



# **Evaluation of public dialogue in England's Nature Improvement Areas**

for Natural England

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## Executive Summary

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Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) were introduced by the Government's Natural Environment White Paper to enhance and reconnect nature on a significant scale in England and to put communities at the heart of devolved and local decision making. Twelve Nature Improvement Areas were identified by Defra in 2011-2012 to be given an opportunity to apply for funding from Natural England (NE) to run community nature programmes, which were to include a strand of community engagement and outreach. Through 2012, at the request of the then chair of Natural England and the lead team for NIAs at Defra, Sciencewise developed a funding package to support those NIAs who were particularly keen to apply for support from Natural England to run a public dialogue project as part of their wider work to engage communities, understand local needs and improve their local natural environment. The project started formally in March 2013 and ended in March 2015.

The project was funded and supported by Natural England and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) through the Sciencewise programme<sup>1</sup>. An Expression of Interest stage was completed in November 2012. Three NIAs applied for this funding, and all were successful. These NIAs were: the Meres and Mosses of the Marches, Morecambe Bay Limestones and Wetlands, and Nene Valley. A scoping stage was then entered which led to the development of delivery plans and detailed objectives for local public dialogue projects in those three NIA areas. The delivery plans were all formally approved by September 2013.

The overarching aim of the NIA public dialogue project was *"To support Natural England, Defra and partners use public dialogue in local decision making for the development of integrated biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems policy and practice, within the context of localism and Big Society."*

The aim of this evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the impact and quality of the NIAs public dialogue project overall, and in doing so contribute to the wider effectiveness of public dialogue both in landscape management and beyond. This evaluation report is based on data collection between August 2013 and April 2015 from: direct observations of management meetings, written correspondence and documents; three rounds of semi-structured telephone interviews (33 interviews in total, with 15 separate people); participant questionnaires (208 participants in total); and liaison with the national evaluation programme that was on-going across the NIAs themselves commissioned by Defra.

Dialogue approaches, activities, outputs and impacts varied significantly across the three local dialogue projects (see below).

### Meres and Mosses NIA

The Meres and Mosses NIA is in Shropshire and Cheshire. The dialogue project ran a series of sequential dialogue activities, enabling them to explore broad options around the management of their landscape before narrowing down on particular topics of interest. Initial scoping activities included a survey and a stakeholder workshop, followed by more focused discussions at a series of public, stakeholder and mixed dialogue workshops.

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<sup>1</sup> Sciencewise aims to improve policy making involving science and technology across Government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and encouraging its wider use where appropriate.  
[www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)

The dialogue started from a broad question to the public of “What do you value and think is special about your local landscape?” The dialogue involved a range of stakeholder and public engagement over two years that reached over 100 members of the public via 10 standardised workshops, each considering public views of choices in local landscape management.

Various challenges arose in the work, including: a rapid and light-touch competition process between the NIAs for funds which precluded a deep collective understanding of what was anticipated, and a misunderstanding about the division of workload between the NIA staff and facilitator being offered through the funding (that in itself originated partly from a lack of clarity about this in the funding process and partly through changes of staff in the NIA internally).

In spite of the challenges, the work produced a number of valuable outputs and impacts. A Dialogue Report of findings has been produced, together with a film promoting the landscape, and a Google Earth tour that enabled workshop participants to explore their landscape virtually and stimulate discussion in a creative way. The film and virtual tour in particular are seen as high quality and useful outputs of the dialogue by the NIA team. Key intangible impacts of the dialogue include new relationships built between the NIA and local organisations, and a new appreciation on the part of two NIA staff members of the value of engaging a smaller sample of the public in depth in comparison to always engaging a larger number in a more superficial way. However, when these outputs are placed against the experience of the NIA staff and the facilitator, one gets a sense of just how difficult the issue of workload division was.

### **Morecambe Bay NIA**

The Morecambe Bay NIA is in Lancashire and Cumbria. The dialogue project chose to run a number of engagement activities concurrently, each focused on four site-based dialogues, each largely separate from each other. They included detailed public and stakeholder dialogues on the planned restoration works at Winmarleigh Moss; developing a future vision for nature and farming in the Lyth Valley focused on an exploration of hopes and fears around a vision for a valley that is having drainage pumping removed; an art installation on a wildlife reserve produced by local primary school children to raise awareness of an established restored moss (Foulshaw Moss); and local engagement to establish delicate discussions about a joint management scheme against a backdrop of controversy on the approach to restoration of Nichols Moss.

Various challenges arose in the work, including it taking a year to get to the point where the four projects were scoped to a sufficient detail with support of local staff that had time to assist. Numerous practical problems occurred and some (but not all) of these might have been avoided or minimised, potentially via improvements to the funding process at the start.

The benefits of the dialogue revolve mainly around the intangible value of initiating independently facilitated discussions amongst diverse stakeholders, rather than any specific tangible output, although a Dialogue Report was produced with signposts to other documents produced. Specifically, the dialogue has enabled local discussions about at least three sites in the NIA to move beyond entrenched arguments, towards more constructive and enquiring conversations that have the potential to move forward further in future if they are supported. For NE, the dialogue has “*proved that the approach works*” and as a result NE have agreed to continue funding the facilitator to progress work further at Nichols Moss.

### Nene Valley NIA

The Nene Valley NIA is in Northamptonshire, running from Daventry to Peterborough. This dialogue project also delivered a range of engagement activities running at the same time. It engaged a range of members of the public, with the most intensive level of engagement happening in the form of 26 individuals engaged at two key sites through two community panel processes to develop action plans for local areas of ecological importance. Wider engagement involved a few hundred people at a much lower intensity of engagement through an interactive online space; training and guidance for other interested organisations; and wider engagement with youth and community groups. The key products were two vision statements and action plans for the two sites, alongside a re-launched website and guidance document outlining key learning points.

Aside from some delays in timescales, the key challenges for the process revolved around the context of the project, specifically timing and funding. The consensus across all interviewees tended to be that more time upfront and some funding set aside to deliver action at the end of the process would have eased many of the difficulties encountered during project delivery. Indeed, the key risk for the project going forward is the ability to secure funding to implement part or all of the activities within the action plans, in order to demonstrate that the time and effort put into the process delivered real change.

It is clear that many of those involved in the project came away from the process having learned something, and with slightly more positive views about the value of engagement in this kind of issue. Indeed, if further funding is secured, delivery of the action plans will be a clear tangible outcome. Two final questions remain: whether the process was worth doing, and whether anything could have been done differently. The value for money question of course partly depends on future delivery of outcomes, but some of the final comments from interviewees touch on a range of aspects, including monetary and social value, as well as what they would have done differently.

### Impacts beyond the three dialogues

Beyond the learning and achievements arising at the local level of each dialogue, benefits arose too across the work as a whole:

- Participating in the coalition Government experiment of local decision-making.
- Raising awareness across all 12 NIAs about public dialogue as an approach.
- Building capacity of NE staff to understand and oversee public dialogue.
- Providing evidence to input to wider external funding bids at the NIA level.

### Conclusions

Overall this was a project of varied success and impact given the scale of time, effort and funding. Specific conclusions include:

- **A more appropriate funding process** would have been a productive investment and paid off in the long term. Specifically, the process used in this case could be built on and improved by increasing clarity and detail in the invitation to bid, as well as support to NIAs during a longer initial bidding

process. This is the single most important lesson from this project, and has more impact than the rest of the lessons combined.

- **The Management Group** worked well as a forum for updates and as a contract-management mechanism, but would have benefitted from having a tighter remit. The group did not have an executive function despite it being perceived as such by some members, and this caused some confusion and ambiguity in the eyes of the NIA representatives and sometimes the facilitators. There was the opportunity to separate out the contract-management discussions to also use the group to share learning and explore interesting dilemmas facing the dialogues at the NIA level.
- **Involvement of full NIA partnerships.** At the start, the members of the partnerships running the three local NIAs doing dialogue projects were not very involved or up to date about the dialogues, which potentially missed opportunities to ease delivery as well as boost likely impacts.
- **Devolved dialogue with local projects poses particular questions** for Sciencewise when compared to single national dialogue projects. For example:
  - How should 'public participants' be defined in public dialogue? It may be useful to consider three categories of participant: professional stakeholders, interested public, and unengaged public.
  - How clearly is 'public dialogue' defined? For example, the boundary between awareness raising and dialogue (e.g. where does an art project sit, and under what circumstances would it be supported?).
  - Where does the impetus for defining the dialogue policy hook come from? Nationally, or locally.
  - At which point and on what basis should a dialogue project be stopped, and by whom? At present there seems no process for stopping a project even when there is no progress or expectation of achievement of objectives.

While these can all be handled on an ad-hoc basis, there is a strong case for Sciencewise discussing these up front as part of the process for agreeing funding and support, and also during early project planning to resolve ambiguities in expectations. Indeed, some of the wider questions, such as the last one on when to discontinue a project, merits stand-alone discussion within the Sciencewise governance structure.

The evaluators thank all those who contributed to the evaluation: it would not be possible without their time, effort and honesty.

## 1 - Introduction

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This report presents the findings of an evaluation of a public dialogue project carried out by three Nature Improvement Areas in England in 2013-2015.

The evaluation report presents evidence on the quality of the public dialogue processes, and their impacts. It also identifies lessons to help develop good practice in public dialogue more widely, in particular commenting on learning arising from a decentralised model of public dialogue.

## 2 - Background to the Public Dialogue project

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Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) were introduced by the Government's Natural Environment White Paper to 'enhance and reconnect nature on a significant scale' in England and to put communities at the heart of devolved and local decision making. NIAs are designed to revitalise urban and rural areas by creating bigger, inter-connected networks of wildlife habitats to re-establish wildlife populations and help achieve nature's recovery. NIAs aim to improve the health of the natural environment to support food production, reduce flood risk and increase access to nature. A competition was held by Defra to identify an initial twelve NIAs who then received three years of funding to deliver an agreed work programme. This period of funding ended in March 2015; no new funding is currently proposed.

The twelve Government-funded Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)<sup>2</sup> identified by Defra in 2011 - 2012 were given an opportunity in late 2012 to apply for funds from Natural England to run community nature programmes, which were to include a strand of community engagement and outreach. Through 2012, at the request of the then chair of Natural England and the lead team for NIAs at Defra, Sciencewise developed a funding package to support those NIAs who were particularly keen to apply for support from Natural England to run a public dialogue project as part of their wider work to engage communities, understand local needs and improve their local natural environment. The project started formally in March 2013 and ended in March 2015, a total of two years.

The project was funded and supported by Natural England and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) through the Sciencewise programme<sup>3</sup>. Total project costs were £567k including non-recoverable VAT.

An Expression of Interest stage was completed in November 2012. Three NIAs applied for this funding in November 2012, and all were successful. These NIAs were: the Meres and Mosses of the Marches, Morecambe Bay Limestones and Wetlands, and Nene Valley. A scoping stage was then entered which led to the development of delivery plans and detailed objectives for local public dialogue projects in those three NIA areas. The delivery plans were approved by September 2013.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/funding/nia/projects/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Sciencewise aims to improve policy making involving science and technology across Government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and encouraging its wider use where appropriate.  
[www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk)

The overarching aim of the NIA public dialogue project was stated<sup>4</sup> as:

*To support Natural England, Defra and partners use public dialogue in local decision making for the development of integrated biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems policy and practice, within the context of localism and Big Society.*

The key objectives were:

1. To embed public dialogue in the NIA planning process:
  - i) To enable NIA partnerships to take evidence-based local policy decisions, dealing with varied and novel scientific and technical information and associated complexity and uncertainty informed by public opinion.
  - ii) To develop, test and apply novel methods of engagement processes to encourage and enable public dialogue in decision making and planning for NIAs.
2. To embed public dialogue in national policy learning from NIAs:
  - iii) To learn from (and with) the NIA partnerships about how they present and deal with scientific and technical issues to enable local decision-making;
  - iv) To encourage the public in the ongoing development of integrated policies on locally-driven, evidence-based conservation and enhancement of landscape, biodiversity, ecological networks and ecosystem services; and
  - v) To facilitate public participation in the evaluation of progress towards ecological and wider outcomes of the NIAs.

Dialogue approaches and activities varied across the three projects.

The Meres and Mosses NIA is in Shropshire and Cheshire. The dialogue project ran a series of sequential dialogue activities, enabling them to explore broad options around the management of their landscape before narrowing down on particular topics of interest. Initial scoping activities included a survey and a stakeholder workshop, followed by more focused discussions at a series of public, stakeholder and mixed dialogue workshops.

The Morecambe Bay NIA is in Lancashire and Cumbria. The dialogue project chose to run a number of engagement activities concurrently, each focused on a specific site in the area. Activities included: public and stakeholder dialogues on the restoration of Winmarleigh Moss; developing a future vision for nature and farming in the Lyth Valley; an art installation on a wildlife reserve produced by local primary school children; and local engagement on the approach to restoration of Nichols Moss.

The Nene Valley NIA is in Northamptonshire, running from Daventry to Peterborough. The dialogue project also delivered a range of engagement activities running at the same time, including: two community panel processes to develop action plans for local areas of ecological importance; an interactive online space; training and guidance for other interested organisations; and wider engagement with youth and community groups.

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<sup>4</sup> The aim and key objectives are taken from the Invitation to Tender for the evaluation.



## **Roles**

Sciencewise provided the majority of the cash funding for the project (see details later). It also provided advice via a Dialogue and Engagement Specialist (DES), advising on project set-up and oversight during the two years.

Natural England contract-managed the project centrally, overseeing timelines and budgets as well as convening regular and frequent catch-up conference calls to facilitate communication between various players on the project. Natural England was the recipient of the Sciencewise grant and agreed with the NIAs the activities that this would be spent on. In liaison with Sciencewise, NE managed the process of competition for identifying participating NIAs.

Delivery contractors were appointed by open competitive procurement to design and help deliver the dialogue work at each local NIA. One consortium was appointed to run all three dialogues involving Dialogue by Design and Icarus. Their team consisted primarily of three facilitators (one working with each NIA), and a central coordination team at Dialogue by Design.

The local NIA leads were responsible for appointing a main contact and responsible person for delivering the dialogue work locally, with the support of the facilitator provided by the delivery contractor. Each NIA took a slightly different approach to this, and roles are discussed later in this report.

Evaluators were also appointed by open competitive procurement to run an independent evaluation on the overall public dialogue project, including the three local dialogues at the NIA level. 3KQ were appointed to do this in August 2013, and this report is the culmination of this work. Additionally, 3KQ were asked in the late stages of the project to conduct a brief survey of the public engagement work the other nine NIAs had done. Throughout, 3KQ worked in liaison with the Project Manager at Natural England and the Evaluation Manager at Sciencewise.

## **Reports**

There are various reports emerging from the project, all of which were authored by the delivery contractors, including:

- Overarching Report, March 2015
- Meres and Mosses NIA dialogue project, Final Report, March 2015
- Morecambe Bay Limestones and Wetlands NIA dialogue project, Final Report
- Nene Valley NIA public dialogue project, Final Report, March 2015

These reports, plus other outputs from the projects (a video and a guidance document), are published on the Sciencewise website<sup>5</sup>. Evaluation reports are listed in the next section.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

### 3 - Evaluation Aims and Methodology

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Defra had commissioned an over-arching national evaluation of the NIA programme, assessing how well the NIAs themselves had performed. This was particularly relevant given that the concept of an NIA was in itself a new idea and subject to a 'pilot' period. This national evaluation however did not directly cover public dialogue beyond generically looking at public awareness and education, so an additional evaluation was commissioned to specifically target the public dialogue project in the three selected NIAs mentioned above.

The aim of this public dialogue evaluation is to provide an independent assessment of the impact and quality of the project, and in doing so contribute to the wider effectiveness of public dialogue both in landscape management and beyond

The seven key questions asked in the evaluation arise from Sciencewise guidance<sup>6</sup> and are:

- Objectives: has the dialogue met its objectives? Were they the right ones?
- Good practice: has the dialogue met the Sciencewise principles of good practice<sup>7</sup>?
- Value, Benefits and Satisfaction: have those involved been satisfied with the dialogue and its value?
- Governance: how successful has the governance of the project been?
- Impact: what difference or impact has the dialogue made?
- Costs/Benefits: what was the balance overall of the costs and benefits of the dialogue?
- Lessons: what are the lessons for the future?

