

## Report of: Head of Nature Recovery

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### **Subject: Well-being Objective Deep Dive / Self-Assessment:**

Conservation – To deliver nature recovery and connectivity at scale, so nature is flourishing in the Park, contributing to the protection of 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030.

Management Team Leads: Head of Nature Recovery. Director of Nature and Tourism. Head of Engagement and Inclusion. Strategic Policy Manager.

#### Outcomes for Objective:

- Promote and deliver nature recovery on land and in the marine environment supporting the protection of 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030.
- Favourable conservation status is achieved on high nature value sites.
- Increase in land managed for nature recovery in the Park (achieved through influencing and working with others and managing our own estate.)
- Increase in ecological connectivity.
- A wide range of people are supported to participate in taking action for nature.
- The management of marine designations has improved through working with partners, nationally and locally.

#### **Outcomes this report is focusing on:**

- Promote and deliver nature recovery on land and in the marine environment supporting the protection of 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030.
- Favourable conservation status is achieved on high nature value sites.
- Increase in land managed for nature recovery in the Park.
- Increase in ecological connectivity.
- A wide range of people are supported to participate in taking action for nature.

## 1. Progress Assessment

Delivery Plan	Inputs [The resources (staff, time, money) being put into an intervention]	Activities [The things that are being done with these resources]	Outputs [A count of what has happened as a result of these activities]	Outcomes [The immediate consequences and change.]	Impact [The higher level and longer term results.]
<p>Nature Recovery Delivery Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in land managed for Nature Recovery in the Park</li> <li>• Increased ecological connectivity</li> </ul>	<p><b>Connecting the Coast</b></p> <p>1 FTE Connecting the Coast Officer</p> <p>SLSP (Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places) funded</p> <p>Significant contributions from Farm Conservation Liaison Officer, Conservation Officer, Lead Ecologist and Conservation Assistant.</p>	<p>A competitive land management grant scheme for farmers and landowners.</p>	<p>18,500m of fencing.</p> <p>76 ha (hectares) of coastal slope managed.</p> <p>41 ha of hay meadows – managed/created.</p> <p>60 ha of species rich permanent pasture managed/created.</p> <p>3 ha of unsprayed arable margins.</p> <p>150 ha of species rich herbal ley and meadow seed mixes.</p> <p>2,600m of hedgerows, nearly 1,000 trees, 8 ponds</p>	<p>More land managed for Nature.</p> <p>45 landowners engaged in the scheme.</p> <p>Greater ecological connectivity.</p> <p>Monitoring regime in place.</p>	<p>More resilient ecosystems.</p> <p>Carbon sequestration.</p> <p>Enhanced Park profile in agricultural community.</p>

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			and interpretation for visitors.  1 Reception Event at County Show.  1 Press Release.  1 presentation to pollinator task force.		
Nature Recovery Delivery Plan:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in land managed for Nature Recovery in the Park</li> <li>• Increased ecological Connectivity</li> <li>• Wide range of people taking action for</li> </ul>	<b>Conserving the Park</b>  Peatland Action Programme Work Programme.  Commons Resilience Work Programme.  1.6 FTE Conservation Officer, 0.7 Conservation Assistant.	Targeted support using the Conserving the Park Toolkit approach for landowners and farmers in the park.  Includes a year-round reactive service as well as targeted work for specific species (e.g. Yellowhammer and Marsh Fritillary) and habitat networks (e.g. Peatlands,	1,651 ha of land managed for biodiversity in partnership with private landowners in 2023/24.  3,792.51 ha of access land where the Authority supported commons management partnerships in 2023/24.	More land managed for Nature.  Greater ecological connectivity.  Targeted landscape scale interventions.  100% of conservation sites were in line with their formal conservation	More resilient ecosystems.  Carbon Sequestration.  Enhanced Park profile in the National Park landowning community.

