilitate or hamper learning?*

One example of sharing information and learning that was identified through the review of Year 1 summaries is the creation of a directory of recommended contacts for wildlife management by Marlborough Downs NIA.

The approach to understanding how partnerships are effectively sharing information and learning will be will be explored further in Year 2. When an approach is agreed it is likely that direct data collection from NIAs will be required to gather relevant information to inform evaluation in this area.

Overview of data / analysis that may be possible in Years 2 and 3

In Year 2 and Year 3 it is proposed to expand on the evaluation that has been possible in Year 1 in relation to partnership working, including:

- Information on the mobilisation of resources of all kinds (financial, human and in-kind contributions) over and above that foreseen in NIA Business Plans and Funding Agreements, and how this has complemented or contributed to NIAs' outputs, outcomes and impacts.

- Information on effectiveness and efficiency of delivery: this will involve gaining a more detailed understanding of how activities have been planned and implemented and comparing the views of a range of stakeholders.

- Information on leadership and influence, particularly on decision-making processes that impact on NIA outcomes.

In addition to these sub-themes, it is also proposed to explore the ways that partnership working is facilitating improved information sharing and learning and better integration between partners.

It is proposed to address these data gaps and associated analysis in Year 2 and Year 3 through:

- Direct data collection from NIA partnerships, particularly in the form of semi-structured interviews or questionnaires.

- Additional data collection and analysis, for example from existing data sets, where appropriate.

8. Assessment of the NIAs' Overall Progress Against their own Objectives and Synthesis of Findings

Key findings from the assessment of NIA progress against their objectives

- **All NIAs have been involved in a range of practical initiatives** along with recruitment of staff, development of projects and securing additional funds.

- In general **all NIAs have made 'good' or 'satisfactory' progress** against their targets.

- **Five NIAs have reported that delivery is in line with milestones** at the end of Year 1.

- **Seven NIAs have reported that delivery is behind schedule** for elements of project work within between one to four objectives.

- **NIAs have delivered across all four themes and sub-themes**.

Progress of NIAs against their own objectives

All the NIAs have developed detailed Business Plans (see Section 3) and these include specific objectives for each of the NIAs setting out what they aim to achieve. All the NIAs have between four and six objectives. This section describes the result of a high level assessment of the NIAs' progress against these objectives and milestones.

The NIAs have undertaken a huge amount of work towards the delivery of their outcomes and objectives during this first year. In addition to recruitment and appointment of staff, development of project plans and securing additional funding, NIAs have been involved with a wide variety of practical initiatives across all four themes. Evidence of progress is seen in the achievements of each NIA in relation to planned outputs for each of their objectives, which have been reported in each NIAs' Year 1 annual summary Progress Report and quarterly Progress Reports. A brief summary of a selection of the main achievements of NIAs against their objectives is provided below (see Table 8.1). Note that all figures included in the table below are drawn from NIA quarterly Progress Reports and Year 1 summary reports. These figures therefore reflect the level of delivery as reported by NIAs for the period 1st January 2012 – 30th March 2013.

Table 8.1: Summary of the NIAs achievements against their objectives

NIA	Objectives[36]	Summary of main achievements
Birmingham and Black Country	1: Amount of habitat	Over 7ha new woodland, heathland, hedgerow, grassland and reedbed created
	2: Existing habitats	Around 80ha woodland, grassland, heathland and geological sites enhanced, seeds and propagules collected, bat boxes installed
	3: Wildlife sites	Two Local Wildlife Sites identified for approval as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and a Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve declared
	4: Corridors	Biodiversity data collected and analysed and 19.5km wildlife corridor enhanced
	5: Communities	Community engagement work through Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and volunteers involved in seed and propagule collection work
Dark Peak	1: Blanket bog	£92,000 SITA funding secured for blanket bog restoration, blanket bog restoration works undertaken with 48 dams built blocking 350 metres of gullies and increase of Sphagnum confirmed in treated area
	2: Priority species	Range of heathland restoration activities including collection of bell heather seeds using volunteers, bracken control, application of wet heath beads, cutting of fire breaks

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[36] Note that the summary titles of each of the NIAs' objectives are used here.