This evaluation report is based on the following data collection and analysis methods, conducted between August 2013 and April 2015:

- **Observation.** The evaluators directly observed a variety of events including:
  - Evaluation inception meeting, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2013.
  - Fortnightly project team catch-up calls throughout the project; observed approximately one per month.
  - Management Group conference calls every quarter; 3KQ observed all except one of these calls.
  - Wash-up meeting to debrief the whole project, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015.
- **Interviews.** Formal stakeholder interviews were conducted at three key points throughout the dialogue. A round of ten baseline interviews was completed with stakeholders<sup>8</sup> before any of the dialogue delivery had started, to establish the context for the dialogues, resulting in an early observations report in October 2013. An interim round of ten interviews was conducted<sup>9</sup> half way through the dialogues (February 2014). A final round of thirteen interviews was completed<sup>10</sup> after the Dialogue Reports were published in

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<sup>6</sup> Sciencewise, 2008. *SWP-07 Requirements evaluating Sciencewise Projects*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Project-files/SWP07-Requirements-for-Evaluation.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> *The Government's Approach to Public Dialogue on Science and Technology*. Available at <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Publications/Guiding-PrinciplesSciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Ten baseline interviews were conducted with the three local NIA Public Dialogue projects, Dialogue by Design, Sciencewise, and Natural England.

<sup>10</sup> Interim interviews were conducted with the delivery contractor and facilitators, the NIAs, NE and Sciencewise.

<sup>11</sup> Final interviews were conducted with the delivery contractor and facilitators, the NIAs, NE and Sciencewise.

March 2015. These formal interviews were complemented by informal discussions with the NE project manager, Sciencewise DES and delivery contractor from time to time throughout the project, as well as observing the conference calls mentioned above.

- **Questionnaires.** Written self-assessment questionnaire data was gathered from many of the dialogue workshops, where the facilitators felt the use of questionnaire forms was appropriate. Overall 208 questionnaire responses were received, the majority of them from Meres and Mosses (164), with others from Morecambe Bay (23) and Nene Valley (38). The questionnaire used for most of the events is provided in Appendix 1.
- **Document review.** The evaluators reviewed key written correspondence<sup>11</sup> and documents that were circulated throughout the project such as minutes, dialogue stimulus materials, draft process plans, and the draft and final Dialogue Reports including the Overarching Report.
- **Liaison with the National Evaluation.** On three occasions 3KQ liaised with the national evaluators to ensure that our respective work was coordinated and information could pass between evaluators.

### Analysis and reporting

The various data streams listed above were analysed at three separate points throughout the project: leading to the separate outputs listed below. Analysis was led by the lead evaluator, with the evaluation team holding joint discussions about emerging themes and conclusions arising. The team have been careful to rely on a mix of quantitative and qualitative evaluation data, and have at least two streams of data supporting a conclusion in order for it to be reliable.

There have been three key outputs from the evaluation:

- Early observations and recommendations report, October 2013. See Appendix 1.
- Interim evaluation report, February 2014. See Appendix 2.
- Survey report of the other NIAs' public engagement work (see section 7).
- Final evaluation report (this report).

The authors are grateful to the Sciencewise Evaluation Manager for providing invaluable on-going advice and acting as a sounding board throughout the evaluation of the project.

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<sup>11</sup> Over 560 emails were read and monitored as part of the evaluation.



## 4 - Dialogue 1: Meres and Mosses NIA

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### Background

Meres and mosses are wetland features of glacial origin. They are geographically discrete, lowland open water (ponds and meres), bogs and mosses, punctuating a thick layer of glacial till covering much of the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain.

In 2008 The Meres and Mosses Wetland Landscape Partnership (MMWLP) was established to bring together local authorities, public sector, charitable and voluntary bodies 'to conserve this unique resource for people – now and into the future'. In 2010 Shropshire Wildlife Trust, a key MMWLP partner, secured development funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) project in the heart of the Meres and Mosses. This enabled the recruitment of a project team and the development of new partnership initiatives, including securing NIA status and funding, and subsequent support from NE and Sciencewise to develop a public dialogue process. The LPS area largely overlaps with the NIA area. See [www.themeressandmosses.co.uk](http://www.themeressandmosses.co.uk) for further information.

Before the public dialogue project began, the NIA already had a clear focus and the resources to deliver community involvement through the HLF funding. This engagement focused on information-giving and increasing public participation in practical, site-based learning and actions. Participants were self-selecting, already with an interest (albeit sometimes not a well-developed one) in nature and conservation. In order to broaden participation, many family-friendly events took place, and there was a strategy of enabling 'learning by stealth'.

In contrast, the public dialogue project aimed to be a deliberative process, gathering evidence and understanding of public views. It sought to engage effectively and involve tens of people in more in-depth explorations of relevant themes, rather than engage in a more light-touch or consultative way with many hundreds or thousands of people.

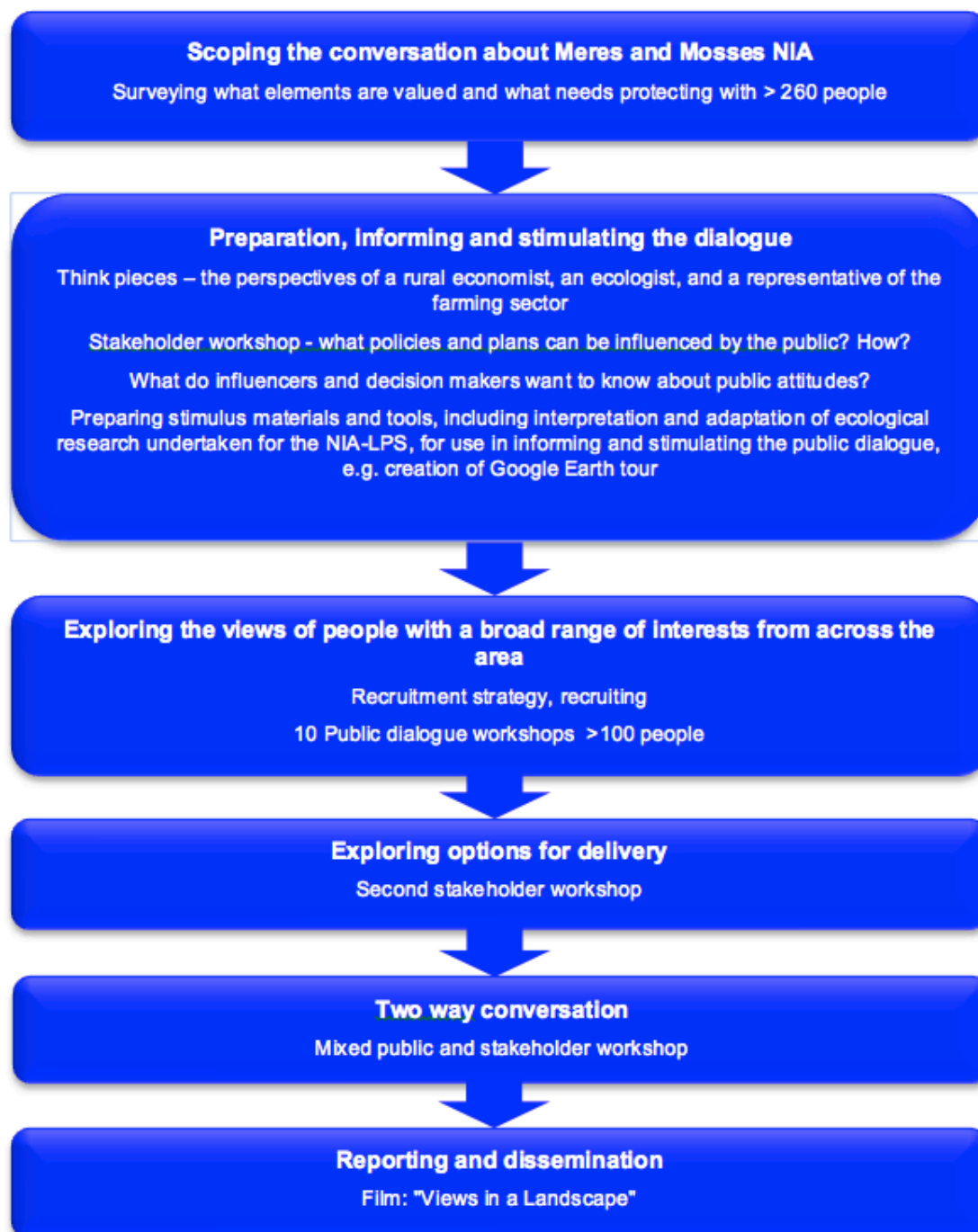
As a starting point, the NIA identified that the public dialogue project could help them ask participants from civic society:

*'What do you value and think is special about your local landscape?'*

It was intended that this very open question should lead on to the identification of problems and opportunities, plus those groups and individuals willing to take action and those requiring greater support. It was from here that the dialogue started and was planned in practice.

### Dialogue activity

The following diagram sets out the main dialogue activities carried out, and illustrates how each stage fed into the subsequent stage, informing design and the topics for discussion.



Readers are invited to view the full dialogue reports for more detail on the activities undertaken<sup>12</sup>.

### What worked well and less well in terms of good practice

#### Clarity of objectives

Although the initial key question for dialogue was very clear (*What do you value and think is special about your local landscape?*), there was not a set of specific

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

objectives written down and widely circulated. From certain documents it is possible to infer over-arching project objectives (for example, from the invitation to workshops), and the wording of these evolved over time as an expression of what the facilitator and NIA leads wanted to get out of the dialogue. These over-arching project objectives are now written up and a sample included in the relevant Dialogue Report<sup>13</sup>. On the positive side, this allowed the dialogue to evolve over time within the overall aim of holding conversations regarding landscape management. However, the late definition of the specific objectives possibly contributed to the slow pick up of project delivery and lower profile of the project amongst partners, as it was not clear what exactly the dialogue aimed to achieve at an early stage. More broadly, it is hard to tell the degree to which the form of the dialogue followed the evolving project objectives, or the objectives developed in the wake of the dialogue activities that happened.

### **Interaction between stakeholders and public**

As illustrated by the timeline diagram above, the dialogue activity included both stakeholders and public in an iterative way. This was planned and delivered in sequential stages, where:

- A stakeholder workshop explored scenarios for landscape management, and discussed what the public could influence, as well as what stakeholders wanted to know about public attitudes.
- A round of 10 public dialogue workshops to hear and explore a range of public views from over 100 public participants.
- A stakeholder workshop, and a mixed stakeholder/public workshop, to reflect on and discuss the public views and the results of the dialogue.

The intertwining of both stakeholders and public seemed to give credibility to the dialogue in the eyes of both the NIA team and the facilitator, as it built awareness of the dialogue, set the public discussion in the reality of the stakeholders' lives, and returned the results of the public dialogue back to the stakeholders. This was a logical and useful structure for the dialogue to take, and appeared to work well.

The involvement of local stakeholders in this way also had the added benefit of making up for the relatively low profile of the project in the standard business of the NIA Partnership, as the members had the opportunity - at least a couple of times during the two years - to get directly involved and learn about the dialogue.

### **Recruitment**

The recruitment of the participants to the 10 public dialogue workshops was carried out by the NIA team, using a recruitment strategy written by the facilitator. This recruitment strategy was relatively formal and well structured, not dissimilar to those used by professional recruitment agencies (see Appendix K of the Dialogue Report). The strategy set out the characteristics required of each workshop to ensure a diverse range of participants. Specific quotas were set for:

- Age.
- Gender.
- Socio-economic class (A, B, C1, C2, D, E).
- Other characteristics such as geographic location, or whether a student or not.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>



- Attitudinal questions were also asked to ensure a mix of people with/without an interest in landscape and conservation issues.

Recruitment was then carried out on an informal basis by the NIA, on the whole using existing networks of contacts to seek participants rather than on the street. Potential participants were then screened on the basis of the recruitment strategy criteria. The facilitator noted that *“we didn’t turn anyone away, as we were keen to get numbers as high as possible as well as diversity of people”*. On the data provided, there was a good mix of people participating in the public workshops, which can give some reassurance that the sample gives broad indications<sup>14</sup> of what the public at large feel about an issue. Additionally, it is very likely that the methodological rigour of *having* a clear written recruitment strategy would improve the diversity of the people attending and therefore the views heard. The thinking that went into the strategy is evident, given the range of geographical locations, inclusion of two student workshops, and one workshop with people with mental health issues.

Incentives were also offered, to ease barriers to participation and encourage those who would not normally get involved. Participants were given a payment of £35 for a 2 hour session, and the students given £20 as they did not incur any travel costs or inconvenience as the sessions were organised at their college. The incentives were seen by both the NIA team and the facilitator as a factor that increased credibility by accessing ‘the publics’ view, not the views of the usual suspects.

Although this evaluation would tend to consider the recruitment of the public workshops a success and worthy of repeating elsewhere in other devolved dialogues (due to the clear strategy and prudent use of incentives), it is worth also noting that the resources to implement the recruitment as planned were not initially available. The NIA team said *“the recruitment was expected to be done to market research standards: we’re not research professionals and didn’t have either the skills or the time to do that”*. The workload for such recruitment could therefore be considered and discussed at an earlier stage in future projects.

### **Funding process**

Throughout the first six to nine months of the project (March-October 2013), it became increasingly clear that there was a divergence of understanding about various aspects of the project that might have reasonably been clarified during the funding process. These included:

- Who would actually deliver the dialogue - the facilitators or NIA staff with facilitator support. See below under ‘division of workload’.
- What public dialogue meant, and what it excluded. It emerged that the NIA and Sciencewise had quite different definitions of public dialogue, and these took some time to be aligned. The NIA at this point generally saw public dialogue as any engagement with the public, which included activities like communication, interpretation in a visitors centre, volunteering or public education etc.
- What the policy hook for discussions was and who decided what it should be. The NIA and facilitator looked repeatedly to NE, Defra and Sciencewise for guidance on what the policy hook should be to build the dialogue around, as the choices highlighted by participants seemed to revolve around national policy issues such farming and CAP, Water Framework Directive issues or the Town and Country Planning Act, where the scope for a regional or local

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<sup>14</sup> Note that Sciencewise funded dialogue does not aim to be statistically representative like an opinion poll, but there is an expectation that the sample will provide strong indications of what the public at large think about an issue.

level of devolved governance seemed limited. NE and Sciencewise however generally saw the local dialogue as being able to decide themselves what the focus could be. See later for separate comment on Defra's involvement. One NIA representative acknowledged that *"we could have delivered more if we were clearer at the start about what we wanted"* but highlighted that *"lack of time in the funding process meant that we had to go into it not fully understanding what it was"*.

These issues were eventually resolved in one way or another, but took around a year to reach workable agreements that could then be implemented. It is possible that they could have been clarified during the funding process.

### **Division of workload**

Ultimately, the project team reached a workable arrangement to share workload between the facilitator and the local NIA team throughout the project, although this required constant discussion and the formal delaying of other work on the part of the NIA. The clearly divergent views caused significant problems and false starts due to incompatible assumptions about who was doing what, as well as practical problems when particular staff were physically unable to prioritise work despite agreements to assist.

Essentially, the NIA believed they were applying for funding that would pay for a project worker/facilitator, who would then design and deliver the whole dialogue with relatively little guidance from the Programme Manager and Community Officer of the NIA. In the world of conservation management, this could be said to be a reasonable assumption as it is a common way of projects being funded and implemented. However, Sciencewise (as the main cash funder) and therefore NE (as the contract manager), were actually releasing a fund that would pay for a professional facilitator to assist the NIA design and deliver their own dialogue. The end result is theoretically the same and the description of the funding semantically similar, but the actual implications for division of workload are significantly different. The NIA summarised this by saying *"had we known this at the start we would not have gone into it"* and *"when we found out we had something different to what we had been sold, we should have cut our losses"*.