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<p>nature (Opportunities for Pathways volunteers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement, Involvement and Learning about the Park Delivery Plan (Provision of Volunteering Opportunities)</li> </ul>	<p>Core Budgets supplemented by Heritage Lottery Fund Nature Networks Funds 2 and 3, NRW Peatland Grant and Pembrokeshire Coast Trust Campaigns Make More Meadows, Wild about Woodlands, and Birds and the Bees campaign.</p>	<p>grassland and heathland).</p>	<p>503.24 ha of property owned or leased by the Authority managed for biodiversity.</p> <p>2 new peatland sites fenced and brought back into management through National Peatland Action Programme.</p> <p>Since April 24, Nature Networks Fund 3 has facilitated capital works on 12 sites. New volunteers have been trained to do SSSI (site of special scientific interest) woodland monitoring and help with chough, bat, dormouse, harvest mouse and marsh fritillary</p>	<p>management plan in 2023/24, continuing the trend from 2022/23.</p> <p>People engaged in taking action for nature, in particular supported volunteers through Pathways project.</p>	

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			<p>monitoring. Pathways volunteers have been key to delivering many of the outcomes of Nature Network Fund 3.</p> <p>Press Releases.</p> <p>Conserving the Park opportunities help support the provision of practical nature recovery volunteering opportunities with 5,205 hours contributed by volunteers to nature recovery in 2023/24. This includes wildlife/ habitat monitoring activities.</p>		
Nature Recovery Delivery Plan:	<b>Stitch in Time</b>	Strategic catchment-based control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)	10 catchments targeted	Areas safeguarded from INNS.	More resilient ecosystems.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Favourable Conservation Status on Designated Sites</li> <li>Wide range of people taking action for nature (Opportunities for Pathways volunteers)</li> <li>Engagement, Involvement and Learning about the Park Delivery Plan (Provision of Volunteering Opportunities)</li> </ul>	<p>HLF Nature Networks fund 2 and 3 and SLSP.</p> <p>Volunteer input, providing practical volunteering opportunities for Pathways supported volunteers.</p>	using volunteers and contractors.	<p>11 ha were under monitoring and maintenance for INNS in 2023/24. 35.26 ha were under high intensity control for INNS in 2023/24.</p> <p>1,802 stems were injected.</p> <p>643 hours volunteer time valued at £12,862.</p> <p>Pathways volunteers have been key to delivering many of the outcomes of NNF3.</p>	<p>Addresses one of the factors influencing unfavourable condition.</p> <p>Greater ecological Connectivity.</p> <p>People engaged in taking action for nature, in particular supported volunteers through Pathways project.</p>	<p>Enhanced water quality.</p> <p>Future proofing by tackling INNS in a strategic manner.</p> <p>Healthier happier population.</p> <p>Education of communities and landowners and managers.</p>
Nature Recovery Delivery Plan:	<b>Traditional Boundaries Grant Scheme</b>	A competitive land management grant scheme for farmers and landowners.	1,492 m of traditional boundary restored under Traditional	Engagement with 60 landowners. 40 landowners were eligible for funding.	More resilient ecosystems.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased Ecological Connectivity</li> </ul>	<p>SLSP and Wild About Woodlands Fund.</p> <p>Farm Conservation Laison Officer.</p>		<p>Boundaries in 2023/24.</p>	<p>10,840 hedgerow whips planted. 238 m of hedges laid.</p> <p>1,667 m of Hedgerow planted.</p> <p>2,185 m of protective fencing Installed.</p>	<p>Increasing Habitat Connectivity and appropriate tree cover within the landscape.</p> <p>Safeguarding Historical and landscape features. Carbon Sequestration.</p> <p>Enhanced profile in the National Park landowner community.</p>

## **2. Case Studies**

### **2.1 Conserving The Park - Brandy Brook Valley, Roch**

The Conserving the Park scheme plays a vital role giving farmers and landowners access to the free ecological and technical advice they need to enable them to do their bit for nature. Practical and financial support then allows this advice to be turned into action.