NIA	Objectives[36]	Summary of main achievements
	3: Connectivity	Range of woodland enhancement activities including felling conifer plantation, restructuring woodlands with creation of scrub layer, open ground and glades, and rhododendron removal
	4: Restoration	Baseline monitoring of grassland completed and around 57ha species rich grassland restored
	5: Access	Restoration of several access routes (bridleways, footpaths) completed and access infrastructure installed with volunteer help
Dearne Valley	**1: Floodplain habitat**	Surface water drainage works undertaken and negotiations underway for land purchase
	2: Woodland & farmland habitats	Habitats and species mapped, baseline monitoring of grassland sites undertaken, 2ha native broadleaf trees planted and farmland advice provided
	3: Local Planning Policy	Draft guidance note for developers produced and NIA Best Practice Network event held
	4: Community	Volunteers involved in planting 2,800 trees, 64 local people engaged in the Hidden Gems project and an active schools engagement programme
Greater Thames Marshes	**1: Evidence & targeted action**	Interactive pdf atlas of biodiversity value, designations, land use and anticipated pressures for change to plan delivery of an ecological network
	2: Habitat	Baseline habitat assessments for invertebrates at 8 sites and enhancement works undertaken for three bumblebee species across a network of sites
	3: Partnership	Farmer Focus Group launched and advice provided for farmer-led conservation actions and first newsletter published with an A5 laminated factsheet
	4: Communication and access	Greater Thames Marshes NIA website and display stands produced and many presentations delivered
	5: Legacy and the resources	Funding opportunities in development with five thematic projects developed covering: strategic water level management, open habitat mosaic, Thames Estuary sea walls, transforming perceptions of the Estuary's distinctive post-industrial landscape and wetland habitat laboratory
Humberhead Levels	**1: Habitats**	Over 13ha wetland habitat creation and land purchased at Crowle Moor
	2: Water management	Advice provided to farmers and landowners for wetland habitat restoration and management
	3: Hydrological integrity	Scrub clearance on Thorne and Hatfield Moors and Water Level Management Plan implementation on Crowle Moors
	4: Local green economy	Investigations and trialling of production techniques for 7 types of biomass fuel products and Biodiversity offset provider identified
	5: Community	Over 2,500 people engaged in events and over 5,000 hours volunteer time involved in practical management works
Marlborough Downs	**1: Wildlife sites**	18 wildlife sites surveyed and those in unfavourable condition identified for action
	2: Chalk grassland	Surveys of 14 grassland sites, workshop held to train farmers and volunteers to prepare habitat maps and native wildflower/grass mix purchased to create a wildlife corridor
	3: Species	Two new ponds built and two restored, five tree sparrow 'villages' planted and five kestrel and one barn owl box installed
	4: Wildlife management	Demonstration/training events to share best practice for supporting birds, bees and wildflowers
	5: Community involvement	Project to be featured in a BBC series on British Wildlife in summer 2013 and a range of farm walks hosted and talks given
	6: Public access	Four mile circular route identified to showcase NIA activities and information panel for dew pond erected
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	**1: Favourable condition**	Conservation management works include Rhododendron control and hedge planting and otter survey training for volunteers delivered
	2: Corridors	Habitat restoration and water level monitoring works underway on peatland sites
	3: Diffuse pollution	Advice provided to farmers and landowners for mitigating diffuse pollution and habitat restoration works
	4: Public awareness	Working group established at Cole Mere following a community consultation event, new hide and learning centre completed, four circular walks established
	5: Lessons learnt	Branding and communications exercise completed and public events held attracting over 700 visitors