This in no way detracts from the appreciation of the input of the facilitator which was well-received by the NIA, it was just that *"although she is fantastically supportive and helpful, we realised she wasn't the doer on this project"*. From the evaluator's perspective this comment doesn't match the amount of 'doing' that the facilitator did: there was significant intellectual input, as well as physical delivery of tasks and maintaining momentum by the facilitator (see section about Facilitators, p49) . The NIA went on to say that the single thing that would improve the whole project would have been funding some of their staff time to resource the project, to enable them to deliver the dialogue in liaison with the facilitator.

### **Outputs and impacts**

The key outputs of the Meres and Mosses dialogue are explained below:

- **Dialogue Report.** The published Dialogue Report<sup>15</sup> contains the findings from all the dialogue work, together with five key opportunities highlighted for

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

consideration by the NIA. Each of the key opportunities<sup>16</sup> is outlined with specific actions that could be undertaken to progress the ideas emerging from the dialogue. The report has been circulated to the NIA leads and is available on the NIA intranet (available to all 12 NIAs), as well as it being published on the Sciencewise website. At the time of writing, it had not been circulated to the full NIA partnership or discussed in a partnership meeting.

- **Film.** Towards the end of the dialogue, a film was made to promote the Meres and Mosses landscape as well as explain the work of the dialogue. The film is available to watch at <https://vimeo.com/118469134> and is seen as a high quality output of the dialogue. Local staff interviewed were all “*really really pleased with it*” even if one saw it as “*a little bit like an infomercial*”. As a tool to promote the area and explain the point of the dialogue, it is undoubtedly a valuable output. It has already been shown in various places including at the final workshops of the dialogue, an NIA Partnership meeting, and many other viewings are planned. It is likely to take the place of the NIAs standard ‘talk’ about the Meres and Mosses, not least due to the excellent aerial filming taken from a drone.
- **Google Earth tour.** As part of the public dialogue workshops, the facilitator developed (with input from the NIA team) a virtual tour of the Meres and Mosses area, enabling participants to view a moving map of the area on screen, and highlight different layers of information that were of interest to them. This was reported as an excellent tool for enabling participants to ‘get a handle’ on the whole geographic area, and see the landscape as something that connected many apparently disparate sites. This is something future landscape-scale dialogues should certainly consider.

Other impacts of the project include:

- **Specific actions.** The dialogue identified some issues that the NIA wanted to follow up immediately. One example of this is how the NIA partnership can and should influence planning applications via the planning system. The NIA has organised a meeting with the planning department and councillors from the local council, to discuss how the NIA can best engage with planning applications.
- **Participant learning and increased awareness.** The public dialogue workshops reached over 100 people, many of whom had no particular connection to the NIA area other than the fact they lived locally. The dialogue temporarily focused their attention on the Meres and Mosses as a valuable landscape and asked them to consider what was important and how it could be managed given the various tensions. Inevitably, this act of learning and consideration results in people becoming more aware of the facts, more understanding of the tensions, and perhaps more supportive of action locally. Participants reported in their evaluation forms that 89% of them “*learned something new*” and that the dialogue had “*affected the views*” of 63% of participants.
- **Relationships built.** The delivery of the dialogue sessions meant that the NIA staff needed to throw the net as wide as possible in terms of recruiting to the workshops. This meant going beyond previously existing relationships and networks to create new connections with institutions such as local colleges, and organisations such as housing associations. The NIA staff said

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<sup>16</sup> The five key opportunities are on page 32 of the Dialogue Report, and include: 1) Education and Learning, 2) Supporting modern farm businesses, 3) Making the planning system work better for people and nature, 4) Branding and marketing, and 5) Effective localism and greater influence for the NIA.



that “we never would have got in contact with these two local stakeholders otherwise” and that they were planning to work together in future. The college in particular has already talked to the NIA about giving a lecture once a year or more to their students.

- **Learning shared between NIAs.** The facilitator gave a presentation to the annual conference of Best Practice between the 12 NIAs, on 24/25<sup>th</sup> February 2015. This gave the other NIAs a sense of the work of the Meres and Mosses dialogue, as well as sharing specific things that had worked well such as the Google Earth tour.
- **NIA understanding of public dialogue.** The NIA staff interviewed cited a significant increase in their understanding of public dialogue, and also a shift in the way they now see public engagement more broadly. Before 2013, they interpreted ‘public dialogue’ to mean awareness raising and surveys on a broad scale, aiming to reach as many people as possible. The public dialogue experience has changed this, meaning they now value asking open questions of a small selection of the public that they wouldn’t normally be able to access, to build their own understanding of different perspectives. One NIA staff member said *“it has fundamentally changed the way in which we approach communities for the better”*.

The list above illustrates a clear and positive set of outputs and impacts.

## Conclusions

The public dialogue in the Meres and Mosses NIA started from a broad question to the public of “What do you value and think is special about your local landscape?” The dialogue involved a range of stakeholder and public engagement over two years that reached over 100 members of the public via 10 standardised workshops, each considering public views of choices in local landscape management.

Various challenges arose in the work, including: a rapid and light-touch competition process between the NIAs for funds which precluded a deep collective understanding of what was anticipated, and a misunderstanding about the division of workload between the NIA staff and facilitator being offered through the funding (that in itself largely originated from a lack of clarity about this in the funding process).

The dialogue has produced a Dialogue Report of its findings, together with a film promoting the landscape, and a Google Earth tour that enabled workshop participants to explore their landscape virtually and stimulate discussion in a creative way. The film and virtual tour in particular are seen as high quality and useful outputs of the dialogue by the NIA team. Key intangible impacts of the dialogue include new relationships built between the NIA and local organisations, and a new appreciation on the part of two NIA staff members of the value of engaging a smaller sample of the public in depth in comparison to always engaging a larger number in a more superficial way. However, when these outputs are placed against the experience of the NIA staff and the facilitator, one gets a sense of just how difficult the issue of workload division was. A selection of quotes illustrate this well:

*“I’m really pleased with the outcome, but it has simply been too much logistically”*

*“Resource intensive for what actually came out of it”*

*“Whenever we thought it was time to call it a day there would be a glimmer of hope to continue”*

*"We wouldn't do it again"*

These comments are considered later in this report in the context of what the other two dialogues said by way of impact and outcomes.

## 5 - Dialogue 2: Morecambe Bay Limestones and Wetland NIA

### Background

Morecambe Bay NIA is based on the limestone and wetland areas around Morecambe Bay in Cumbria and Lancashire. The area is a UK biodiversity hotspot with a unique transition of priority coastal and freshwater wetlands and limestone pavements, grasslands and woodlands. The area has a wealth of designated wildlife sites (over 30% is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Local Wildlife Site) and many high quality non-designated sites.

The Morecambe Bay strand of the NIA Public Dialogue Project focused around two key topics:

- The restoration of lowland raised bogs; and
- The need to develop a shared vision of future management of natural assets in the Lyth Valley in Cumbria, prompted by likely changes in the management of water in the area due to the Environment Agency stopping pumps to drain low-lying land.

Underpinning these issues has been the need for informed conversations around the increased risk (actual or perceived) of flooding or wetting of land. Through effective dialogue with local people and stakeholders, this project aimed to help the NIA in achieving its ambition to enhance conservation and encourage shared visions for nature.

The dialogue had a small Steering Group, initiated in early 2014, which operated on behalf of the wider NIA Steering Group. The membership of the group was Natural England (Chair), Cumbria Wildlife Trust, National Trust and RSPB.

### Dialogue activity

The project was delivered through four site-based workstreams, a brief description of each is shown below. All sites were located within the NIA.

#### Nichols Moss restoration

Summary	Engagement of stakeholders (landowners) to establish a shared approach to the restoration of a lowland raised bog near Witherslack in Cumbria.
Questions addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What does the wider community value about the Moss?</li><li>- What benefits and opportunities will the restoration plan create, for nature or for local people?</li><li>- How would the wider community wish to use, access or spend time on the Moss in the future, and how can this be accommodated?</li><li>- How would the wider community wish to be involved in caring for the Moss and the wildlife that lives there in the future?</li></ul>
Numbers involved	19
Sessions	Individual conversations
Timeframe	10 months
Recruitment method	Personal contact, via land ownership records
Financial incentives?	No

### Winmarleigh Moss restoration

Summary	Engagement of stakeholders (landowners, shooting syndicates and neighbouring landowners) and dialogue with members of the public regarding the planned restoration of a lowland raised bog near Winmarleigh, Lancashire.
Questions addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What concerns you about the planned restoration?</li> <li>- What would you like to know more about/what information is missing?</li> <li>- What potential benefits and opportunities will the restoration plan create, for nature or for local people?</li> <li>- What do you value most about the Moss?</li> <li>- Is the planned restoration of value to stakeholders/the wider public?</li> <li>- How would stakeholders / the wider public wish to use, access or spend time on the Moss in the future?</li> <li>- How would stakeholders / the wider public wish to be involved in caring for the Moss and the wildlife that lives there in the future?</li> </ul>
Numbers involved	52
Sessions	5
Timeframe	9 weeks
Recruitment method	Personal contact, letter
Financial incentives?	No

### Foulshaw Moss - Aren't Bogs Brilliant?

Summary	Engagement of the public through delivery of a temporary art installation produced by local primary school children and installed on Foulshaw Moss, a restored lowland raised bog in Cumbria. Dialogue was structured around the positive value of the Moss as a natural asset.
Questions addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do people perceive the Moss (and do those perceptions tally with the science)?</li> <li>- What does the public value about the Moss?</li> <li>- How would the public wish to be involved in caring for the Moss and the wildlife that lives there in the future?</li> <li>- How would the public wish to use, access or spend time on the Moss in the future?</li> <li>- What potential benefits and opportunities are there, for nature and for local people?</li> <li>- How could more people find out about or make a connection with the natural environments of the Moss?</li> </ul>
Numbers involved	Approximately 60
Sessions	2
Timeframe	8 weeks
Recruitment method	Invitation through launch of art installation on the Moss
Financial incentives?	No

### Lyth Valley

Summary	Structured dialogue with partner agencies, landowners / farmers and members of the public designed to develop a shared future vision for nature and for farming in the Lyth
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	Valley in Cumbria, an area that may potentially experience significant changes to water management in the near future.
Questions addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is a vision for nature compatible with a vision for farming?</li> <li>- What parts of the vision are shared?</li> <li>- What parts of the vision are not shared?</li> <li>- What parts of this vision do participants wish to see happen?</li> <li>- What parts of this vision don't feel right to participants?</li> <li>- What would be participants vision for the nature of the valley in 2035 be?</li> <li>- What implications does the revised vision have for future policy and planning choices?</li> </ul>
Numbers involved	62
Sessions	3
Timeframe	4 months
Recruitment method	Personal invitation, flyers for public session
Financial incentives?	No

Readers are invited to view the full dialogue report for more detail on the activities undertaken<sup>17</sup>.

## What worked well and less well in terms of good practice

### Local ownership

It took some time for local ownership of the project to build, and therefore delivery on the ground to start. A number of factors slowed progress in the first year, including: the lead member of staff changing, dialogue conversations being postponed or shelved due to seasonal changes on specific sites, and time needed for local staff to really engage with the opportunity for local dialogue that the funding provided. Decisions about delivery therefore took a comparatively long time to emerge.

The 'early observations' evaluation report<sup>18</sup> highlighted 6 months into the project the lack of ownership of the dialogue from the NIA itself, and suggested the setting up of local Steering Group to provide some focus. This was set up – as indeed set out in the NIAs own bid for funding – and was first convened by the facilitator in March 2014 to comprise NE, the National Trust, RSPB and Cumbria Wildlife Trust. This proved useful for the facilitator in particular for giving reassurance that the project was *"sound in the eyes of key local stakeholders"*, although much of the drive for the work still came from the facilitator and the Steering Group *"never quite got its own energy"*. The terms of reference for the Steering Group are included in the Dialogue Report Appendix A. This is good practice, and sets out clearly how the Steering Group should ideally relate to bodies around it in the governance structures.

There was *"little enthusiasm for updates to the full partnership"*, with updates being informal and only really provided to the NIA Partnership Steering Group, a sub-group of the full partnership. These updates did not involve the facilitator. This missed the opportunity of involving the full partnership in a more interactive way, which may in

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

<sup>18</sup> See Annex of Evaluation Data, published separately at same link as above

turn have helped build ownership and energy behind the dialogue. A few of the partnership members were of course involved more closely, either via Steering Group membership or alternatively by leading one of the site-based discussions with the facilitator e.g. Lancashire Wildlife Trust on Winmarleigh Moss (whilst not a Steering Group member, LWT was a member of the NIA partnership).

This lack of ownership was an issue during the first year to the extent that the facilitator, delivery contractor manager and evaluator all felt that the project hovered at the boundary of viability. One week it seemed to be stationary, the next week moving forward, the next week sliding backwards. This was manifest in particular by six to nine months of fortnightly update conference calls that in summary reported *“no substantive progress although it feels like things are moving”*. There is a connection here with the workload division, covered next.

One of the key things that changed this rather frustrating stasis was the facilitator identifying a specified lead person at each one of the four sites. The facilitator could then work directly with each of the four leads that felt a direct ownership of the discussions, as well as had authority to carry out actions and time to do the work. The facilitator cited identifying these four leads as *“critical to getting momentum and progress”*.

After about a year, momentum did indeed pick up and a suite of various events were run – see the tables above. It is interesting however to reflect on what could have accelerated this ‘build up’, or simultaneously, reduced the number of false starts. This is covered in part under ‘funding process’ below.

### **Division of workload**

One of the Steering Group members summarised well how the issue of ownership impacted on workload by saying *“The facilitator owned this dialogue really, not us”* and how therefore *“it was his job to deliver it”*. With the ownership of the dialogue process sitting mainly with the facilitator, it was difficult to get any momentum going as there was little appetite or capacity from other staff to contribute to the actual delivery work, beyond advising and discussing options with the facilitator (not actually doing the work). This improved at the site level when the facilitator had identified the four local site leads, as there was a better balance of ownership and input.

More broadly, a key local stakeholder explained, *“when we started the process we assumed the whole dialogue came as a package led by Sciencewise and the facilitator”*. As time went on *“we gradually realised that we were expected to do a lot more, with the facilitator only assisting us to deliver the dialogue”*. This made it difficult to handle in terms of resources *“until we reset our expectations”*. Similar to the situation in the Meres and Mosses dialogue, the facilitator was seen as *“the delegated worker to deliver the whole project”* as is common in conservation management funding processes. It is likely that the funding process could have minimised or ironed out this misunderstanding much earlier on: this is covered below.

The misunderstanding about who would “do” the work must be separated from the value that the local staff placed on the facilitator’s input. All interviewees that commented said the facilitator’s input was highly valued: in particular his independence, given the controversial nature of the site-based discussions. This is evidenced further by NE currently considering funding the continuation of the facilitator’s involvement in the Nichols Moss restoration project.

### Definition of ‘public’ in public dialogue

The Morecambe Bay NIAs funding bid to NE in 2012 is clear that the main focus of engagement that they wished to do was primarily with “*neighbours, local parishes and statutory agencies, there is a need to engage a wider community, both in place (to include residents within the entire catchment who may be charged through local levy for continued pumping) and in interest (to include farmers, local residents, businesses, local politicians and visitors)*”. This is how the facilitator and NIA planned and started their engagement. However, as plans were developing and engagement had started being delivered, there was some pressure from Sciencewise to ensure a better balance of public and stakeholders (i.e. more public participants) were engaged. This was perceived by some as a rather inconvenient shifting of the goalposts given the funding bid had been accepted on the basis of the phrasing above which primarily focuses on neighbours or local stakeholder representatives, and in some instances there was little scope for engaging the previously-unengaged public.