#### **Long term benefits**

The follow-up monitoring we provide and the development of the relationship with the landowner means that we can ensure these actions are turned into results. In this way, we can deliver direct benefit to the priority habitats and species of the National Park. This long-term relationship-building means many of these sites truly provide a long-term benefit, security and return on investment as required by the 30 x 30 target.

One of the larger sites to benefit from our Conserving The Park scheme sits on the slopes of the Brandy Brook valley, which leads down to the sea at Newgale. At 70 acres in extent, it encompasses a rich array of habitats from the valley floor to the top of the slope – river, wetland, ancient woodland, hay meadow, species-rich pasture, developing woodland and scrub.

The landowners work with a local farmer to graze the land, but they were keen to access advice, practical assistance and financial support to make their land as nature rich as possible.

#### **Recovering Nature**

Over the last 3 years, we have worked closely with farmers and landowners in many ways and much has been achieved.





A management agreement has supported a switch in grazing regime of the grassland habitats, allowing them to reach their full potential. The number of flowers in these areas has increased very noticeably, including a very unusual inland population of spring squill, normally only seen on cliff tops.

Fencing grants have also facilitated this.



The wetland has benefitted from a new grant-aided pond, introducing some open water habitat to this part of the valley. Otters have been recorded using it.



The valley sides were planted up with trees over 20 years ago under a different scheme, but many trees had died and the slopes had become a monoculture of gorse. We brought in a specialist contractor to start clearing paths and openings within the gorse, and wardens to cut around the remaining trees to allow them to flourish. This work is extended every winter. Volunteers have collected many bags of old plastic tree guards. The result has been flower-filled glades which will now be maintained by hardy ponies grazing, creating a new habitat here – wood pasture.



**Connecting people and nature** The discovery of a yellowhammer here on a monitoring visit led to a connection with the local volunteer bird ringing group who set up a survey and discovered the site is being used by over 60 yellowhammers, making this a hotspot for this species in a county where it is thought to have declined by 99% in recent times. We have contributed to the cost of feeders and trays which have been developed at Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre and networked with the Pembrokeshire Yellowhammer Recovery Group for the provision of seed.

#### **Landscape scale connections**

We are also involved in other sites up and down the same valley, contributing to ecological connectivity and nature recovery on a catchment scale. The sites within the Brandy Brook Valley connect down the SSSI at Newgale and on to National Trust land at Wood Farm and Southwood Estate and onto the wider coastal habitat network.

## 2.2 Nevern Valley Conserving the Park

PCNPA have been working with landowners along the Nevern Valley to manage and enhance habitats. Together they comprise 67.8ha of almost contiguous habitat managed traditionally without any artificial inputs.



Each site has meadows managed for biodiversity surrounded by billowing hedgerows connected to woodland along the valley. Tree planting has taken place at three sites to further improve woodland connectivity without losing any species-rich grassland, planting will start at another once funding is available. Wildlife ponds have been dug at two sites as part of their systems to manage rain run-off.

We knew from the outset that both greater and lesser horseshoe bats use the Nevern valley; we also suspected that barbastelle bats and dormice could well be present, as both species are features of nearby Pengelli Forest SSSI. All these species rely on woodland networks at a landscape scale to support viable populations. One of our volunteers worked with Natur am Byth to undertake bat surveys in the woodland and we were delighted to discover that barbastelles are present. A licensed dormouse volunteer made use of boxes provided by the Initiative for Nature Conservation Cymru to monitor for dormice: we were thrilled to record a young dormouse present during the first survey season.