NIA	Objectives[36]	Summary of main achievements
Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands	**1: Low carbon economy**	Two sustainable community woodfuel project initiated and visitor survey undertake to inform nature tourism work
	2: Limestone & wetland habitat	Advice provided to farmers and land managers for habitat enhancement and restoration works and volunteer working parties held
	3: Stepping stones	Series of capital projects to improve connectivity completed, corridors for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly created and demonstration events held
	4: Planning system	Species evidence base established and ecological network and connectivity mapping underway
	5: Communities	Big volunteer day held at Arnside with around 80 volunteers involved in management of four sites, programme of practical volunteer events on woodland and grassland management, and schools assembly pack developed
Nene Valley	**1: Value of natural environment**	Register of accessible natural areas compiled and Biodiversity SPD for North Northamptonshire amended to include the NIA
	2: Public awareness & access	Visitor access study underway including an online survey and training session held for breeding bird survey volunteers
	3: Ecological status of the river	Desk studies completed for all 69 waterbodies in the Nene Catchment and one enhancement project underway
	4: Ecological network	Advice provided to landowners for HLS applications covering 1,500ha land and GIS mapping completed to target areas for improved management
	5: Marketing ecosystem services	Investigations and testing of ecosystem service mapping tools underway and GIS maps produced showing density of bees and other pollinators
Northern Devon	**1: Robust & coherent ecosystem**	350ha of habitat restore through agri-environment schemes and workshops held on hedgelaying, woodland planting, deer control and culm grassland management. Held Best Practice event for the NIAs on grassland (Sept 2012)
	2: Delivering ecosystem services	Landowner visits targeted at the Lew sub-catchment, a priority for water quality advice and training held for landowners on resource protection and soil management
	3: Communities	Over 30 community events held plus eight volunteer days for habitat management and Parish Biodiversity Audits completed covering 15,000ha
	4: Advisory service to landowners	Network of advisors developed across the Culm Natural Character Area for consistent approach
	5: Local markets	Woodland creation work started with advice on woodfuel and carbon sequestration and a training day held on the Woodland Carbon Code
South Downs Way Ahead	**1: Walk the Chalk**	Chalk grassland ecological network work programmes developed for five focal areas and the South Downs Way corridor and extensive habitat management and restoration works started
	2: Linking the Fragments	Analysis of the state of the chalk grassland resource completed and seed collections harvested and plant species cultivated for use in restoration
	3: Surface to Groundwater	£25,000 match funding secured for development of a groundwater model and links established with neighbouring land management groups
	4: Town to Down	Lewes 'Big Benefits' Game developed for public engagement, conservation grazing of 100ha across 14 sites started and breeding lapwing and stone curlew surveys completed
	5: Valuing the Chalk	Nearly 5,000 people attended City Parks/green spaces events and around 6,500 volunteer hours on conservation tasks; ewes and cattle acquired and deployed on site
Wild Purbeck	**1: Land management**	New saline lagoon with research into its colonisation and hydrology undertaken, five ponds restored, 26ha conifer stands felled and Land Managers Forum established
	2: Community	£50K secured for Past Arts project and Community Gateway events held including wildlife gardening days, drop in sessions with over 200 people attending and a Bioblitz wildlife recording day
	3: Resilience	Report encompassing the impact of climate change across the NIA produced and £54K secured for the Cyril Diver project with preservation of Studland records underway
	4: Green economy	Assessments to establish quantity and usability of scrub arising from heathland management in progress
	5: Partnership approach	Partnership development and working ongoing with new members added

Progress of NIAs against their objectives and milestones

A qualitative assessment has been made of the progress of the NIAs against their own objectives. This assessment of progress is based on 4th quarter Progress Reports of the NIAs self-assessment of level of progress made towards project outcomes and reporting of whether progress is in line with the original milestones. See Table 8.2.

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 4th 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' only if progress in advance of milestones
Amber	None/Satisfactory/Good	No
Red	None/Little/Some	No

It should be noted that this assessment is indicative only, reflecting self-reported information on progress as included in 4th quarter Progress Reports, and also that the criteria for scoring against green, amber or red are quite broad. For example a 'green' score is given even where no progress has been achieved, if none was planned, thus an NIA which had planned to achieve little or no progress in Year 1 in relation to any objective, could still be scored 'green' across all objectives. In addition, the adverse weather experienced in much of England (in particular rainfall) was noted by some NIAs as leading to some unavoidable delay in progress on specific activities, and that subsequently some activities have been postponed until Year 2 or swapped with those originally planned for later in the delivery programme.

No NIA objectives fell in the red category. Comments have been provided for objectives with amber scores and for green scores where there has been some change or development with planned projects. The comments have been based on information mainly from the 4th quarter Progress Report, but also from earlier Progress Reports.