One initiative in particular that did accommodate Sciencewise’s request was the Aren’t Bogs Brilliant? art project. This funded an artist to work with a local primary school to develop an art installation on Foulshaw Moss. The parents of the children who had helped, together with residents from the village where most of the school children lived, were all then invited to the launch – many of whom had never visited the Moss despite it being close-by. From one perspective the initiative “*was a great success, bringing over 60 local people on to the site that would never have otherwise come*”. Everyone the evaluator interviewed agreed that the day was successful and the public really enjoyed having their eyes opened to such a special habitat on their doorstep. In terms of outreach and communication, this is a compelling impact. However, from the perspective of dialogue with the public in the way that Sciencewise generally uses the phrase and defines it in its guidance, one has to be quite imaginative to allow it to fall into the definition of public dialogue. In the words of the local newspaper<sup>19</sup>, this was “a project aimed at enthusing and educating local people about the rare and precious habitat”. The ‘dialogue’ aspect that did occur was a follow-up event in a local village hall that attracted only 7 people<sup>20</sup>. The event was described in publicity materials as an opportunity to informally “*discuss the Moss, how it works, and how we can care for the nature on our doorstep*”. The event was held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014 and lasted 2 hours in the village hall closest to the moss. There may be various reasons for the low attendance but in conclusion the strict ‘dialogue’ aspect of the initiative was less successful than hoped, and not really what local stakeholders valued about the initiative (they valued connecting the children and their parents to the nature at the site). It is also interesting that on the NIAs website<sup>21</sup>, much is made of the art installation and involvement of the school children, whilst the dialogue session is not mentioned. The dialogue angle appears to have a low profile.

The reason why this evaluation report highlights the fuzzy definition of ‘public’ as being a problem is that the lack of clarity tangibly impacts the quality and efficiency of dialogue projects. In this case, it prompted a redirection of resources and effort halfway through the project towards an initiative that strictly speaking was public outreach, not public dialogue (although undeniably interesting and well-received). Additionally, it created a gentle undertow of tension between Sciencewise and the Morecambe Bay NIA dialogue that they were somehow playing at the margins of the rules even though their funding bid was clear about who they wished to engage.

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<sup>19</sup> Westmorland Gazette, 20 November 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Problems with the distribution of publicity materials contributed to this low number.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/arent-bogs-brilliant>

More positively, the lack of clarity prompted discussions amongst various project players about 'who the public are' and 'who is a stakeholder'. This kind of discussion may appear semantic and potentially even pedantic but is critically important when significant public funding is in play over long periods of time. These terms are discussed at length in the literature and there are myriad definitions. However, a constructive insight emerged from the Morecambe Bay NIA dialogue that one can envisage three types of people involved in a public dialogue:

- **Professional stakeholders:** people paid to have an interest and take action such as statutory agencies, Local Authorities, and paid staff on NGOs like the RSPB or National Trust.
- **Interested public:** local people with an identifiable interest in an issue or site. For example in relation to a Moss in Cumbria: local parish councillors, the landowners / tenants of the site, dog walkers or bird spotters that use the site regularly, and immediate neighbours.
- **Unengaged public:** previously unengaged and largely uninformed about the issues, potentially live far away with no connection at all to the site or issue e.g. recruited off the high street randomly.

Various parties involved, including the facilitator, delivery contractor and Sciencewise DES saw the value in this three-way split, and thought that Sciencewise projects had much to contribute in particular to the second *and* third bullets if a less purist conception of public dialogue was to become generally accepted. The first bullet is generally seen as the domain of stakeholder engagement<sup>22</sup> rather than public engagement and so therefore largely outside Sciencewise's remit.

## Funding process

It took around a year for the Morecambe Bay NIA dialogue to scope out and define what it wanted to achieve, and what would be realistic given seasonal changes<sup>23</sup> and local staffing commitments. The planned activity was written up into a delivery plan in April 2014 that was then largely delivered as anticipated<sup>24</sup>.

It is useful to reflect on the period of orientation and planning. Is a year normal and acceptable? How does it compare to other public dialogue projects? Are there ways of accelerating this necessary process of scoping and planning? Those interviewed felt that some of the false starts could indeed have been either avoided or minimised, and that a year was certainly longer than one would hope.

The funding process was identified by interviewees as having a significant role to play in either compressing or extending this project development and start-up stage. Some specific suggestions for improving the funding process include:

- Exerting more challenge to the funding bids. The following questions could have usefully been asked in the NIA funding competition process<sup>25</sup> by NE and Sciencewise: How widely owned is the funding bid amongst the NIA partners? What kind of local staff capacity is really available to be committed to the

<sup>22</sup> 'Stakeholder engagement' here refers to the act of engaging stakeholders as an end in itself, rather than stakeholder engagement that serves to support public engagement (for example, stakeholders reviewing stimulus material that is later used in public engagement).

<sup>23</sup> Seasonal changes affect bog restoration in particular because the ground gets very wet, meaning it is difficult for stakeholders and public to walk around the site and discuss issues and options. At least one site discussion was postponed due to entering winter for this reason.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix A of the Dialogue Report at <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

<sup>25</sup> See appendix 2 for a blank funding bid application form (Expression of Interest proforma).



project? How much time, at what level, and to do what?

- Include an extra phase in the funding process, where the detail of a project could be worked up with local staff and matters of capacity and benefit-in-kind commitments can be pinned down, *before* funds are awarded in full. The extra time spent on this up front is seen as significantly outweighing the delays incurred otherwise – especially given that all the scoping work needs to be done anyway.

Together, these two improvements are seen as potentially taking the funding process quite a long way forward towards being able to support the project get set up without undue delay.

### Outputs and impacts

The key outputs of the Morecambe Bay dialogue are explained below:

- **Dialogue Report.** The published Dialogue Report<sup>26</sup> contains the findings from all the dialogue work, together with conclusions from the four individual site-based dialogues. The report has been circulated to the NIA leads and is available on the NIA intranet (available to all 12 NIAs), as well as it being published on the Sciencewise website. At the time of writing, it had not been circulated to the full NIA partnership or discussed in a partnership meeting.
- **Winmarleigh Moss summary document.** The summary document outlining what was raised by local people in the two events, and the information given in response, has been posted on Lancashire Wildlife Trust's website<sup>27</sup> as well as sent to the public participants, the dialogue Steering Group and the NIA Steering Group. This document is extremely accessible and clear in the questions asked and answers provided, and stands as a long-term resource for anyone interested in conversations with the public about bog restoration.
- **Art installation at Foulshaw Moss.** For six to eight weeks the art from the primary school was on display on the moss site. Although it now no longer exists, it was an output on so far as many participants and other visitors took photographs of it.
- **Refined vision for Lyth Valley, by RSPB.** Although not yet published, the RSPB has refined its vision for the Lyth Valley as a result of the dialogue sessions carried out with both stakeholders, farmers and public.

Other impacts of the project include:

- **Overcoming past miscommunications and conflicts.** On three sites at least (Nichols Moss, Winmarleigh Moss and Lyth Valley) trust has been built amongst stakeholders and landowners to a level where calm conversations can be had, largely in the absence of misunderstandings or arguments. This is a notable change from the last few years of discussions, which have been dominated by controversy and lack of substantive progress, although all the sites are different in their characteristics. This change is a good base upon which to build future progress. In the words of NE, *"there is clearly more dialogue work to do to take Nichols Moss and the Lyth Valley sites forward, but the dialogue work has initiated them well"*.
- **Evidence of the value of an independent facilitator.** Progress at Nichols Moss after a long period of impasse has illustrated to NE in particular how a

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.lancswt.org.uk/news/2014/09/26/way-forward-winmarleigh>

neutral third party can move discussions forward constructively: *“It has proved the approach works, which was the main objective for us.”* Another SG member said *“The fact that an independent facilitator was running it made a huge difference to the quality of the conversation”*.

The list above illustrates a positive set of outputs and impacts. It is particularly hard to place a value on the establishment of better relationships and moving beyond conflict that is starting to happen and this achievement is clearly important even in the short term. Much will depend on if and how the conversations are continued.

## Conclusions

The public dialogue in the Morecambe Bay NIA focused on four site-based dialogues, each largely separate from each other. They ranged from an art project to raise awareness of an established restored moss (Foulshaw Moss), to detailed discussions about planned restoration works (Winmarleigh Moss), to establishing delicate discussions about a joint management scheme against a backdrop of controversy (Nichols Moss), and the exploration of hopes and fears around a vision for a valley that is having drainage pumping removed (Lyth Valley).

Various challenges arose in the work, including it taking a year to get to the point where the four projects were scoped to a sufficient detail with support of local staff that had time to assist. Numerous delays occurred although and some (but not all) of these might have been avoided or minimised, potentially via improvements to the funding process at the start.

The main value of the project here is that the dialogue has enabled local discussions about at least three sites in the NIA to move beyond entrenched arguments, towards more constructive and enquiring conversations that have the potential to move forward further in future if they are supported. There have also been other more intangible benefits from initiating independently facilitated discussions amongst diverse stakeholders and a Dialogue Report has been produced. For NE, the dialogue has *“proved that the approach works”* and as a result NE have agreed to continue funding the facilitator to progress work further at Nichols Moss.

## 6 - Dialogue 3: Nene Valley NIA

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### Background

The Nene Valley encompasses a wide range of natural habitats primarily spanning Northamptonshire, including wildflower meadows, wetlands, marshes, woodlands and wet grasslands. This diversity of habitats makes the valley one of the most important inland localities in England for a range of wildlife including kingfishers, herons, otters and grass snakes. It is also internationally important for its populations of over-wintering water birds such as golden plovers, bitterns, wigeon and gadwall.

The Nene Valley Nature Improvement Area (NIA) aims to re-create and re-connect natural areas along the River Nene and its tributaries from Daventry to Peterborough. The core of the NIA, the Nene Valley floodplain between Northampton and Aldwincle, has been classified as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Birds Directive.

See [www.nenevalleynia.org](http://www.nenevalleynia.org) for further information.

The intention of the Nene Valley NIA was that the public dialogue project would aim to give local people a sense of ownership in finding solutions to address access issues in the NIA, thus contributing to the sustainable delivery of those solutions both during and beyond the end of the original NIA funding period from Defra.

The purpose of the public dialogue in Nene Valley NIA was described in the original public dialogue action plan as follows:

*“To engage local people in meaningful dialogue about the NIA and relevant policies.”*

The long-term goal was to engage the public so they could contribute to the Nene Valley NIA objectives, particularly with regards to fostering positive landowner / public relations, encouraging sustainable access to the countryside to improve health and wellbeing, and mitigating the impacts of recreational disturbance in the Special Protection Area.

### Dialogue activity

The public dialogue project sat underneath the second of five overall Nene Valley NIA objectives: “enhance public awareness, access and benefits of the NIA in a sustainable and sympathetic way, while ensuring that the designated sites at the core remain in favourable condition”. As such, the dialogue work was overseen by the planning group responsible for this objective, formed as a sub group of the NIA Partnership Board and including members of a range of organisations (RSPB, Wildlife Trust, Natural England, University of Northampton and River Nene Regional Park).

The planning group worked in partnership with the dialogue facilitator across five work streams, outlined below.

**Workstream 1: Pilot testing a Community Panel approach to assessing site issues and potential.**

April 2013 – March 2014.

Four panel meetings (plus one interim meeting) held, focusing on Northampton Washlands.

**Reach and outputs**

12 members of the public involved in the panel.

Vision statement agreed and action plan document produced.

**Workstream 2: Roll out of the Community Panel process.**

May 2014 – December 2014.

Six panel meetings focusing on Summer Leys / Mary's Lake, plus a face to face / online survey and a guided walk.

**Reach and outputs**

14 panel members, 31 survey respondents, 7 guided walk attendees.

Vision statement agreed and action plan document produced.

**Workstream 3: Interactive NIA website to provide a space and mechanism for online dialogue.**

September 2013 – project end (ongoing).

Design of a new Nene Valley NIA website, incorporating interactive mapping and space to engage in discussions with members of the public.

**Reach and outputs**

Website complete.

Photo competition (187 entries); 22 people interacted with online discussions.

**Workstream 4: Training and guidance.**

December 2014 – February 2015.

Sharing of learning between planning group and wider partners to embed learning and aid understanding in relation to the use of dialogue processes in the future.

**Reach and outputs**

7 people engaged in training in public dialogue processes.

Guidance document produced.

**Workstream 5: Wider engagement with youth and community groups.**

November 2014 – March 2015.

Two activities: PloverFest (family events to engage local people) and an arts project examining local perceptions of the Nene Valley NIA and how it is used.

**Reach and outputs**

48 people engaged in PloverFest; 4 youth groups involved in the arts project.

5 sculptures painted.



Readers are invited to view the full dialogue reports for more detail on the activities undertaken<sup>28</sup>.

## What worked well and less well in terms of good practice

### Clarity of objectives, scope and timing

The overall objective for public dialogue activities at the Nene Valley NIA was clear from the start: *to engage local people in meaningful dialogue about the NIA and relevant policies*. However, the project was conceived within the context of rushed timescales during the initial bidding process.

*“The bid process was incredibly rushed. The very short timescale meant we put quite a lot in there that proved to be difficult to deliver... It was not entirely clear in the project specification what we were bidding for.”*

Because proposals for some activities (for example the website and art project) involved aspects outside the Sciencewise definition of public dialogue, some negotiation was required to agree a clear way forward. Time and resources were absorbed in the early stages of the project that could usefully have been spent upfront (i.e. before submission of proposals) to aid the NIA partnership in matching objectives and delivery plans more closely to funding requirements.

*“There is a need to spend time on the foundations and work with sites when putting together bids – for example the DES could have a day with each project at this stage.”*

This raises a question for Sciencewise about whether time could usefully be spent upfront (specifically in devolved processes) working with those putting bids together to ensure they are clear about the criteria – i.e. what does or does not fall within the scope of Sciencewise funding.

One interviewee commented that aligning the timing of the public dialogue funding with NIA funding would have aided a closer tie in to NIA objectives<sup>29</sup>. In addition, the lack of time upfront meant that it was necessary to submit the expression of interest before gaining buy in from all partnership members, leading to the need to seek buy in and explain the process to partners afterwards.

*“The public dialogue work was a way of adding value to the business plan, but it’s the business case that took the absolute focus, though not ignoring the fact we had public dialogue work. In hindsight, it would have been better if the public dialogue work had been announced at the start of the three year NIA process, and we could have had a single start point.”*

Another point about overall timing and funding, raised by all of the interviewees, was

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

<sup>29</sup> This was attempted by Sciencewise and NE at the start of the project, but it was considered too much to squeeze into the funding programme for the NIAs.

the lack of funding at the close of the project to carry forward actions, as well as the lack of time to reflect on outputs and next steps. The public dialogue funding ended at the same time as the overall Nene Valley NIA funding. Timing the public dialogue to start and finish earlier may have enabled more time for reflection on actions and potentially some funds to be ring fenced for pursuing actions.

Despite these contextual difficulties, the project did succeed in engaging local people in meaningful dialogue at two identified sites within the NIA. The overall consensus of those interviewed and of members of the public involved in the panels was that the process would make a difference to the local area (dependent on future funding) and the process appears to have impacted positively on the views of those involved with respect to the value of public engagement.

### **Flexibility of approach**

There were a few delays across the public dialogue process, including with the delivery of panels and development of the website. Time requirements from other unrelated processes also impacted on the overall delivery timetable. In addition, based on learning from the initial panel and the results of the 2013 Footprint Ecology research (visitor access study)<sup>30</sup>, it was agreed to run just one further panel covering the two sites of Summer Leys and Mary's Lake rather than the total of five panels originally envisaged.

Although the changing timescales may have had some impacts on the process (e.g. winter meetings being potentially less attractive for people who have to travel to attend), the flexibility of the project team in dealing with the various delays was key to ensuring the process stayed on track. One interviewee highlighted the importance of the facilitator's approach in aiding the continued smooth running of the process *"the facilitator adapted very well and that meant we could move at the pace we needed to. If you don't have flexibility, that can create discomfort and dis-ease. The approach was perfect – for example she handled the postponement well and with confidence."*

### **Recruitment and public involvement**

Recruitment for the both panels involved a concerted effort to involve a range of different interests, for example by using posters and talking to people at the sites. The recruitment process turned out to be much more resource intensive than expected, and was the primary cause of delay to the panel process.

Once recruitment was complete, the first panel involved a mixed group of 12 members of the public, with a maximum of 9 in attendance at panel meetings, and most meetings being attended by 5 or 6. The second panel involved a mixed group of 14 members of the public, with most meetings being attended by 11 or 12.