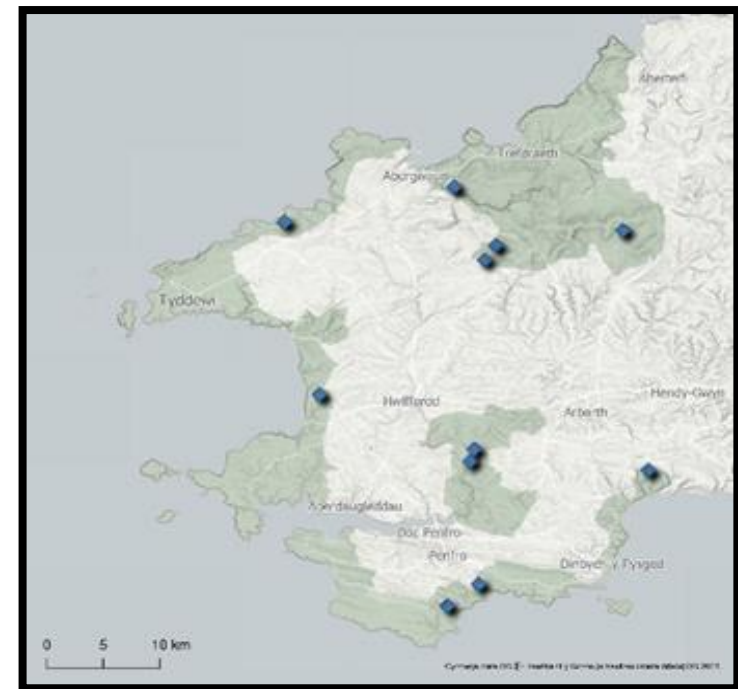
Other works at these sites over the last 18 months have included constructing a night roost for horseshoe bats, opening up an old gateway between adjoining meadows so that cattle no longer pass through (and nibble) an area of young woodland, and monitoring barn owl chicks. PCNPA's Pathways volunteers have done an enormous amount of fencing to enable cattle grazing to be reintroduced, and some sites have organised their own sessions for volunteering and engagement. Funding sources have included the Nature Networks Fund, Wild about Woodlands and Local Places for Nature.

## 2.3 Traditional Boundaries Grant Scheme 2023/24

238m of laid Hedges	10,840 Hedgerow plants planted	1667m of Hedgerow planted	2185 m of Protective fencing installed.
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The **Traditional Boundaries Grant Scheme** offered by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority is designed to support landowners and land managers in the restoration and preservation of traditional field boundaries such as stone walls, hedgebanks, and earth banks. The scheme provides financial assistance for the restoration of these traditional boundaries, which contribute to the ecological health of the area by supporting habitats for various species, enhancing biodiversity, and improving soil stability. Due to funding availability the creation and restoration of hedges were prioritised in this year's scheme.

Tremendous interest in the scheme was generated through a Facebook campaign and other media outlets, resulting in 60 initial enquiries, 40 of which were eligible to receive grant support. After a scoring process, 17 landowners were accepted into the scheme. The adjacent map shows the distribution of the completed projects. Some dots represent multiple landowners working together to plant and safeguard the same hedge.





### Hedge Near Portclew

190m of Planting- 300m of Protective Fencing



In recent history this hedge had been left unfenced and as a result it had been grazed out by sheep. The newly Planted hedge is adjacent to a bridleway and an area of ancient woodland



Examples of Other works



### Hedge near Cas Fuwch

55m of Hedgerow Planting -110m of Protective fencing

In addition to the hedging wips we were able to support the landowners ambition of creating a wider 4m wildlife corridor through the funding of 2m +trees. These included Wych Elm, Wild Crab Cherry and Peach, Field Maple Rowan Sessile Oak, Downy birch Hornbeam and Lime. All though a small hedge it acts as a vital connection from the nearby Heathland Common and Rhos pasture.



## 2.4 Invasive Non-Native Species – Stitch in Time Project

Controlling invasive plants to allow visible progress on Nature Recovery



*Milford Haven Port Authority corporate volunteers enjoy a day balsam bashing in Kingsmill Wood, Castlemartin Corse catchment*

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund: Nature Network grants 2 and 3 and the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places grant, the authority's Stitch in Time project is successfully controlling two very different invasive nonnative plants.

The annual seed producer Himalayan balsam can be controlled very effectively through constant cutting throughout the growing season undertaken by project contractors, volunteers and staff, the hardy rhizome forming and colonial spreading Japanese Knotweed requires specialist treatment from late summer with herbicide. The common feature of both these plants is their invasiveness, able to dominate the habitats they invade and ease of spread through the landscape shading out and outcompeting nature recovery.