Table 8.2: NIA progress against milestones for each objective

NIA	Objectives	Score Green	Score Amber	Score Red	Comments (e.g. amber scores / where planned projects have changed)
Birmingham and Black Country	1: Amount of habitat	■			• Grassland creation was programmed for the 2nd quarter but this has been rescheduled for Year 2.
	2: Existing habitats	■			
	3: Wildlife sites	■			
	4: Corridors	■			
	5: Communities	■			
Dark Peak	1: Blanket bog	■			• Work moved forward due to budget changes.
	2: Priority species		■		• Less heather was cut at Burbage than planned due to discovery of heather beetle and the risk to other sites where the cut heather

NIA	Objectives	Score			Comments (e.g. amber scores / where planned projects have changed)
		Green	Amber	Red	
			Amber		• was to be used to aid gully blocking; presence of heather beetle to be monitored. • Work on restoring botanical diversity of heathland at Ramsley Moor delayed due to adverse weather.
	3: Connectivity		Amber		• Cutting of conifers at Crowden delayed due to adverse weather conditions.
	4: Restoration		Amber		• Weather conditions too wet for meadows to be cut at Longshaw and Eastern Moors and Swallows Wood.
	5: Access		Amber		• Nature trail at Dove Stone delayed due to difficulties with planning permission.
Dearne Valley	1: Floodplain habitat	Green			• Some funding implications for work at Wombwell Ings but progress reported as being in line with milestones.
	2: Woodland & farmland habitats	Green			• Farmers faced challenges due to flooding earlier in the year but overall progress reported in line with milestones.
	3: Local Planning Policy	Green			
	4: Community	Green			
Greater Thames Marshes	1: Evidence & targeted action	Green			
	2: Habitat	Green			
	3: Partnership		Amber		• Transfer of funds delayed for production of the Biodiversity Offset Management Plan but mitigated by release of funds elsewhere.
	4: Communication and access	Green			
	5: Legacy and the resources	Green			
Humberhead Levels	1: Habitats	Green			• On target despite delays with land purchase for Crowle Moor.
	2: Water management		Amber		• Delays in implementation of the River Idle Storage project due to the requirement to produce a Decision Document.
	3: Hydrological integrity		Amber		• Delays with the Crowle Moor land purchase resulted in milestones being behind schedule.
	4: Local green economy	Green			
	5: Community		Amber		• Delays in site acquisition at Potteric Carr Gateway Site have resulted in rescheduling of milestones.
Marlborough Downs	1: Wildlife sites	Green			
	2: Chalk grassland	Green			• A poor return of habitat surveys in the 2nd quarter probably reflected farmer involvement in dealing with a very wet summer.
	3: Species	Green			• Although some targets (nectar plots and wild bird mixes) were underachieved, expectations were exceeded elsewhere.
	4: Wildlife management	Green			
	5: Community involvement	Green			• While the 'outreach package' to promote the NIA has not delivered required outcomes, the objective has developed in other positive ways.
	6: Public access	Green			• Installation of gates and waymarks had to be delayed until the 4th quarter due to adverse weather conditions.
Meres and Mosses of the Marches	1: Favourable condition		Amber		• Majority of the delivery team joined in September meaning that progress was slow during the first half of the year. • Conservation work on Brown Moss delayed due to adverse weather conditions in the 4th quarter.
	2: Corridors		Amber		• Biodiversity offsetting project with Cheshire East making slow progress due to the lack of statutory means to push developers and timescales for including in local planning.
	3: Diffuse pollution	Green			
	4: Public awareness	Green			