Overall, this is not a large number of people, but there were never targets for involving a set number – rather a good mix of interests. The first question here is did the panels achieve what they set out to do, to which the answer is yes: they produced vision statements and action plans for each site. The second question is how credible are these products given the small number of people involved. The consensus here (based on interviews and the positive reception of the action plans

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<sup>30</sup> Liley D, Floyd L, Cruickshanks K, Fearnley H (2013) Visitor Access Study of the Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA, UK: Footprint Ecology.

by the NIA Board) appears to be that the outputs are credible in the eyes of the people that matter in this case. The panels did involve a mix of different interests and, crucially, the first panel involved the tenant farmer as a key decision maker regarding specific actions or agreements about the site. In addition, the action plans provide a practical way forward based on this range of interests represented.

However, the question still remains of how credible the action plans will be with wider audiences and users of the sites beyond those directly involved in the process. This should become more apparent if and when the action plans are rolled out (dependent on future funding). Processes of public involvement commonly lead to questions about representativeness – for example, one interviewee noted *“how do you translate talking to a few dog walkers to reaching a whole user group?”* In this case, however, the aim was never to be representative, but rather to involve a mix of members of the public with different interests in the sites under discussion. Certainly at this point in time, the vision statements and action plans appear to be viewed as credible by those who were involved (though see related discussions of long term credibility depending on funding), and do take into account a range of views that would not have been captured by traditional decision making structures.

Panel members were not provided with incentives and so were naturally motivated to get involved based on their specific interests and use of the sites. This sets them apart from the involvement of standard lay members of the public. So on the one hand, the panels did not directly fit with the traditional Sciencewise definition of public dialogue, but on the other hand it is doubtful whether general members of the public would have had the knowledge or interest in the sites to be able to contribute to the development of meaningful action plans – for example, because neither site had any significant neighbouring geographical communities who would be aware of them even if they didn't use them.

This raises an interesting question for Sciencewise about the degree to which it expects involvement along the spectrum from 'the general public' to those with an existing interest in or knowledge of the issues being discussed. The point in the spectrum arguably should not matter as long as there is clarity over why specific people are involved and as long as their involvement leads to outputs that are seen as credible, which does appear to be the case in this project (though see related discussions of long term credibility depending on funding).

### **Panel delivery**

The delivery of the panels themselves was well planned, well structured and had the ability to adapt depending on how the meetings developed and who was in the room. As well as strong planning and facilitation, the successful delivery of the panels owed much to key partners being in attendance and providing a sense of commitment to the outcomes.

*“I think it gave them a sense they were being valued for their knowledge. I would hope people really got that sense of their contributions being valued.”*

Feedback from panel attendees was positive, and observation of one of the panels provided further evidence of a confidently run, well-managed process.

### **Website**

An interactive website was part of the funding bid from Nene Valley, with a strong focus on contributing to the University of Northampton's (one of the NIA partners)

ecosystem service mapping activities. As touched on already, plans for developing the website required some initial discussion in order to clarify the objectives with respect to the dialogue element in line with Sciencewise funding criteria.

*“The website could have done with involvement earlier in the commissioning process. It was an idea already and there was not much funding for the dialogue element.”*

Once a way forward had been agreed, there were some additional delays to the development process while the developers worked to fully meet the brief. The website [www.nenevalleynia.org](http://www.nenevalleynia.org) was launched at the end of August 2014, and received coverage on BBC Radio Northampton as well as local papers and social media.

The initial photographic competition generated significant interest in the site, with 2,000 unique users visiting the site in the six weeks the competition was running. However, this did not convert into a high level of deeper engagement. 20 people posted information in response to the University’s area of questioning around ecosystem services and two responded to the specific community panel questions posted on the website.

This low level of deeper engagement is not unusual in relation to online activities, and demonstrates the importance of strong messaging and incentive (not necessarily financial, but rather social or personal) to drive proactive contribution.

Aside from the relatively low level of interaction beyond the photography competition, the process had led to the development of a quality website with interactive functions that could be further developed and used in future activities.

### **Wider engagement and learning**

The fourth and fifth workstreams involved wider engagement in two forms: disseminating learning and engaging with youth and community groups.

The activities to engage youth and community groups involved PloverFest – a weekend of activities including guided walks, a watch point at the Northampton Washlands and a family activity day – and an arts project. Engagement through PloverFest was fairly low level (41 people in total), certainly partly due to the heavy rain across the weekend. Engagement led to the identification of five key themes relating to values and concerns with respect to the local area. These fed into the art project, in which local groups were asked to decorate sculptures each with one of the themes in mind. The sculptures are due to be displayed at Stanwick Lakes wildlife trails in order to provoke thoughts from other members of the public about what the valley means to them.

Both PloverFest and the arts project involved innovative and practical engagement ideas designed to provoke thought about the local area and its value. If similar activities are repeated in future, reflection on the process suggest some areas worth further thought would be:

- Considering how these activities can link back to or contribute to the other dialogue/panel activities, for example informing the action plans.
- Timing events so that good weather and ‘passing trade’ is more likely (e.g. in Spring or Summer).



- Thinking about how to maximise the value of face-to-face interactions – for example encouraging attendees to visit the website, talk to friends and family back home, etc.

The wider training activities involved the delivery of a training session to embed learning within the wider NIA partnership followed by the production of a guidance document – both led by the facilitator. Feedback from the learning event was very positive. As well as helping to embed learning, it contributed to the development of the guidance document by identifying what participants would find useful. The document itself presents a good summary of the activities and learning from the Nene Valley activities in the context of an overarching introduction to public dialogue. It should serve as a useful grounding for other similar projects.

*“The guidance document I hope will be useful to the NIAs, but it needs to be advertised. It is a really good solid output.”*

### **Governance, roles and responsibilities**

The day to day running of the project was the responsibility of a small team of people, including the facilitator. The consistent membership of this group throughout the process and the proactivity of all involved were key factors in the delivery of the project.

At the beginning of the project in particular, it seemed that some of the roles and responsibilities were not entirely clear. For example, the facilitator was trying to establish local relationships at the same time as having to act as the conduit for messages about funding criteria. This suggests the need to have clearer lines of communication between the funders and the local projects particularly at the start of a project and ideally during the tendering process, in order to avoid potentially uncomfortable situations. In addition, beyond the early stages, the need for a consistent approach and involvement of funding bodies was highlighted by a couple of interviewees, for example: *“Sciencewise’s interventions at times have been rather confusing – for example questioning why there were only two panels instead of five towards the end when this had been agreed earlier.”*

Feedback from interviewees suggests that the fortnightly catch-up conference calls could have been utilised in a more effective and efficient manner, particularly in relation to the opportunity for sharing learning: *“I’m not quite sure what we spent two hours talking about. We didn’t really do any sharing of learning even though the opportunity was there.”* This is covered more later in this report.

In terms of wider NIA partnership involvement, individual members were mixed in their level of engagement with the process. The awareness and engagement of the overall partnership seemed to grow as the project progressed (see carrying forward actions and impact below) and those members who were involved generally contributed very positively to the process:

*“The ... people involved in Nene Valley were really good and had a lot of honesty about how people’s input would and might not be used – they helped to set clear boundaries and expectations.”*

*“There were some key partners that were strongly involved and others just receiving recommendations and reports, which is not necessarily a bad thing... I think we had the right partners involved at the right time.”*

### Carrying forward actions and impacts

The NIA partnership seemed to visibly grow in their level of engagement and understanding as the process progressed and particularly as the outputs of the panels became clearer. For example, one interviewee commented *“at the second partnership meeting they were much more engaged and keen to hear what people had said.”* This increased level of engagement is important given the rushed timescales upfront and the lack of early partnership involvement in producing the expression of interest. In particular, the very local and detailed knowledge of panel members seemed to resonate: *“they really made very local and specific the concepts we as professionals talk about regularly.”*

However, one issue raised by all interviewees was the concern that there is no funding to carry forward the outputs of the dialogue – specifically the action plans emerging from the panels. This risks the long-term credibility of the process, and is evidenced by a range of comments:

*“As the public dialogue funding came in later, we didn’t have any money set aside to implement actions coming out of the panel. We are hoping funding will come from Heritage Lottery Fund – we are reliant on finding further funding.”*

*“The action plans went to the partnership, but they haven’t got funding for what happens next as the NIA doesn’t have funding. It could be easily undermined if nothing happens as a result.”*

### Outputs and impacts

The key outputs of the Nene Valley dialogue are explained below:

- **Dialogue Report.** The published Dialogue Report<sup>31</sup> contains the findings from all the dialogue work. The report has been circulated to the NIA leads and is available on the NIA intranet (available to all 12 NIAs), as well as it being published on the Sciencewise website.
- **Action plans.** The two Community Panels led to the production of vision statements and action plans for two important sites within the SPA. These were developed with members of the community and have been positively received and endorsed by the NIA partnership. Some actions have already been set in motion – for example the development of a ‘friends of’ group for one of the sites. At the time of writing, funding is currently being sought for the delivery of a number of larger, more resource intensive actions.

*“Some small things have happened already – funding for a ‘friends of’ group for one site, and a couple of small things relating to management and timing. Other things are subject to funding, so there is uncertainty over how some of those things will move forward.”*

- **Interactive website.** The redevelopment of the NIA website is a lasting output of the public dialogue process. It includes interactive elements that could be developed and utilised further in the future.
- **Dialogue guidance document.** Towards the end of the public dialogue project, the facilitator led the production of a guidance document, setting out learning from the experience of public dialogue in the Nene Valley NIA (see commentary above).

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

- **Art installations.** The sculptures produced as a result of the arts project are (at the time of writing) due to be displayed at Stanwick Lakes with the aim of engaging visitors.

Other impacts of the project include:

- **Participant learning and increased awareness.** The public dialogue activities involved 26 members of the public directly in public panels, and a few hundred people in wider activities (including website viewers). Feedback from the panels shows that these panel members came away from the process with increased learning, likely to change the way they think or what they do in future, and being more convinced of the value of public participation in these sorts of topics. However, it is very difficult to say what impact wider activities had on those other members of the public touched by the process in some way, and indeed exactly how many members of the public have been directly or indirectly affected by the project overall.
- **Ongoing public involvement and new relationships.** The motivation of members of the public involved in one of the panels to stay involved and in touch has led to the formation of a 'friends of' group.

*"At the first panel there was really strong social capital built as they hadn't met before, and they are still meeting now."*

- **Wider learning for similar processes.** Beyond the guidance document (see above), some of the less tangible learning from this process appeared to relate to the way in which landscape pressures are discussed and managed more generally.

*"One thing that came out of the community panels was that you can't solve a problem on one site if it shifts the problem elsewhere. You need to think on a landscape scale."*

- **NIA understanding of public dialogue and public views.** Based on the interviews undertaken, it is clear that the views and understanding of at least one partnership member has shifted in relation to public dialogue: *"It is fair to say I had some emotional baggage when it comes to engaging with members of the public...but I came out with a better understanding of community dialogue."* More broadly, it is apparent that the wider partnership went through a degree of learning, realising the value that public involvement can bring:

*"When the reports came back from the panels they did a bit of a double take – the level and quality of the reports and recommendations have caused them to take notice."*

*"Those in the NIA partnership that participated have come away more open, more receptive to the idea of community dialogue."*

The list above illustrates a clear and positive set of outputs and impacts. However, as discussed above, the long-term credibility of the dialogue will rely on the ability to secure funding for the implementation of priorities identified by the two action plans.

## Conclusions

The Nene Valley NIA public dialogue engaged a range of members of the public, with the most intensive level of engagement happening in the form of 26 individuals engaged in depth at two key sites. Wider engagement involved a few hundred people at a much lower intensity of engagement. The key products are vision statements and action plans for the two sites, alongside a re-launched website and dialogue guidance document outlining key learning points.

Aside from some delays in timescales, the key challenges for the process revolved around the context of the project, specifically timing and funding. The consensus across all interviewees tended to be that more time upfront and some funding set aside to deliver action at the end of the process would have eased many of the difficulties encountered during project delivery and increase the likelihood of the process delivering impacts in a timely manner. Indeed, the key risk for the project going forward is the ability to secure funding to implement part or all of the point within the action plans, in order to demonstrate that the time and effort put into the process delivered real change.

There are wider questions raised by the project, particularly for Sciencewise, in relation to funding criteria and the devolved delivery mechanism – see Management and Governance below for further discussion.

It is clear that many of those involved in the project – particularly the delivery team, some partnership members, and the panel members – came away from the process having learned something, and with slightly more positive views about the value of public engagement in this kind of issue. If further funding is secured, delivery of the action plans will be a clear tangible outcome.

Two final questions are whether the process was worth doing, and whether anything could have been done differently. The value for money question of course partly depends on future delivery of outcomes, but some of the final comments from interviewees touch on a range of aspects, including monetary and social value, as well as what they would have done differently:

*“I spent... a very disproportionate amount of time on the project.”*

*“If I was going back to the beginning I would have had a more targeted conversation about the wider connection of where dialogue fits. We should have got that embedded.”*

*“I’m not sure it was value for money overall.”*

*“It has given the partnership (and specific members) confidence about working with the community. It has given some of the members of the public greater involvement and input in what happens.”*

*“It was perhaps slightly ill conceived not to have a bit of funding set aside for the end of the project to carry some things forward.”*

*“Aside from the tangibles, we’ve had a higher quality conversation with a small group of people and produced some tangible products that stood us in good stead for the future and left us better equipped to do more in the future.”*

These comments are considered later in this report in the context of what the other two dialogues said by way of impact and outcomes.

## 7 - Other NIA public engagement

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As the three NIA dialogue projects were drawing to a conclusion, 3KQ were asked by NE to gather additional information about public dialogue work carried out by the nine NIAs who did not participate in the project (there are 12 NIAs overall, of whom only three received funding for public dialogue).

This section summarises the findings from a high-level review of the public dialogue activity carried out in each of these nine NIAs. It includes information drawn from:

- The overall Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Progress Reports for NIAs for Years 1 and 2.
- The progress reports submitted by the individual NIAs at the end of Years 1 and 2, and Q3 of Year 3.
- Telephone discussions with the five NIAs that responded to a request for an interview (Dark Peak, Humberhead Levels, Marlborough Downs, South Downs Way Ahead and Wild Purbeck NIAs).

Although the data from this review is not comprehensive, it provides a useful if partial picture from the other nine initial NIAs. Also, the survey does not necessarily capture all public dialogue activity undertaken but was instead intended to provide an overview that can be used as a comparison with the three NIAs participating in the specially funded public dialogue work, and to give a light-touch insight into:

- Feedback about the funding award process for the main public dialogue project including reasons why they chose not to submit a bid.
- The understanding of the NIA partnerships about what constitutes public dialogue.
- The extent and nature of public dialogue work that the nine NIAs without special funding have undertaken.
- Dialogue work that the NIAs would have liked to carry out but did not proceed with.
- The perceived benefits, dis-benefits and lessons learnt from any public dialogue work that was carried out.
- Barriers to undertaking public dialogue work.
- Suggestions of support from Natural England or other NIA partners that would assist large-scale partnerships in undertaking future public dialogue work.

The above bullets were discussed and agreed with Natural England as the basis of the telephone discussions that followed on from the review of the information in the progress reports. The results are set out below.

### **Feedback on the funding award process**

Those who took part in telephone interviews were asked why they had chosen not to apply for the NIA Public Dialogue Project funding. Responses included:

- All felt that the Expression of Interest came at a very bad time – the NIA project teams/partners had already done a significant amount of work to be awarded NIA status and they were still just finding their feet. Key project officers had not yet been appointed or were only working on a part-time basis, and their focus was on other priorities. All who were in post at the time said



that they simply did not have the time or resource to work up another bid – comments included: “we were still learning to walk” and “we just looked at it and said no way!”