Controlling these two invasive plants is therefore Nature Recovery in action, following effective control of both encourages more desirable native and non-native vegetation complete their own lifecycle which in turn support invertebrates which rely on them for their lifecycle which can also benefit vertebrates further up food chains.

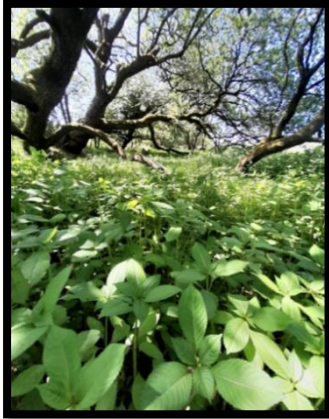
The project is focussing Himalayan balsam control over 8 Pembrokeshire catchments: Castlemartin Corse, St David's Afon Alun the coastal catchment of Waterwynch and the Pembroke catchment in South Pembrokeshire. The sub-catchments of the Afon Nyfer (Brynberian, Clydach, Blaenffos and Crymych) the Afon Wern, the Molygrove catchment and the adjacent coastal catchment of Pwll y Granant, in North Pembrokeshire. The project also continues to monitor and maintain near eradicated states of balsam in Cwm Gwaun and Porthgain.

In total approximately 50 hectares of land affected by Himalayan balsam is being managed using contractors, volunteers and staff in a high intensity phase of consistent and thorough control.

Over 2024 the project has organised 34 Himalayan balsam work parties with a total of 1,461 hours of time contributed over both 2023 and 2024 from over 60 individuals helping to contribute to this task therefore directly involved in practical Nature Recovery.

Volunteer involvement with Japanese knotweed control is limited to assisting with winter clearance to make access easier in late summer for herbicide treatment. Interestingly Japanese knotweed can inhibit growth of Himalayan balsam. The photo examples below highlight the success noted on sites in the Blaenffos (Afon Nyfer) and on the coastal slope of Ceibwr (Moylgrove).





***Blaenffos May/June 2023***

*Himalayan balsam thrives under willow at high densities producing a dark understory beneath the balsam stems excluding light and nutrients from any plants below due to the sheer quantity of stems.*



***June 2024***

*9 balsam plants were hand pulled in the same area in June 2024. Thorough control within one season can produce excellent results and is a worthwhile investment high up in a catchment.*



***Blaenffos July 2023***

*Himalayan balsam control was left a bit later than normal (picture shows before work undertaken).*



***Blaenffos July 2024***

*One season of thorough cutting by contractor and follow up with project officer has reduced the density of balsam significantly. Foxgloves, grasses, nettles and dead nettle thrive once competition from balsam removed.*