NIA	Objectives	Score			Comments (e.g. amber scores / where planned projects have changed)
		Green	Amber	Red	
	5: Lessons learnt	🟩			
Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands	1: Low carbon economy	🟩			
	2: Limestone & wetland habitat	🟩			
	3: Stepping stones	🟩			• A demonstration event in the 2nd quarter had to be cancelled due to wet weather (site was flooded).
	4: Planning system	🟩			
	5: Communities	🟩			
Nene Valley	1: Value of natural environment	🟩			
	2: Public awareness & access	🟩			
	3: Ecological status of the river		🟧		• Completion of milestones delayed due to the recruitment time for River Restoration Adviser; milestones have since been revised. • Heavy snow and rain, and subsequent flooding, caused delays in carrying out of the river walkover surveys in the 4th quarter.
	4: Ecological network	🟩			
	5: Marketing ecosystem services		🟧		• Work on this objective started in October rather than April 2012 and as a result is behind the original timetable
Northern Devon	1: Robust & coherent ecosystem		🟧		• Targets for habitat creation/woodland planting not met due to time required to develop schemes and delays due to late start date of advisory staff. • A herd of ponies were not purchased as originally planned as the DWT grazing ring far exceeded targets for number of sites grazed during Year 1.
	2: Delivering ecosystem services	🟩			
	3: Communities		🟧		• Some targets behind schedule due to new staff getting up to speed and work programme development.
	4: Advisory service to landowners	🟩			
	5: Local markets	🟩			• Some delays with site visits regarding woodland economy / woodfuel due to the late recruitment of the Woodland Officer, however progress in line with milestones by end the 4th quarter.
South Downs Way Ahead	1: Walk the Chalk	🟩			•
	2: Linking the Fragments	🟩			• Research into optimum methodology for seed priming now being undertaken prior to establishing restoration trial plots.
	3: Surface to Groundwater		🟧		• Project milestones slightly revised in Q4 due to the refinement of the project specification.
	4: Town to Down	🟩			• Work on farmland bird distribution completed in Year 1 rather than Year 2.
	5: Valuing the Chalk		🟧		• Project publicity is behind schedule due to project changes • Leaflet production not completed within anticipated timeframe.
Wild Purbeck	1: Land management	🟩			
	2: Community	🟩			
	3: Resilience	🟩			
	4: Green economy	🟩			
	5: Partnership approach	🟩			

Note: comments are included where there has been some change or development with planned projects. These are mainly drawn from the 4th quarter Progress Report, but also from earlier Progress Reports.

Evaluation of progress of NIAs against objectives and milestones

The following evaluation questions have been used to assess progress of NIAs against their own objectives:

- *What evidence is there that NIAs have made planned progress against their own objectives?*
- *What evidence is there that NIAs are behind in planned progress against their own objectives?*
- *What evidence is there that NIAs are ahead of targets with their objectives?*

What evidence is there that NIAs have made planned progress against their own objectives?

A summary of the progress made by NIAs is described above and in the tables showing achievements of each NIA in relation to planned outputs for each objective.

Based on the NIA self-assessment in the 4th quarterly Progress Reports, five NIAs have recorded that progress of objectives is in line with milestones (Table 8.3). The remaining seven NIAs reported that they have not achieved milestones, for between one and four objectives, as planned. It should be noted that where milestones have not been met these are for individual elements of projects that contribute to the achievement of the overall objective.

Table 8.3: Summary of NIA progress against milestones

NIA	All objectives in line with milestones	Number of objectives not in line with milestones			
		One	Two	Three	Four
Birmingham and Black Country	✔				
Dark Peak					✔
Dearne Valley	✔				
Greater Thames Marshes		✔			
Humberhead Levels				✔	
Marlborough Downs	✔				
Meres and Mosses of the Marches			✔		
Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands	✔				
Nene Valley			✔		
Northern Devon			✔		
South Downs Way Ahead			✔		
Wild Purbeck	✔				

Source: NIA self-assessment in the 4th quarterly Progress Reports

What evidence is there that NIAs are behind in planned progress against their own objectives?

Table 8.3 indicates that, from evidence within the 4th quarter Progress Reports, progress for seven NIAs is behind that planned. The reasons given by the NIAs cover delays resulting from the need to overcome a range of issues and changes to the original planned work as a result of project development. Table 8.3 shows the progress with objectives at the year end. Several NIAs reported that objectives were not in line with milestones in their 1st, 2nd and 3rd quarter Progress Reports, however by the year end many issues had been resolved such that objectives were on target.

Where NIAs have reported delays to the achievement of objective milestones, these have largely been overcome by rescheduling tasks within the first year or revising milestones for future years.

The most frequently cited reasons for delays to projects were:

- **Time taken for project staff to be appointed** and to then get up to speed with the work, for example: most of the project team for the Meres and Mosses of the Marches NIA were not in post until September; and Dearne Valley Green Heart, Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands, Nene Valley and Northern Devon NIAs also reported delays resulting from late starting dates of project staff.