- The 3-week timescale to submit funding applications for public dialogue funding was too short and would not have allowed enough time for consultation with partners.
- The application process was felt to be too onerous, and there was too much expectation to have actually scoped the projects out before submitting the bid when the timescales did not allow for this.
- There wasn't enough explanation of what was actually meant by public dialogue so people did not really know what it was about.
- Those who already had a strong focus on community engagement in their business plans did not feel that a bid from them would be likely to be successful, and they also felt that the funds could be better used by NIAs that had less emphasis on working with communities.
- The nature of the approvals process for applying to become an NIA meant that some projects had already been scoped out to the point where it was too late to seek public input, meaning that there was little purpose in seeking funding for public dialogue.
- It was felt by some that other NIA partnerships would have been much better set up to respond to the EOI i.e. those who were better resourced or had bid-writing expertise in their partner networks would have been more able to put a bid together quickly and were therefore more likely to be successful. This and the previous point were both also raised in relation to scepticism that some other NIAs would just be “chasing the money” without a clear or properly justified purpose for the funding.
- Humberhead Levels NIA reported that they would have been interested in applying for the funding but due to staff changes/timing they were unable to put a bid together in such a short timescale.
- Marlborough Downs felt that the funding would have benefited them hugely if it had been done at a different time and in a different way e.g. if there had been the offer of a half day workshop prior to submitting a bid about what is meant by public dialogue and how it could be of use to them, and if the timescales had been more realistic.

Suggestions for improvements to the application process included:

- Provide a clearer explanation of ‘public dialogue’.
- Offer a seminar on public engagement/dialogue followed by the opportunity to bid for funding if it is subsequently felt that it could be of use.
- Provide guidance and examples/case studies from other partnerships to explain what is meant by public dialogue to aid understanding of potential activities and benefits.
- Allow more time for bid preparation to allow partner input.
- Allocate a proportion of the funding to enable consultancy/support to be offered to *all* of the NIAs in the areas that they need e.g. scoping out potential activities, providing training and/or supporting bid preparation.

A list of public engagement activities undertaken by each of the five NIAs that responded to the survey is set out in the Annex of Evaluation Data Annex<sup>32</sup>.

### **Broader benefits**

Broader benefits of public involvement that were raised by the NIAs included:

- In Marlborough Downs the partners/farmers got a lot more for themselves out of community involvement/2-way communication than they expected – at the start of the project the main driver was more about what the project could achieve for them in terms of educating the community (e.g. managed access, responsible dog walking) but it became so much more. Everybody was on a high when more than 800 people attended the first Open Farm Sunday event, and the emotional reward/feel good factor of “seeing big smiles on people’s faces” has been a major factor in creating motivation amongst partners to do more.
- In more than one NIA the level of buy-in from the communities was a real surprise i.e. the extent to which people wanted to be involved. Marlborough Downs also stated that the work of the NIA had “reinvigorated the local community”.
- The work of the NIAs has contributed towards building trust and respect across communities, and has developed stronger relationships between partner organisations and other stakeholders.

### **Dis-benefits**

Very few ‘dis-benefits’ were identified. Concerns at the outset about seeking too many opinions were ultimately outweighed by the positive aspects of seeing the extent to which people engaged with the work of the NIAs and their partners. The only work that was felt to have been a waste of time and money was the Smartphone App developed by Marlborough Downs NIA.

### **Challenges/issues and barriers to undertaking public dialogue**

A number of challenges/issues and barriers to undertaking public dialogue work were identified:

- More than one NIA expressed disappointment that their partner organisations did not do as much as was hoped or expected in disseminating information to their own internal/external networks and contacts.
- For some NIAs it is not clear who is on their mailing lists so it is difficult to assess who is being contacted.
- Many people in the NIA partnership networks are motivated to ‘do’ the work rather than talk about what is being done, meaning that communication and awareness-raising is often not viewed as a priority.
- The need for communications expertise and time/resources to engage with members of the community were raised as significant issues, particularly for NIA project managers/officers who are not experts in these fields, as well as for NIAs that did not have access to expert resource within their wider partner network.
- Some NIAs found that it was difficult to get publicity in local papers/media, and this was another area where it was felt that expert resource (e.g. from a PR company, press officer, education or sharing best practice) could have helped.

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<sup>32</sup> Available at <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>

- The costs of consultation and research activities were highlighted as a significant issue. It was noted that it is very difficult to get funding for research and visitor management, so the fact that the NIA funding allowed this to happen was welcomed.
- It takes time for public awareness of the NIAs and their work to develop, and in a 3-year window some of this is only now just starting to take off as Phase I draws to a close. It was therefore felt by some that it would have been useful to have started the ball rolling sooner, but it was also acknowledged that until work on the ground actually started to happen and achievements could be shared, there was little that could have been publicised or promoted.
- A key issue raised by the majority of NIAs was the fact that projects needed to be tightly mapped out/drawn up in order to apply for NIA status – this meant that there was limited opportunity for members of the public to genuinely input into or influence much of the planned work.

### **Lessons learned and keys to success**

A number of lessons learned and recommendations for keys to success were identified by the NIAs as follows:

- Having a specific member(s) of staff whose role/remit is public engagement and communication (i.e. they have the time to do this work).
- Having the right kind of people on board who are able to engage with/enthuse members of the public and community groups (i.e. they have the skills to do this work).
- Allocating a pot of money for parishes, community groups and members of the public to bid for.
- Recognition that involving, informing and educating members of the public can lead to dialogue in its own right.
- Working through interest groups to reach a wider audience.
- Access and interest groups should be involved and consulted with as early as possible, ideally *before* project plans are committed to.
- Facebook has been found to be one of the most useful tools for communicating with members of the public and raising awareness. It also has the benefit of allowing 2-way communication, provides demographic information, and is cheap to set up and maintain (although this does require time/input).

### **Future support for carrying out public dialogue**

Suggestions for future support varied and it was evident that the support that is needed is very dependent on a) what the NIA or specific projects are trying to achieve, and b) levels of existing expertise/resource within the NIA partners and project teams. Suggestions included:

- More sharing of best practice between NIAs.
- Case studies/examples of what has and hasn't been successful previously.
- More targeted support/'hand-holding' during the start-up period to help scope out plans and activities.
- Targeted funding and independent support/expertise to help the NIAs carry out dialogue around highly contentious issues.

- Workshops and/or best practice notes on how to promote the work of the NIA and how to engage/involve members of the public e.g. how to make the most of social media, designing and writing surveys, PR/working with the press, facilitation skills etc.

Wild Purbeck NIA highlighted two examples of more contentious public dialogue issues that they do not feel they have the skills to deal with and which need to be tackled through public dialogue/consultation. Both of these are in relation to people not necessarily behaving in a way that benefits the countryside e.g. getting dog walkers on board with responsible dog walking (potentially working through Dorset Dogs), and tackling recreation management through dialogue with users, operators etc.

### **Key messages and conclusions from surveying the other nine NIAs**

It is clear that the term 'public dialogue' is not clearly defined or commonly understood both in terms of the target audience(s) and the extent to which dialogue is intended to inform local plans/policy-making as opposed to purely raising awareness and involving local communities in the work of the NIAs. There were some clear examples of both planned and actual activities that would be encapsulated within the Sciencewise definition of public dialogue, and the overlap or inevitable blurring between public dialogue and other forms of engagement meant that several community engagement activities led to 2-way communication and enabled members of the public to influence local plans/projects.

Communication, engagement and dialogue are not areas of expertise for many NIA partners or project staff, and it is evident that support and/or training would have been beneficial in enabling them to better understand how to maximise the opportunities for public/community engagement and dialogue. It was suggested that sharing best practice, case studies and individually tailored support/education would have been more useful than being asked to 'compete' or bid for funding for activities that (at the time of the bidding process) were not well understood by all. The NIA funding has, however, allowed work to be done that is difficult to get funding for elsewhere and it was felt that the additional support from Natural England and Sciencewise could have been of use to some if the bidding process had been managed in a different way.

Plans for dialogue with members of the public varied greatly at the outset, and although not all of the planned activities came to fruition (for a variety of reasons), some NIAs received more input from local communities than they initially envisaged. For some this came about through necessity i.e. when it became evident that public concerns needed to be addressed, whereas for others more emphasis was placed on public involvement when people and partners saw how well it was working.

It was commonly felt that having the right people involved in planning at the outset of projects is key to their ultimate success. The business plan and approvals process for the NIAs meant that many projects had already been pinned down by the time they were approved, meaning that there was limited scope for members of the public or wider interest groups to be able to have any significant influence. A level of flexibility may be appropriate to build in to certain projects to allow the views of relevant stakeholders, interest groups and broader members of the public to be taken into account *before* plans are committed to.

## 8 - Management and Governance

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There are various aspects of management and governance that are important in this project, which was necessarily complex and multi-layered given its structure. Each of the following is taken in turn:

- Funding competition
- Management Group
- Local Steering Groups and Partnership involvement
- Defra and links to other bodies
- Division of workload, and match-funding
- Sciencewise
- Natural England (NE)
- Supply-driven public dialogue

### Funding competition

The funding process is of interest here because it underpins and frames all three dialogues at the NIA level. The funding process consisted of:

- NE agreed a budget, applied for and gained funding from Sciencewise.
- Application form emailed to all 12 NIAs by NE.
- 3 week deadline for return to NE (15<sup>th</sup> October 2012 to 7<sup>th</sup> November 2012).
- Award decision made by the NIA Public Dialogue Management Group on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2012 via conference call.

As referenced in various sections above and in the Evaluation Interim Report<sup>33</sup>, several things are noticeable within this process:

**Short deadline for NIAs to apply.** A deadline of 3 weeks made it almost inevitable that the funding applications needed to be completed by one person in one organisation, perhaps with some discussion with colleagues. In dialogue projects that arguably rely so heavily on wider ownership of other local organisations to implement landscape scale change, this misses the opportunity to involve partners at the start by *jointly* compiling a funding application across NIA organisations. A longer timescale would also have provided more competition *per se* in the funding process (see below), both in terms of the depth of detail of the applications made, and potentially a higher number of applications.

**Opportunity for more challenge in the award process.** There was an expectation that the award process would filter applications and ultimately shortlist four dialogues to fund. In the event, only three NIAs applied and all three were funded. Despite a lack of competition existing and providing the Management Group with a wider choice of projects, there was perhaps the opportunity for more challenge at the time of awarding funding. In specific areas, further detail could have been requested before awarding funding, or conditions attached to a funding award to develop more detail, including:

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<sup>33</sup> See Annex of Evaluation Data available at <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/nature-improvement-areas/>



- The status of the application: did it have the support of just one individual, one organisation, a subset of the NIA, or all the NIA? This may have given a better understanding to how much energy and support there was behind each dialogue.
- Gaps in the funding applications where questions were unanswered or answered only in very broad terms. This may have helped the projects develop ideas and be more specific about how things would be managed.
- The details and commitment of match funding being provided by local partners. This would have given a good indication of how much 'push' there was from the NIA side, beyond the rather general details provided. It is however notable that the invitation to apply for funding was not explicit about the match funding requirement, which was later retrofitted to the projects in an informal way. Specifically, the funding application form asks as a sub-question of Q5 "What resources (cash or in kind) can you provide?" It is not a requirement or major question that highlights the match-funding requirement. The suggestions of possible resource commitments from NIAs (where they existed) were also not confirmed or reported on throughout the project.
- How the NIAs saw dialogue as being different or additional to their current work. This may have reduced some of the misunderstandings about which activities were eligible for special funding and which were not.

Specifically, an interview or negotiation stage in the funding process might have offered the chance to discuss the work jointly and explore points like these. Or more radically, a 'feasibility stage' in the funding process – potentially with limited funds provided at an early stage - for NIAs to map out a possible dialogue and discuss it with the funders and partners before applying in full<sup>34</sup>. Importantly, more *direct contact* between the projects and the funders would have allowed a joint exploration and alignment of priorities, rather than a cut-and-dry application process that feels - with the benefit of hindsight at least – somewhat 'light-touch' given the overall scale of funding<sup>35</sup> and 2 year timescale (see page 55 for more details on funding). A longer deadline for returns would likely have benefitted the process in a variety of ways (as above).

We are aware of the inevitably bureaucratic nature of funding processes, and that at the time the 12 NIAs had already gone through a significant amount of paperwork and justification to become a recognised NIA, before the public dialogue offer arrived in their inboxes. There was perhaps some reluctance to ask for more detail or more stages in the process. The choice to keep the public dialogue application process streamlined is therefore understandable: however there were risks that ultimately were difficult to manage and which resulted in delays and lower impact.

**Lack of context of how public dialogue was being defined.** In the invitation to apply for funding sent to the NIAs, there was little explanation of what 'public dialogue' is and how it is being defined. The written invitation extended to half a side of A4 and was written in general terms. There is evidence that there was some confusion over the definition at this stage from both within NE and also the NIAs, with projects inevitably defining it in ways familiar to them. This took some time to be ironed out and could have been accelerated by providing more explanation about boundaries, and perhaps examples of other public dialogue work done elsewhere.

<sup>34</sup> The Expressions of Interest submitted by NIAs would have been better termed 'funding applications' as there was no 'next stage'. NIAs were actually *applying* for the funds, not expressing *interest* in order to find out more and get to the next stage where more detail and challenge would be required.

<sup>35</sup> Overall project costs are £567,285 including VAT. This includes all project costs, management costs from Sciencewise, NE and the delivery contractor, as well as the independent evaluation.

The process of the NIAs competing for support to deliver public dialogue did work. Three projects successfully applied and were awarded funds to do public dialogue work. However, at least one key person in all three of the NIA dialogues admitted that *“we went for the funding not fully understanding what it entailed or what we were letting ourselves in for”*, indicating that there is positive scope for improving this next time round in a decentralized model of funding public dialogue.

### **Timing of funding competition**

A few interviewees, at NIA level and within NE and Sciencewise, acknowledged that in an ideal world the funding process would not have been a separate process at all: it would have been merged with the overall competition for NIA status. This would have resulted in the community engagement emphasis of the NIA competition becoming stronger in the award criteria, and Sciencewise potentially funding part of the successful NIA work. It is interesting to note that this is indeed what the Sciencewise DES tried to arrange at the time three years ago, but ultimately it was decided that amongst other pressures in NE, it was just too much of a rush to get it organised given the administrative processes that needed to be gone through to agree public funding. NE comments that *“it would have been good to include the public dialogue funding as part of the overall programme funding and not as a bolt-on”*. The Sciencewise DES also comments *“it’s a shame we didn’t manage to get it written into early competition architecture of the NIA funding”*.

### **Management Group**

Throughout the two years, there was a Management Group that convened via conference call every quarter for around an hour. The group comprised:

- Natural England contract manager (convened and chaired the meetings)
- Natural England NIA Manager
- Sciencewise
- Defra
- Delivery contractor project manager
- Delivery contractor facilitators, one for each NIA dialogue
- NIA leads, one for each of the three dialogues
- In addition the evaluators observed most of the discussions.

The Management Group membership started as the first four bullets above, then expanded to include the other members when the funding was awarded and the delivery contractor appointed, in early 2013.

The quarterly conference calls served to provide updates about progress in the three dialogues, manage contractual obligations and financial reporting against budgets, as well as discuss issues such as the structure of the final reports to ensure standardization across the three dialogues.

Overall the group worked well as a mechanism to share updates and administer the contract and funding. Conference calls were a fairly efficient way to share updates amongst the number of geographically dispersed people, and allowed a degree of discussion about how projects were going. It allowed each of the three projects to ask questions of each other, and it allowed NE to request updates or financial reports

in a standardized way. One NIA described the group calls as *“quite useful to keep everyone on same page, although not critical”*.

On the other hand, interviewees cited ways in which the Management Group could have been improved:

- **Executive or Advisory Body.** It was frequently implied in discussions that the Management Group was an executive body, in that the group ‘had decisions to take’. However, the reality was that the group as a *body* had few, if any, substantive decisions to take. Decisions were either owned by NE, Sciencewise, or the delivery contractor, or the NIAs themselves, although it is fair to say that at times it was valuable to gain the Management Group’s input to them, for example the structure of the final Dialogue Reports. There was therefore confusion around the remit of the group as intuitively its members seemed to grasp this advisory role, but on the other hand documents such as dialogue plans were asked to be circulated ‘for sign off’ from the group. There was some discomfort with this sign-off role, given that there is little ethical or practical argument for two of the NIAs to be signing off on another’s plans for dialogue. In any case this function was applied to differing degrees across the three dialogues, and usually received little response from members. On reflection, it might have been clearer and more accurate to call the group a Coordination or Advisory Group or similar, and explicitly leave out any reference to executive functions.
- **Sharing learning and good practice.** Some interviewees had hoped that the group would be a good opportunity to share issues arising and to explore those with the benefit of others’ experience and perspectives. In other words, a safe environment to troubleshoot and learn from each other – both from positive and negative experiences. Occasionally the group discussions touched on this, but there was little time available in the calls to ‘relax’ into an exploration and sharing of experiences. Also, the contract-management function of the group led to a slight feel of the funders (NE and Sciencewise) ‘checking on’ the projects within their guidelines, which can understandably lead to a guarded tone of participation for other members: not ideal for the honest sharing of experiences. It is perhaps worth being realistic about how much these two functions can be combined in one conversation: it might be more effective to explicitly separate out contract management from sharing best practice or troubleshooting.
- **Face to face or conference call?** A couple of interviewees certainly appreciated the fact they didn’t have to travel across the country to participate in a set of updates or contract management discussions, which can arguably be completed efficiently over the phone (indeed they were). However, a couple of interviewees said *“the fact we never met as a group meant that we had little rapport to explore more tricky and useful stuff”*. There was a sense that if the group had met face to face, at least a few times, there might have been more scope to squeeze more value out of it.