## 2.5 Safeguarding Scheduled Monuments: Benefitting Nature

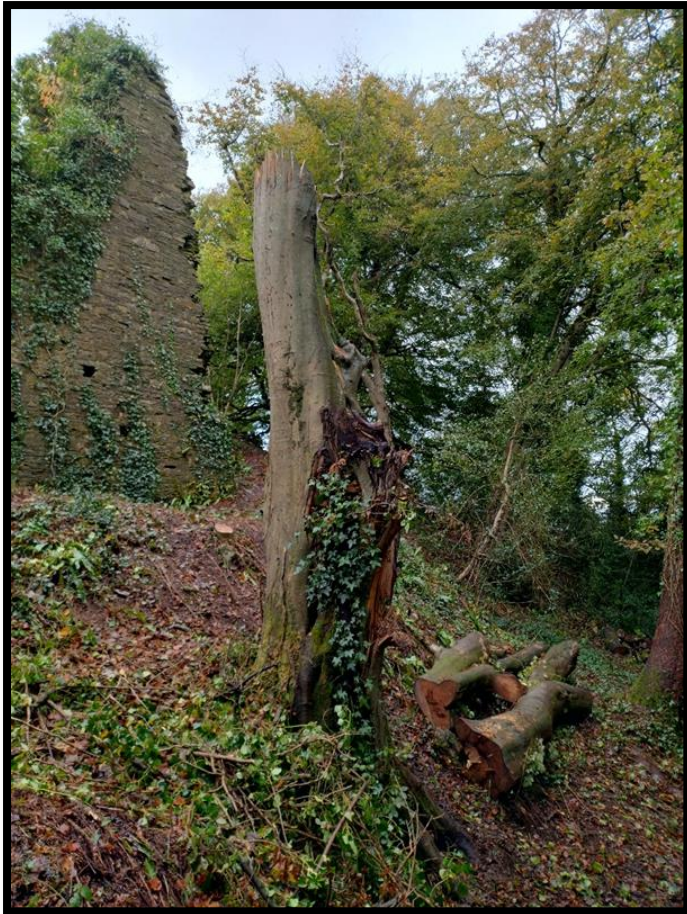
Since 2020, heritage volunteers have been monitoring the condition of publicly accessible scheduled monuments across the National Park area. This accounts for almost half of all scheduled monuments in the National Park area. Between April 2023 and October 2024, 294 visits had taken place and almost 97% had been assessed by the Community Archaeologist or support staff.

Monitoring data collected has revealed a number of issues at scheduled monuments, including vegetation encroachment, woodland, coastal erosion and heritage crime issues. The data has been used to develop work programmes on several sites affected by issues. Between April 2023 and October 2024, work has been delivered by the Community Archaeologist, other Authority staff, external partners, volunteers and community groups.

One of the biggest issues facing scheduled monuments in the National Park is vegetation encroachment, this means conservation work relating to scheduled monuments is largely focussed on this issue. Problem species include gorse and bracken and in limited cases, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and buddleia.

Vegetation encroachment is problematic for many archaeological sites because it causes disturbance and displacement of archaeological features and increases deterioration in the condition of sites. Species that are problematic for scheduled monuments can also prove problematic for nature, such as creating a monoculture or reducing biodiversity.

Work to reduce and clear problematic species at several sites, benefits both the historic and natural environment. Clearance of bracken and gorse at Mill Haven Rath, Tower Point Rath and Crugiau Cemmaes have led to an increase in native species, such as Foxgloves. Work tackling Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed at a medieval leat in St Davids will improve the condition of the monument but also help slow the spread of these invasive non-native species within the Alun River catchment area. Felling a diseased beech tree next to the south tower at Newport Castle was done sensitively, so that disturbance to potential bat roosts was minimised, a four-metre habitat stump was also retained to help support nature.



*Newport Castle: Base of tree retained as habitat stump for nature following felling work in October 2024.*



*Crugiau Cemmaes Round Barrow: Friends of the Pembrokeshire Coast bracken bashing around foxgloves in July 2024.*

### 3. Challenges and Opportunities

There are a range of challenges facing nature recovery, on a local and global scale, as well as for the work undertaken by the National Park to deliver outcomes with the greatest impact to deliver nature recovery and connectivity at scale.

**Funding** is a challenge for delivery; due to the often short-term, unpredictable and uncertain nature of funding and its sources. In order to make impact at scale, funding for and investment in nature recovery must reflect that ecological processes and nature recovery processes are generally outside of traditional funding timescales. Related to this are challenges aligning staffing resource with available funding; many funding sources are for capital works which whilst welcomed and effective, are dependent upon capacity to deliver.

Work with landowners and other stakeholders, and partners through land management agreements locally has made significant impacts on nature recovery within the National Park. This has been contingent to having payment / incentive structures which are accessible and practical to those local landowners. This is linked to the evolution of the wider **policy** landscape, including the Welsh Government Sustainable Farming Scheme, and ensuring that there are funding mechanisms which support landowners and relevant stakeholders to continue to maintain and enhance resilient ecological networks. Opportunities remain with the ongoing work with Welsh Government to influence and shape policy in these areas.