- **The wet weather conditions** (rain and floods) which had an impact on the work of farmers and land managers with the effect that:
    - Tasks or events had to be postponed until later in the year, for example: planting of five 'tree sparrow villages' within Marlborough Downs NIA was postponed until later in the year; and Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands NIA had to cancel a demonstration event as the site was flooded.
    - Tasks could not be undertaken and had to be rescheduled for the following year, for example: Dark Peak NIA were unable to start restoration of heathland diversity at Ramsley Moor or to get hay meadows cut; and Marlborough Downs NIA were unable to plant autumn sown nectar mix and bird mix because of the dry spring, wet summer and drawn out harvest.

Other examples of delays to achievement of milestones included:

- **Time taken to receive planning permission, for example in Dark Peak NIA milestones were delayed (within year) due to** the time taken for building consent for locating cattle infrastructure and work on a nature trail has been moved to Year 2 as a result of issues with the planning application.

- **Time taken for land purchase procedures**, for example within Humberhead Levels NIA delays to the purchase of Crowle Moor pushed milestones for hydrological work behind schedule and delays to site acquisition at Potteric Carr has resulted in rescheduling of milestones.

- **Difficulties with delivering biodiversity offsetting projects**, for example: in the Meres and Mosses of the Marches NIA slow progress is being made with the development of an offsetting project with Cheshire East Council due to the lack of statutory means to enforce offsetting and the timescales for inclusion in local policy; and in Greater Thames Marshes NIA production to a Biodiversity Offset Management Plan was held up due to issues around transfer of funds.

- **The length of time taken to develop woodland planting schemes** with landowners as found, for example, by Northern Devon NIA.

- **Species issues**, for example within Dark Peak NIA: the discovery of heather beetle at Burbage within posed a risk with transferring the cut heather to another for use in gully blocking; and the discovery of a badger sett on an embankment of a reservoir (a location for restoration of species rich pasture) had to be delayed until investigations had been undertaken to ensure the bank was structurally safe.

In some cases NIAs have changed planned work and milestones to accommodate changing project circumstances. These include:

- Birmingham and Black Country NIA had hoped to create grassland in the summer of Year 1 but this has been rescheduled for Year 2. Much effort was focussed instead on identification of seed/propagule source sites and the collection and cataloguing of seeds/propagules.

- Marlborough Downs NIA has found that its 'outreach package' to promote the NIA has not been as effective as anticipated, but community involvement is developing in unexpected

ways with considerable interest being shown in the project. For example, the project is to be featured in a new BBC series on British wildlife to be shown in summer 2013.

- Following the initial scoping study for chalk grassland restoration within the South Downs Way Ahead NIA it was decided that research into optimum seed priming protocols was essential for identifying the most appropriate methodology to apply to restoration trial plots (which have been rescheduled for Year 2).

- Northern Devon NIA did not purchase a herd of ponies as originally planned as the Devon Wildlife Trust grazing ring far exceeded the targets for the number of sites grazed; the need to purchase ponies is, therefore, to be reviewed.

What evidence is there that NIAs are ahead of targets with their objectives?

There are a few cases where NIAs reported that elements of project work were ahead of target:

- South Downs Way Ahead reported that work on farmland bird distribution was completed in Year 1 rather than Year 2, although this may be due to milestones being recorded in the wrong year.

- Work was moved forward to Year 1 following movement of budgets (as a result delays in obtaining planning permission for another project) enabling inoculation of *Sphagnum* beads for restoration of blanket bog within Dark Peak NIA.

- Following restoration Moss Road an additional bridleway and a path were restored using the same budget.

Progress of NIAs in relation to the four themes

Examples of progress made by NIAs in relation to the four M&E framework themes (Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Social and economic and contributions to wellbeing and Partnership working) are illustrated in Table 8.4. While projects have been listed against a theme and sub-theme it should be noted that in practice any one project delivers outcomes for multiple themes.

Note that all figures included in the table below are drawn from NIA quarterly Progress Reports and Year 1 summary reports. These figures therefore reflect the level of delivery as reported by NIAs for the period 1st January 2012 – 30th March 2013.