The views of some interviewees were also influenced by the fact that the delivery contractor, facilitators and NE contract manager had a catch-up conference call every fortnight to discuss operational issues and progress. One of these participants said *“it was quite an update-heavy project: at times it felt a real nuisance but with hindsight it was necessary”*.

### Local Steering Groups

The approach to forming local governance structures differed across all three projects:

- Meres and Mosses: did not form a Steering Group.
- Morecambe Bay formed a small Steering Group after a year.
- Nene Valley used an existing Planning Group to guide the dialogue.

Given the different commitments made in their funding applications and the approaches ultimately used, it is hard to draw firm conclusions across the board. However, where local groups existed (Morecambe Bay and Nene Valley) those involved said that they were useful groups to assist with planning and delivery of the dialogues. In Morecambe Bay the group generally did more 'sign-posting' than 'doing' but was useful in doing so, whilst in Nene Valley the group took an active role in shaping the dialogue as well as with delivery of the work.

There is a question here for Sciencewise to consider in particular, about how far to prescribe governance arrangements in devolved dialogue projects. The spectrum ranges from: allowing complete flexibility to local projects as to how to govern a dialogue, to advising or even requiring a local steering group to be set up. This kind of choice is covered later in this report.

### Defra and links to other bodies

Defra was listed as a member of the Management Group, and was in receipt of all email communications regarding the dialogue projects. However, Defra did not participate in any of the Management Group meetings or contribute via email to the discussions.

There were two main impacts of Defra's non-participation. Firstly, at points where a dialogue at an NIA level requested guidance, such as the Meres and Mosses dialogue asking for input on what the policy hooks for dialogue should be locally, no guidance was available. This left the local dialogue to fill the vacuum with its own view on what the dialogue should focus on. Although this seemed to turn out well, it was not a comfortable position for the project or facilitator to be in. Secondly, the lack of Defra input to the discussions meant that the project had a sense of operating in a vacuum at a national level, because there was little visibility of other cross-cutting initiatives or policy discussions that overlapped with NIA business. In this vein, a representative from NE said that if the project was happening again, they would *"ensure the project was much better plugged in at the national level, via initiatives such as the national NIA Steering Group"*.

### Division of workload, and match-funding

The issue of division of workload and clarity of match-funding expectations are covered in detail above within the individual dialogue sections of this report. To summarise, whilst all projects reached workable arrangements on how to divide the work of delivering the dialogues, there were misunderstandings on the part of all three NIAs about what the funding would cover, although these differed slightly. In short the NIAs largely expected the funding to pay for a project officer to design and deliver the dialogue with limited guidance from the NIA, whereas in fact the funding paid for professional advice from a facilitator to help them deliver their own dialogue.

This misunderstanding caused significant delays and/or tensions on the projects, and may have been avoided or minimised via a clearer description of 'the deal' during the

funding process regarding roles and match-funding.

It is also worth considering the implication here of the NIAs assuming that funding for their time was covered – or at least funding for a dedicated project worker. The implication is that had funding been available to cover their staff time, they would have firstly been more keen on bidding in the first place (perhaps leading to more than three applications), and secondly they would have been more able to deliver the work rapidly and smoothly. It is worth considering offering funding for direct staff time at a local level in future, as long as the limits to this are clear. Both the Sciencewise DES and at least one of the NIAs spontaneously suggested this as a possible improvement for future work.

### Sciencewise

As well as providing most of the cash funding for the dialogues, Sciencewise provided help via a Dialogue and Engagement Specialist (DES) to assist with the funding process and selection of the three NIA projects. The DES also monitored the three dialogues, offering advice on their design and delivery as well as ensuring they stayed within the agreed boundaries for funding.

There were various trade-offs that needed juggling here:

- **DES level of involvement.** On the one hand, the DES needed to be involved enough to assist where necessary, but on the other hand there was naturally a limited budget for them to spend on the project and a two-year project with fortnightly conference calls to follow consumes a considerable amount of time. This tension is illustrated by two apparently conflicting interview comments, firstly from one NIA staff member saying *“it would have helped to have the DES directly involved more by simplifying the management chain”*, and another player saying *“it felt like we were operating to two clients at the same time: not ideal at all”*.
- **Sciencewise guiding principles.** Sciencewise requires that any funded public dialogue work needs to be in line with their guiding principles<sup>36</sup>. However, in practice these are broad enough to allow flexibility to enable projects to make their own choices and respond to specific objectives and circumstances productively. The question is ‘How much flexibility of interpretation is allowed?’ It is fair to say that the three projects were not always initially clear about issues such as how widely the definitions of ‘the public’ and ‘public dialogue’ could be interpreted, although workable arrangements were ultimately reached.
- **Who carries the message?** At times, it was inevitable that the funders needed to intervene to either seek clarification or enforce a particular boundary to the work that fitted within the agreed parameters for funding. In this project, a good example was lack of clarity from funders that local NIAs were expected to contribute match funding (although not 50%) to the work. The facilitators at times felt that the fact that they had to carry these messages to the projects directly themselves – as a messenger from the funder – caused them friction in their relationship with the NIAs.

### Natural England

On the whole NE’s role was to contract manage the funding, ensuring that the funds

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<sup>36</sup> The Government’s Approach to Public Dialogue on Science and Technology. Available at <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/assets/Uploads/Publications/Guiding-PrinciplesSciencewise-ERC-Guiding-Principles.pdf>



were spent within the anticipated time and that the required reports were generated. Additionally NE aimed to keep internal staff up to date with developments on the project.

All interviewees that commented on it felt that the contract management of the project had been effective with few improvements to make. Whilst not everyone's favourite part of a project like this, people felt that requirements were clear, they knew where to go to ask questions, and they largely got useful answers to questions within reasonable timescales.

If there is one area that a couple of interviewees highlighted that NE could have done more of, it was to offer guidance on the questions or trade-offs under discussion in the dialogues i.e. natural environment management at a landscape scale. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, there was occasionally a lack of clarity about where this 'content guidance' was to come from. Two of the projects chose to decide themselves what to focus on, whereas one project looked to NE, Sciencewise and ultimately Defra for advice. NE for its part felt comfortable that the projects defined the questions for dialogue as they saw relevant for their local context.

NE staff acknowledged itself that *"we couldn't spend the time on it that we would have liked to"* and that *"given my time again, I'd want to spend more time walking the corridors talking to colleagues about it"*. The day-to-day management though did not suffer significantly from a lack of time, apart from perhaps occasionally minutes or actions taking a while to be written up and circulated after catch-up calls, due to other work pressures.

## Facilitators

The facilitators in all three dialogues found themselves in a difficult position at times. The local NIA staff frequently saw the facilitators as 'responsible for delivering the dialogue' despite this not being the case in the facilitators' eyes (or Sciencewise's). This set in train a dynamic where the facilitators wanted the dialogues to be successful, but they generally had little support locally at least for the first year. At times – indeed, for many months – it felt *"like pushing water uphill"*. Facilitators felt boxed into a role of providing the energy and drive for the dialogues as manifested in the need for them to continually push local staff for responses, remind about commitments, deliver tasks that weren't completed by local staff, proactively organise meetings/calls, make suggestions and generally 'work around' the lack of pull from the NIA projects. It is important to note that this varied across the three NIAs both in scale, nature, persistence and timing, but a general observation backed up by much evidence over months<sup>37</sup>, is that not much would have happened if the facilitators hadn't been so persistent, energetic and imaginative over such a long period of time. The evaluators therefore acknowledge the important role of the facilitators in this project, and commend the effort put in given the successes emerging despite the constraints.

In the face of the varied challenges, the facilitators occasionally reflected on how much it was appropriate for them to do: should they step in and deliver large parts of the projects on their own accord so that at least some activity happened, or should

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<sup>37</sup> The 'early observations report' of the evaluation (October 2013) said "There does not seem to be a sense of accountability at the local level" and that there is a "risk of the process being 'owned' by the facilitator" and that "most of the energy and 'drive' for the specific dialogue work has come from the facilitators". In March 2014 the evaluation Interim Report went on to say that "it is entirely possible that the project would have not progressed at all if the facilitator had not persistently prompted discussions over the past 9 months (Morecambe Bay)" and "it is unclear how much progress would have been made in the facilitators' absence (Meres and Mosses)" and "progress is in large part due to the time and effort put in by the facilitator (Nene Valley)".

they stand back and let the project fail (or at least seriously underperform) due to the lack of work sharing by NIA staff? In the end all facilitators opted for delivering more work than they originally planned to do, and in most cases more than they really felt comfortable with given the need for local input, drive and ownership.

Throughout the 18 months of the evaluation, the related question of 'when to withdraw' came up various times because of the delivery problems with the projects: although this applies less to Nene Valley. It was generally agreed that in theory there is a point at which it is appropriate to 'cut one's losses' when a project is failing, as nobody wants to throw good money after bad. However, defining exactly what this 'failure point' looks like was difficult: firstly for the facilitators as individuals keen to protect their professional integrity, and secondly for Sciencewise as a funding body keen to maximise its publicly funded investment. This warrants reflection for future projects.

### Supply-driven dialogue

It is interesting to reflect on the origins of a public dialogue project, and the extent to which there is a correlation between the nature of the origin and the degree of value emerging. At least one other recent evaluation of Sciencewise-funded public dialogue<sup>38</sup> presented evidence that where public dialogue is driven by its supply - rather than demand from a specific policy issue - there is less value arising, at least to the specific policy-makers receiving the results from the dialogue. What then, was the original driver for this dialogue on landscape management in NIAs?

There are a variety of reasons this dialogue started, and these are cited in the Invitation to Tender for delivery contractors. These included: publication of the Lawton Report<sup>39</sup> in 2010, publication of the Nature Environment White Paper in the same year, the publication of *Biodiversity 2020 – a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services* in 2011, and then later the establishment of NIAs as pilot bodies to assist with delivering 'more, bigger, better, and joined' habitat areas. But tracing the origin back even further in an attempt to understand where the drive came from for the project, it is possible to identify Sciencewise as one of the initial drivers of the work. A Sciencewise representative said "*we hadn't worked with Natural England before and this seemed like a gap*", and a NE staff member said that "*Sciencewise had a desire to do public dialogue in England around ecological management*" as a key part of the project being seeded.

This evaluation report does not comment on how Sciencewise should interpret and apply its role of encouraging public dialogue's wider use where appropriate<sup>40</sup>. However, it is useful to highlight the inherent balance between on the one hand wanting to encourage the use of a particular approach (in this case, public dialogue), and on the other hand funding that approach where there is not an explicit pull or demand from an issue and the associated organisations that are responsible for managing it (in this case, ecological management in NIAs). In particular, one can envisage a hypothetical situation where public dialogue is funded as a first step in encouraging or building the capacity of a particular organisation to make more effective use of public dialogue in the longer term, but potentially at the expense of a productive project in the shorter term.

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<sup>38</sup> 3KQ. Evaluation of public dialogues on wellbeing, for Cabinet Office, 2015. Available at <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/embedding-wellbeing-science-in-decision-making>

<sup>39</sup> Sir John Lawton, Making Space for Nature, August 2010.

<sup>40</sup> From homepage of [www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk](http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk) "Sciencewise is a BIS funded programme to improve Government policy making involving science and technology by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and *encouraging its wider use where appropriate* [emphasis added]. We provide co-funding and specialist advice to help Government Departments and Agencies develop and commission public dialogue".

Where then, does this project sit in this balance? Overall, based on evidence gathered during this evaluation and the benefit of hindsight, we would conclude that the chain of origination of the public dialogue might be described as ‘supplied and accepted’ as opposed to ‘demanded and pursued’. When this origin of the project is then placed in the wider context of the delivery challenges experienced, it is possible that some of the delivery issues stemmed both from the funding process and further back to the origination and conception of the project. It is impossible to know because there is no direct comparator, but the evaluators see value in highlighting the possibility, as food for thought when conceiving supply-driven public dialogues in future.

### **Conclusions and Lessons on Management and Governance**

In summary, the main conclusions regarding management and governance of the project are:

- A more appropriate funding process<sup>41</sup> may have minimised delays and confusion during the first year of delivery. This is the main lesson.
- The Management Group worked well enough on a contract-management level, but did not realize wider objectives around sharing learning and jointly approaching interesting dilemmas.
- The setting up of local Steering Groups helped delivery, although was not a ‘solve-all’ for gaining ownership. It would be worth Sciencewise considering what degree of guidance (or requirements) it provides to local projects bidding for funds.
- Defra effectively did not participate in the project after the initial stages despite being on the Management Group. It might have been better for them to either participate (even if infrequently), or to remove themselves from the formal governance structures to provide clarity to other players.
- Division of workload, and match-funding. The requirements for match funding could have been spelt out more clearly and firmly as part of the funding process to enable NIAs to understand they had to contribute a significant amount of time and work, before they were committed.
- Supply-driven public dialogue carries the risk of a lack of ownership and ‘pull’ from the players that are required to take on board the results.

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<sup>41</sup> By funding process, the author means the process by which NIAs were invited to participate in the project and funds allocated i.e. the EoI process.

## 9 - Impacts

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The most tangible impacts from this NIA public dialogue project are those emerging from the three individual dialogues at local NIA level: these are covered in chapters 4-6. However, there are also impacts arising across the dialogues as a whole. These are summarised below. There is also comment in this section of how the dialogue project met its objectives, followed good practice, and the factors shaping the level of credibility of the project.

### Impacts and benefits, beyond the three local NIA dialogues

The dialogue project was conceived as a single entity, enabling several NIAs to conduct their own dialogue work at a local level. Therefore beyond the learning and achievements arising at this local level (outlined above in previous sections), benefits arose too across the work as a whole:

- **Participating in the coalition experiment of local decision-making.** It was seen by some to be valuable to be taking part in the Government's agenda of devolving decision-making to local people, and playing an active part in an experiment of how best to do this.
- **Raising awareness across all 12 NIAs** about public dialogue, via presentations to the NIA conference in September 2014, and an NIA Best Practice conference in February 2015. Combined, these two events set out the work undertaken and the benefits of having dialogue with the public. Informal feedback from participants to the presenters was positive.
- **Building capacity of NE staff** to understand and oversee public dialogue. Various people who were interviewed for the evaluation pointed out the learning within NE regarding public dialogue. One interviewee said *"we convinced and educated a number of people about the nature, value and importance of good dialogue"*.
- **Input to wider external funding bids.** There was evidence that stakeholders peripheral to at least two of the dialogues cited the dialogue results in their on-going applications for funding (HLF, LEADER programmes), although it is not known to what extent or whether these bids were successful.

### Meeting the objectives

Making a meaningful judgment about how well the NIA dialogues met the project objectives in the Invitation to Tender is difficult. This is largely because the project objectives are framed in quite broad terms, and the three NIA-level dialogues were in turn not framed directly around the objectives – but rather, around the funding applications submitted by the NIAs. This extra layer of administration led to a further 'translation' of the objectives to the extent that there is now little clear evidence to trace between initial objectives and final results. One interviewee commented that *"it was unclear about what topics were off the agenda or not – the objectives allow almost any conversation to be run as long as it relates to the NIA in some way"*.