**Partnership and collaborative** working is key to the delivery of nature recovery. The impact of the recent consultation and announcements by Natural Resources Wales may pose future challenges, the extent of which may not be clear in the short term. There is already concern around the management of designated sites. Opportunities exist to deepen relationships with key partners, for example the National Trust. Opportunities for working with key partners and stakeholders, building on many years of collaborative working across the National Park and wider, allows for larger scale and impactful nature recovery action.

Linking nature recovery work with volunteering and Engagement and Inclusion Teams provides opportunities to support a wide range of people are supported to participate in taking action for nature, which can support nature recovery project bids as seen with the Nature Network Fund and Pathways projects. Capacity can impact on number of volunteering opportunities team can provide.

#### 4. Contribution to Cross Cutting Outcomes:

Cross Cutting Outcome	Contribution – Activities and Impact
Sustainable Development Principles – 5 ways of working	<p><b>Long Term</b> – The world is facing a nature emergency, the conservation action we carry out now is expected to have positive consequences for future generations and environmental and biodiversity resilience. The Authority and its volunteers are engaged in wildlife/ habitat monitoring activities to support long term data sets.</p> <p><b>Prevention</b> – Conservation work is focused on delivering nature-based solution that are focused on building positive relationships with landowners and communities to strengthen biodiversity resilience in the Park.</p> <p><b>Integration / Collaboration</b> – Authority is a committed member of the Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership. It’s conservation activities also align with Well-being Plan for Pembrokeshire’s project on Tackling Climate Change and the nature emergency. Collaboration is at the heart of the Authority’s Conservation work and approach; we can only achieve positive outcomes through working closely with landowners and communities in the Park and with wider partner organisations working within the Conservation sector.</p> <p><b>Involvement</b> – Projects such as Connecting the Coast or Traditional Boundaries Grant scheme provide a good opportunity to engage with new landowners we may previously have had limited engagement with. Our nature recovery activities provide opportunity for volunteers and communities to take practical activities and monitoring in support of nature in the Park. The INNS scheme has been engaging with garden centres.</p>

Public Sector Equality Duty/ Socio Economic Duty / Reducing Child Poverty	Nature Network Funding as provided opportunities for Pathways supported volunteers to participate in nature recovery activities, helping support a wider range of people to participate in taking action for nature. Major proportion of our budget provides direct investment in the local rural economy by working with SME's including farms and local contracting businesses.
Promoting Welsh Language	The Authority's Agriculture Conservation officer speaks Welsh and it is important that we are able to engage with a range of stakeholders including landowners in Welsh when carrying out nature recovery activities.
Section 6 Biodiversity Duty / Sustainable Management of Natural Resources	Learning from our core nature recovery work can be used to help inform wider work of the Authority in terms of biodiversity – for example how we manage our assets, supporting communities with nature recovery activities and nature recovery engagement opportunities for volunteers and others.
Engagement with Communities and Stakeholders	Projects such as Connecting the Coast or Traditional Boundaries Grant scheme provide a good opportunity to engage with new landowners we may previously have had limited engagement with. Our nature recovery activities provide opportunity for volunteers and communities to take practical activities and monitoring in support of nature in the Park. We can only achieve positive outcomes through working closely with landowners and communities in the Park and with wider partner organisations working within the Conservation sector.
Staff Development / Volunteering Opportunities	New volunteers have been trained to do SSSI woodland monitoring and help with chough, bat, dormouse, harvest mouse and marsh fritillary monitoring. Nature Network funding has enabled Pathways Supported Volunteers to further engage with Conservation related activities.

## 5. Overall Assessment and Next Steps

Progress towards the wellbeing objective is positive, with a huge range of work and activities undertaken, a small sample of which have been highlighted in this report. Nature Recovery continues to be embedded in most areas of the Authority's work, and work will continue to deliver existing projects.

Further engagement on and defining the aspirations for nature recovery will follow, focussing on the other priority actions for nature recovery; aligning with funding opportunities as well as identifying wider sources of funding. For example, exploring and building opportunities and scope for green and private finance in a National Park context to achieve the National Park's priority actions.