Table 8.4: Examples of NIA delivery against themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of NIA delivery
Biodiversity	Habitat	- Over 6.5ha of new woodland created within the Birmingham and Black Country NIA. - New saline lagoon created within the Wild Purbeck NIA. - Around 350ha of habitat restored through agri-environment schemes and through use of machinery and grazing rings in Northern Devon NIA. - Blanket bog restoration works undertaken within Dark Peak NIA. 21.5ha woodland, 51.8ha grassland, 6.5ha of heathland and two geological sites enhanced within the Birmingham and the Black Country NIA. - Condition of watercourses improved by preventing pollution by contaminants within the Dearne Valley NIA. - Scrub clearance undertaken at Crowle and Hatfield Moors in the Humberhead Levels NIA.
	Species	- Variety of actions for a range of species including scattering of grain to feed farmland birds, construction of five tree sparrow 'villages', and erection of sparrow, kestrel and barn owl boxes within Marlborough Downs NIA. - Research being undertaken into seed priming protocols for chalk grassland species restoration for the South Downs NIA. - Works undertaken across a network of sites for bumblebee species in Greater Thames Marshes NIA.

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of NIA delivery
Ecosystem Services	Connectivity	• 19.5km wildlife corridor, including watercourses, hedgerows and boundary features, enhanced within the Birmingham and the Black Country NIA. • Native wildflower and grass seed purchased to create 5.73km of wildlife corridor in Marlborough Downs NIA. • Over 1,500ha of land to be incorporated within HLS agreements to strengthen the ecological network in the Nene Valley NIA. • Interactive pdf atlas produced that takes account of existing biodiversity, land uses and anticipated pressures for change to help delivery of an ecological network in Greater Thames Marshes NIA.
	Invasive species	• Rhododendron control undertaken within the Meres and Mosses NIA. • Bracken and Rhododendron control undertaken to restore moorlands and woodlands in Dark Peak NIA.
	Cultural services	• Visits to schools by the NIA (via RSPB as part of schools' outreach project. • Major access routes for visitors restored in Dark Peak NIA with the help of volunteers enabling additional works to nearby routes. • School groups visited the River Torridge with a storyteller, saw the Giants in the Forest art installation and wrote their own stories of the river and its environment in Northern Devon NIA.
	Supporting services	• GIS maps produced showing density of bees and other pollinators across the Nene Valley NIA. • Training delivered on resource protection and soil management in Northern Devon NIA.
	Regulating services	• Training delivered the Woodland Carbon Code for application within Northern Devon NIA.
	Provisioning services	• Two sustainable woodfuel projects initiated, and volunteers registered for a 'woodshare' scheme and moved 7 tonnes of wood cut for conservation management moved to a 'wood bank' in Morecambe Bay NIA.
Social & economic benefits & contributions to wellbeing	Social impacts	• The CONNECT Project within the Humberhead Levels NIA has resulted in more than 2,500 additional visitors to Gateway Sites and over 5,000 hours of volunteer time. • A big volunteer day held at Arnside in Morecambe Bay NIA engaged around 80 volunteers, including school children, in practical tasks.
	Wellbeing	• A four mile long circular route identified for people to enjoy the Downs and view project activities of the Marlborough Downs NIA. • Walking resources in development in the Meres and Mosses NIA.
	Economic values and impacts	• Production of seven different types of biomass fuel products from harvested reed and removal of trees and scrub under investigation and trial by the Humberhead Levels NIA. • Nature tourism business network launched in the Morecambe Bay NIA. • Breeding flock of Shetland ewes and herds of Dexters and British White cattle acquired and deployed at sites within the South Downs NIA. • Work started for a South Downs Way Visitor Payback Scheme. • Investigations underway to identify the quantity and usability of scrub arising from heathland management works in Wild Purbeck NIA.
Partnership working	Mobilisation of resources	• Just under £2.1 million secured from the Catchment Restoration Fund for water quality improvements and £92,000 from SITA for blanket bog restoration within Dark Peak NIA. • £0.5 million secured from the Coastal Communities Fund for a Morecambe Bay sustainable tourism project.
	Efficient and effective delivery	• Links developed with nearby landscape project groups by the South Downs NIA to maximise outcomes and achieve efficiencies in delivery through combined effort. • Partners in the Wild Purbeck NIA are working with the Frome Piddle Catchment Management Plan, particularly on woodland planting and wetland restoration to achieve joint outcomes.
	Leadership and influence	• NIA Best Practice events on glasslands hosted by Northern Devon NIA and planning hosted by the Dearne Valley NIA. • The Biodiversity SPD for North Northamptonshire has been amended to include the Nene Valley NIA. • Branding and communications exercise completed and work being undertaken with local universities and agricultural colleges within the Meres and Mosses NIA. • Website developed for Greater Thames Marshes NIA.