In practice, all three local dialogues did deliver landscape-based conversations that were not inconsistent with the project objectives, and perhaps just as importantly sat comfortably with the NIA leads of the dialogues in terms of what they wanted to get out of the work. Common comments from NIA leads included that *"we got what we*

*wanted from it although it was a lot of work” and “its shown us this approach has real value, which is what we wanted to test”, and “it has been great but it’s value will only come into its own if the next stage gets funded”.*

One of the project objectives was “*to develop, test and apply novel methods of engagement*”. Several project outputs are worth highlighting that fit neatly under this heading:

- **Film.** The film produced by Meres and Mosses illustrates how a dialogue can lead to a high quality product to raise awareness and promote a project and a landscape.
- **Google Earth tour.** The Meres and Mosses virtual tour was an effective and innovative tool to help engage members of the public, and particularly useful in landscape-scale discussions.
- **Art projects and installations.** Two NIAs used art installations to engage the public, both at Morecambe Bay and also Nene Valley. These were seen as interesting initiatives and effective in their own way at attracting people to a site they hadn’t seen, and raising awareness from visitors.

### **Meeting best practice principles, including devolved dialogue and evaluation**

The three specific local NIA-focused chapters of this report largely address what went well and less well in terms of the Sciencewise Guiding Principles on public dialogue. It is difficult however to reach a definitive judgment across the project as a whole because in numerous places the guidance was interpreted flexibly because the dialogues were devolved to local project level to commission, design and deliver. This raises questions for Sciencewise and commissioning bodies in funding public dialogue work in this kind of devolved way, as the additional layer of translation down the funding chain introduces interpretation and a greater challenge for monitoring the projects. Two specific questions are listed below to prompt thinking in future:

- How clear is Sciencewise on the limits to what it will and will not fund as public dialogue, in particular when the dialogue is devolved? How firmly is it willing to enforce those limits?
- How clear is Sciencewise on how and when it should intervene to insist on a change to project delivery in order to meet the Guiding Principles? Again this is particularly important during a devolved dialogue, where the local project team may have little contact or history with the Dialogue and Engagement Specialist, as there is an additional contract management organisation involved (in this case, Natural England).

In summary though, there were no areas where the evaluator or those involved in the dialogues feel that the best practice guidance was not being applied in an appropriate way, given the nature and structure of the dialogues.

The one guiding principle that can be covered in isolation is evaluation, as it stands a little apart from the rest of the design and delivery of the project overall. Others are invited to reflect and comment from their perspective, but from the evaluators’ view this principle seems fairly well met. Factors contributing to this include:

- There was an independent evaluation.
- The evaluation was commissioned by competitive tender.
- The evaluation started relatively early. The evaluation was up and running 18 months before the end of the project, although it is worth noting that the

delivery of the project started in March 2013, six months before the evaluation (August 2013).

- The evaluation addressed the objectives and expectations of stakeholders, as well as standards of good practice set by Sciencewise (although see comment below regarding resourcing).
- The evaluation gathered both qualitative and quantitative data, from different sources, so that conclusions could be evidence-based.
- The dialogue process ended with an open discussion of learning at a 'wash-up' meeting, as well as planned publication of a case study to share learning more widely.

The resourcing of the evaluation is worth mentioning, as it constitutes the main reason why the authors qualify their judgment of the principle being 'fairly' well met. The scale of Sciencewise evaluations in terms of funding are usually set at around 10% of the total project cost. However, the scale of this evaluation was set at just above 3%<sup>42</sup>. Whilst the evaluators believe the evaluation work undertaken is valuable, we are aware of the limitations of undertaking such a significant and long term evaluation under such resource constraints. Specifically, extra resource would have enabled – in common with many other comparable evaluations – the following extra robustness to the work:

- Direct observations of NIA-level dialogue sessions (only one was conducted).
- More frequent liaison and interviewing of key players at NIA and project level.
- A wider interview pool, in particular to assess the impact of dialogue locally.
- More frequent and detailed review of documentation circulated.
- Deeper and more robust analysis of the affect of the Sciencewise funding in comparison to the public engagement conducted by the other nine NIAs.

The evaluation report and findings must be considered within these limitations.

One of the choices made early on by the evaluators in liaison with Sciencewise was to spend a greater amount of time on the Interim Evaluation report, to provide formative feedback that might help in design and delivery of the dialogues. Various interviewees including the NE contract manager positively received this choice, *"The evaluation interim report was invaluable. It caused us to discuss difficult questions about the projects' progress early on, and make changes as a result. Our difficulties would have multiplied otherwise, and we may well have ended up off the rails"*. The downside of the choice was that the evaluation was then constrained in the degree to which it could monitor or gather data, or at times even gather basic information about what had happened when and why at the NIA dialogue level. We would therefore recommend Sciencewise considering a more realistic level of resourcing if the robustness of evaluations is to be maintained.

Any mistakes in this evaluation report are the responsibility of the lead author, and factual corrections are gratefully received. The evaluators welcome feedback on any aspect of the evaluation.

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<sup>42</sup> Calculated by taking the cost of the evaluation (£18K including VAT) and dividing by the total project cost excluding VAT (£567K).



## Credibility

Interviewees at the end of the project were asked their view on how credible the dialogues were, and what contributed to – or detracted from – their credibility.

Factors that **contributed to** the credibility of the dialogues, in the eyes of interviewees, included:

- Independent facilitation. Facilitators could act as critical friends to the dialogues, as well as being seen as independent in the eyes of participants.
- Involvement of NIA partners at every event.
- NGO partners led the projects, not a contractor alone.
- Project being presented at NIA conferences (September 2014, February 2015).
- Specific action plans coming out of the site based dialogues (Nene Valley).
- Seeing the change in attitude of NIA partners towards public engagement
- Recruitment specification: clear and detailed (Meres and Mosses).
- Sciencewise were involved: reassured the NIAs that it was ‘proper’ and overseen by someone outside the nature conservation world.
- Good level of funding, on the whole not restricting dialogue work<sup>43</sup>.
- Results emerged eventually, including practical management progress (Winmarleigh Moss in Morecambe Bay NIA).

Factors that **detracted from** the credibility of the dialogues, in the eyes of interviewees, included:

- NIA partnerships did not really own the dialogue work, or took a long time to gain this ownership.
- Cost effectiveness: although everyone acknowledged there were benefits, some interviewees questioned the cost effectiveness of the project overall.
- Recruitment: using friends and families or their wider networks leading to potential self-selection.
- Low profile of the project beyond those directly involved in it.
- Lack of Defra involvement, or other national level initiatives such as the national NIA Steering Group.

Overall the three NIA dialogues were seen as credible undertakings by those involved, despite some of the practical problems that arose.

## Costs

The total project cost was £567,000 including VAT, of which Sciencewise contribution £240,000 including VAT.

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<sup>43</sup> This is in part evidenced by what interviewees said, and also the fact that there was a slight underspend in the project overall across the two years.

## 10 - Conclusions and Lessons

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Overall there are several conclusions and lessons to draw from a project of varied success and impact given the scale of time, effort and funding:

- **A more appropriate funding process** would have been a productive investment and paid off in the long term. Specifically, the process used in this case could be built on and improved by increasing clarity and detail in the invitation to bid, as well as support to NIAs during a longer bidding duration that potentially had an extra 'scoping' phase. Specific things that needed explaining and jointly exploring included:
  - A clear definition of what public dialogue is and what it is not, shared among all those involved.
  - The match funding requirement, and what this meant for dialogue delivery, local project staffing and workload division.
  - Governance requirements, for example the value of using a local steering group, plus formal updates to all members of NIA partnerships to boost ownership.

This is the single most important lesson from this project, and has more impact than the rest of the lessons combined.

- **The Management Group** worked well as a forum for updates and as a contract-management mechanism, but would have benefitted from having a tighter remit. The group did not have an executive function despite it being perceived as such by some members, and this caused some confusion and ambiguity in the eyes of the NIA representatives and sometimes the facilitators. There was the opportunity to separate out the contract-management discussions to also use the group to share learning and explore interesting dilemmas facing the dialogues at the NIA level.
- **Involvement of full NIA partnerships.** At the start, the members of the partnerships running the three local NIAs doing dialogue projects were not very involved or up to date about the dialogues, which potentially missed opportunities to ease delivery as well as boost likely impacts. Greater involvement could be engendered by: giving more time and support during the competition process to build ownership amongst the partners, and more procedurally, requiring at least a minimum level of updates to the full partnership throughout the life of the project. It was only really in the Nene Valley dialogue that ownership built over time across the whole partnership as they saw the value of the public findings.
- **Devolved dialogue with local projects poses particular questions** for Sciencewise when compared to single national dialogue projects. For example:
  - How should 'public' participants be defined in public dialogue? It may be useful to consider three categories of participant: professional stakeholders, interested public, and unengaged public.
  - How clearly is 'public dialogue' defined? For example, the boundary between awareness raising and dialogue (e.g. where does an art project sit, and under what circumstances would it be supported?).

- Where does the impetus for defining the dialogue focus come from? Nationally, or locally.
- At which point and on what basis should a dialogue project be stopped, and by whom? At present there seems no process for stopping a project even when there is no progress or expectation of achievement of objectives.

While these can all be handled on an ad-hoc basis, there is a strong case for Sciencewise discussing these up front as part of the process for agreeing funding and support, and also during early project planning to resolve ambiguities in expectations. Indeed, some of the wider questions, such as the last one on when to discontinue a project, merits stand-alone discussion within the Sciencewise governance structure.

The evaluators thank all those who contributed to the evaluation: it would not be possible without their time, effort and honesty.

## Appendix 1 – Evaluation Questionnaire

These events are being independently evaluated by 3KQ. We would really appreciate you providing your views below, and handing the completed form to the facilitator. Thank you.

Please circle one answer for each of the following statements.

1	Overall, I was <b>satisfied</b> with the event/s	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments:							
2	We had enough <b>time</b> to discuss the issues	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments:							
3	I was able to <b>contribute</b> my views and have my say	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments:							
4	I <b>learned something new</b> as a result of taking part	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Please explain, e.g. what did you learn?							
5	Taking part has <b>affected my views</b> on the topics under discussion	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Please explain, e.g. how have your views been affected?							
6	I am likely to <b>change something that I do</b> as a result of taking part	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Please explain, e.g. what will you do differently?							
7	I am more <b>convinced of the value of public participation</b> in these sorts of topics	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Comments:							
8	I am confident this/these event/s will <b>have an impact</b> on future decisions on these issues	Strongly Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Neither	Tend to Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
Please explain:							

9. Any other comments?

**PLEASE TURN OVER**

We may want to phone a few participants to ask them some more questions about these events later on. Would you be willing to talk to us again in a short telephone interview?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*Sciencewise* co-funded the dialogue project you are taking part in. It is a national programme that promotes public dialogue on policy issues involving science and technology. Would you like to receive other information from *Sciencewise*, including possibly opportunities to be involved in other debates on these sorts of topics in future?

Yes

☐

No

☐

If you answered 'yes' to either of the two questions above please provide the following details:

Name: .....

Home phone number (including area code): .....

Email address: .....

## Appendix 2 – Eol proforma (or funding application form)

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### NIA - champions / beacons in public engagement

The NIAs provide an opportunity to reconnect nature with people and build on communities' vision for nature and biodiversity.

If your NIA partnership would like to develop further engagement of the public and local community in shaping the direction of the NIA project, find new solutions to complex challenges and create a community vision for nature improvement, then you might like to apply for additional skills, resources and training being made available by a new pot of funding<sup>44</sup>. We are looking for four beacon NIAs, or consortia of NIAs, to act as flagship projects with respect to public engagement.

A pot of skilled community engagement facilitators, event co-ordinators, and natural environment experts will be made available to help your NIA partnership engage with the wider public and community and gather their views and opinions<sup>45</sup>. These could help you:

- Understand future flash points and conflicts in your NIA area
- Gather evidence about public ideas and attitudes
- Use dialogue to generate novel new approaches to old problems
- Explore future scenarios and management options with stakeholders
- Raise awareness and engage a wider group

**Please complete this expression of interest and return to [Nick Brodin](#) by 7<sup>th</sup> November 2013. Your proposal will be scored against the criteria described under each question. You might also find it useful to look at the Sciencewise public dialogue principles (<http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/guiding-principles/>). Each of the questions on the form below should be answered in a maximum of 250 words. The proposals will be scored against the selection criteria given under each question.**

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<sup>44</sup> This is being part funded by [Sciencewise](#), the government's programme to support public dialogue in policy making

<sup>45</sup> Up to £200,000 of funding is available over 2.5 years to be focused on four core beacon NIAs, or consortia of NIAs. The support will be provided by a consortium of contractors, to be recruited based on needs expressed in the winning proposals.



## Your public engagement proposal

### 1. What issues and topics will you seek to engage the public and communities in dialogue on?

- How have you come up with your list of issues?
- Whose views are important to you in relation to which issues?
- Why do you think your NIA delivery plan will benefit from engaging on these issues?

*Max score 10: focus on issues related to biodiversity and landscape management, an articulation of the questions for engagement, and the possible options that are need debate.*

### 2. Who will you engage with?

- Which sections of the public do you want to involve in the your proposed engagement activity?
- How will you reach them and make them aware of the invitation to engage?
- How will you ensure a representative groups of voices engage, including the hard to reach?

*Max score 10: a desire to go beyond the 'usual suspects' to listen and engage more widely and deeply on difficult or complex issues.*

### 3. How will you engage the public and communities?

- What are the key stages in your public engagement plan?
- What activities, tools, or methods do you intend to employ?
- What questions will you ask and how will you capture and record the public and communities' responses?

*Max score 10: sufficient understanding of public engagement. Realistic expectations in terms of what you can achieve within the scope of the project.*

#### 4. Outcomes and impact.

- How will you use the outcomes of the engagement to inform activity in your NIA or group of NIAs?
- What role will your partnership / steering group have in the engagement?
- How will you demonstrate how people's views have informed activity in your NIA or group of NIAs?

*Max score 10: a clear vision as to how the outcomes of the engagement will inform activity in your NIA (or group of NIAs if bid is from a consortium), and how the steering group will use the results. A genuine ambition and commitment to engage the wider public.*

#### 5. Skills and resources required. You could consider the following questions:

- What support will you need to carry out the engagement activities described above?
- What technical expertise will you require?
- What further resources (tools, visual aids, etc.) would you like to use?
- What resources (cash or in kind) can you provide?

*Max score 5: realistic assessment of the skills and inputs needs*

#### 6. Timetable

- Please provide a simple timetable of your proposed activities

*Max score 5: realistic assessment of what needs to be done when*

Your NIA, or consortia of NIAs .....

NIA Contact details .....

## Possible activities that can support Community Engagement work

Project Time Table		Are you interested in...?
<b>Baseline stakeholder and activity mapping</b> Identify current activity and issues, and potential partners and networks. Set up catchment stakeholder group.		Overview of international best practice in collaborative planning, and basic training
		Support with stakeholder and community mapping, analysis and outreach
		An independent third party broker to help develop catchment management group and stakeholder forum
		Help with design and facilitate outreach meetings and workshops, help prepare support materials and record / report workshop results
		Advice and support on establishment of a community advisory panel
		Support with baseline issues mapping, and help stakeholders / public identify gaps in evidence and information
A brief description and shared understanding of the problems in each catchment, to inform the NIA 'plan' and create a shared vision.		Design and facilitation of visioning workshop and launch event to consider most important outcomes
		Design and facilitation of workshops to help scan the widest range of possible for catchment restoration options. This could include horizon scanning, scenario planning, future basing workshops or new technology assessments.
		Help with convening an independent expert panel
		Support with development of briefing sheets which explain key issues and options, and the advantages and disadvantages, costs and benefits of each
		Help facilitating dialogue and wide agreement on criteria for evaluation of options and priorities
		Help designing online deliberative polling approaches / online options appraisal and visualisation tool
<b>NIA 'plan'</b> To show key problems, shared vision, action required, and commitment from partners. Description of key services provided by the catchment and their relative value to users.		Running collaborative action planning workshops to underpin commitments
		Supporting task groups against strategic strands
		Supporting wider public engagement on the detail of key priorities outcome areas

Registering the outline costs and relative effectiveness of actions identified. Format to be defined locally.		Help recording insights and findings from participatory events
		Advice on future engagement and follow up