Link between the NIAs' objectives, the M&E themes and Biodiversity 2020 outcomes / themes

Table 8.5 presents an overview of the links between the NIAs objectives and activities and the Biodiversity 2020 Outcomes and Themes. This provides an overview of how the NIA objectives both link to the four M&E framework themes (see Sections 4 – 7) and potentially support the delivery of the Biodiversity 2020 outcomes and themes (Table 8.6).

The extent to which the NIAs are contributing to the delivery of Biodiversity 2020 Outcomes and Themes will be explored in more detail in the Year 2 evaluation.

Table 8.5: Links to Biodiversity 2020 Outcomes and Themes

Outcomes
Outcome 1 – Habitats and ecosystems on land (including freshwater environments) All NIAs have objectives and activities for maintaining, enhancing, restoring and creating habitats and ecological networks.
Outcome 2 – Marine habitats, ecosystems and fisheries None of the NIA objectives or activities appear to deliver against this objective.
Outcome 3 – Species While some NIAs have objectives that specifically relate to improving the status of priority species (e.g. Marlborough Downs and Dark Peak), others have species activities integrated into other objectives.
Outcome 4 – People All NIAs include objectives and activities for linking and working with people and communities.
Themes and priorities
Theme 1. A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea All NIAs take a landscape scale approach towards conservation and are working to deliver more coherent ecological networks. Some NIAs are taking targeted action for species beyond wider habitat-based measures.
Theme 2. Putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy All NIAs have objectives and activities for people and communities, including increasing awareness of the value of biodiversity and the numbers of people taking action (as volunteers), taking account of decision making tools and identifying mechanisms to fund biodiversity outcomes.
Theme 3. Reducing environmental pressures NIAs are taking a range of actions to help reduce environmental pressures by integrating with the agricultural, forestry, planning and development and water management sectors as well as dealing with invasive non-native species as covered by this theme.
Theme 4. Improving our knowledge Several NIAs are undertaking research as part of the achievement of their objectives, for example, South Downs Way Ahead NIA is working in partnership with RBG Kew on seed priming protocols. All NIAs are undertaking monitoring of their activities and are involved in data recording (for example, submitting information to local biodiversity records centres). A variety of dissemination techniques are also being used by NIAs to share and communicate information.

Examples of biodiversity theme NIA contributions to Biodiversity 2020 are listed in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6: Examples of NIA biodiversity contributions to Biodiversity 2020 outcomes and themes

Biodiversity 2020 Outcomes and Themes of relevance to the NIA biodiversity theme	Examples of NIA activities
Outcomes	
Outcome 1 – Habitats and ecosystems on land (including freshwater environments)	• Over 6.5ha of new woodland created within the Birmingham and the Black Country NIA. • Scrub clearance undertaken at Crowle and Hatfield Moors in the Humberhead Levels NIA. • Blanket bog restoration works undertaken within Dark Peak NIA. • New saline lagoon created within the Wild Purbeck NIA.
Outcome 3 – Species	• Variety of actions for a range of species including scattering of grain to feed farmland birds, construction of five tree sparrow 'villages', and erection of sparrow, kestrel and barn owl boxes within Marlborough Downs NIA. • The RBG Kew provided advice on harvesting single species seed collections for South Downs NIA. • Works undertaken across a network of sites for bumblebee species in Greater Thames Marshes NIA.
Themes	
Theme 1. A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea	• 19.5km wildlife corridor, including watercourses, hedgerows and boundary features, enhanced within the Birmingham and Black Country NIA. • Native wildflower and grass seed purchased to create 5.73km of wildlife corridor in Marlborough Downs NIA. • Corridors for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly created in Morecambe Bay NIA.
Theme 3. Reducing environmental pressures	• Condition of watercourses improved by preventing pollution by contaminants within the Dearne Valley NIA. • The Biodiversity SPD for North Northamptonshire has been amended to include the Nene Valley NIA. • Landowner visits targeted towards intensively managed areas in the headwaters of the Torridge catchment within Northern Devon NIA. • Rhododendron control undertaken within the Meres and Mosses NIA. • Bracken and Rhododendron control undertaken to restore moorlands and woodlands in Dark Peak NIA.