



# CAMBRIAN MOUNTAINS TO THE COAST: DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION FOR OUR LAND AND SEA

## Report from the Nearly Wild team for Summit to Sea and the Cambrian Mountains Initiative



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SUMMIT TO SEA

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# CONTENTS

CONTENTS..... 2

1 INTRODUCTION ..... 3

    1.1 Background..... 3

        1.1.1 Cambrian Mountains Initiative..... 3

        1.1.2 Summit to Sea ..... 4

    1.2 Purpose of the work..... 4

    1.3 Approach to the work ..... 5

2 A BIT ABOUT THE BUSINESSES WE TALKED TO ..... 6

3 WHAT WE HEARD FROM THESE BUSINESSES..... 9

    3.1 How the businesses benefit nature ..... 9

    3.2 The relationship between nature and their commercial activities..... 12

    3.3 Their perceptions of the state of nature locally and the threats to nature in the area..... 13

    3.4 The role the businesses play in the local community & economy..... 16

    3.5 Their aspirations for the future ..... 16

4 ANALYSIS..... 20

5 PROPOSED PROJECT CONCEPTS..... 25

    5.1 Principles for support..... 25

    5.2 Project concepts ..... 26

        5.2.1 COMMENTARY ..... 33

6 CONCLUSION..... 34

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The need for developing a shared vision and action plan for enabling farmers, land managers and other 'nature-based' businesses to increase public goods delivery through actions across the Cambrian Mountains landscape was highlighted by the *Landscape status for the Cambrian Mountains* report, and is evident from ongoing discussion around the future of land use within the Cambrian Mountains, particularly in the context of post-Brexit changes to support structures.

Similarly, for Summit to Sea, this work was intended to help clarify and make real the emerging vision and themes in the initiative's development phase. This is particularly true for Theme 1: A nature rich and sustainable production system - which has identified that many natural resource production agendas are driven by economic policy, markets and grants / subsidies which don't allow for the local nuances and the different needs of different owners, users and managers. The theme therefore seeks to find ways that national needs can be satisfied but with greater scope for local control and solutions which benefit nature within a productive system. However, the linkages are also strong with the other emerging themes: Connectivity between wildlife rich habitats for greater collective benefit; re-connecting people; and re-connecting the economy.

More broadly, this is a time of change for natural resource management, including farming. The UK's withdrawal from the European Union is leading to the biggest change in agri-environmental policy in decades. Future direction is still uncertain at present, but the new regime is due to come into place in 2025. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 provides the legislative and policy framework for natural resources management in Wales, introducing the concept of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources "as a new approach which ensures that the way in which the use of and the impacts on our natural resources do not result in their long term decline".

And if we look more broadly again, there is an increasingly urgent issue facing all of us around climate change and carbon. The three Local Authority areas included in the areas covered by Summit to Sea and the Cambrian Mountains Initiative have all declared Climate Emergencies. What can S to S and CMI do in practical terms to contribute to local and regional attempts for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and working towards net zero carbon?

### 1.1.1 Cambrian Mountains Initiative

The purpose of the Cambrian Mountains Initiative is to carry out activities which benefit the community of the Cambrian Mountains area of Wales and in particular to:

- Work with communities, local producers, tourism providers and others to support the development of sustainable and resilient rural communities.
- Sustain the natural environment, the built environment and the heritage of the area.
- Enable the provision of ecosystem services to the benefit of the wider society through securing carbon in the soil, improved water storage and quality, flood management and the provision of opportunities to enjoy the countryside.
- Promote the highest standards of land management within the area of the Cambrian Mountains
- Work with partners to establish the area as a tourism destination within the wider tourism offer of mid-Wales



- Develop greater understanding of the Cambrian Mountains amongst visitors, locals and other interest and user groups, through interpretation, education and contact with the general public and enhanced facilities.

### 1.1.2 Summit to Sea

Summit to the Sea is a co-created project developing place-based collaborative land-management practices which support healthy and diverse ecosystems across property boundaries, delivering economic, ecological and social benefits appropriate to the locality.

The overarching aim of Summit to Sea is to **co-design** with local stakeholders, landowners and sea users a nature-rich area from the Pumlumon massif, down through wooded valleys along river systems and out into Cardigan Bay. Working from the ground up through a co-design process the project is exploring what works for communities, businesses, and nature, how it can be implemented.

Summit to Sea recognises that solutions to our environmental challenges cannot be found by excluding inhabitants, protecting only small and isolated pockets of wildlife, or disregarding the wealth of knowledge, understanding and concern for the land that already exists in the area.

The only ethical, just way to turn around environmental destruction is to find ways to work with people. We need to be ambitious and crucially work at landscape-scale. Solutions must be joined up, underpin the local economy, and celebrate the local culture and sense of place.

## 1.2 Purpose of the work

The Cambrian Mountains Initiative (CMI) and the Summit to Sea (S to S) project wish to support a stronger local economy, communities, and nature. With this in common, along with their overlap in geographical areas, they decided to collaborate on this piece of work.

As part of their work to plan for future activity, the Cambrian Mountains Initiative and the Summit to Sea project wanted to develop a vision for the future of our land and sea that is shared by farmers and other natural resource managers. Nature can sometimes get lost when considering community and economic regeneration, and both Summit to Sea and Cambrian Mountains Initiative wanted to place this at the heart of this report, while not losing sight of the other two elements.

What is the interplay between business and nature currently? What are businesses' aspirations for the future? Will they benefit nature directly or indirectly if implemented? If so, how can the initiatives support business development that will have positive benefits for nature, community and also the economy?

And for both initiatives, it is vital that local stakeholders are fundamentally involved in the planning process.

CMI and S to S wanted to understand more about how businesses in their areas work with and benefit nature, whether it's businesses where people are earning their living working directly with natural resources, such as farming, fishing or forestry, or businesses that have a more indirect relationship with nature, such as tourism or outdoor pursuits, but where this relationship is still a core part of the business model.

Both CMI and S to S want to be able to support businesses to do more to benefit nature in their areas. But, if they're going to look for the money which could be invested in this, they needed to



understand what's currently happening, what these businesses want to do in the future to do more for nature and biodiversity, and what support these businesses think would be useful.

In this report, we:

- Provide information to help to build a picture of businesses in the CMI and S to S areas which are working with the area's natural resources.
- Provide information about what the people running these businesses think about the relationship between their business and nature, what their aspirations are for the future and what support would be most useful, what their perceptions are about the state of nature locally, and the relationship between their businesses and the local community.
- Make proposals for CMI and S to S for potential project development.

### 1.3 Approach to the work

Following an open tender process, CMI and S to S appointed Nearly Wild to carry out the work, starting in early June 2021 and reporting in September 2021.

The Nearly Wild team included a number of locally based associates who have sound knowledge of the local nature-based economy: Rupert Allen; Anne-Marie Carty; Ifan Davies; Huw Denman; Dafydd Morris-Jones; Jane Powell.

The work included:

- Inception meeting, familiarisation and preparation.
- Collation of a list of nature-based businesses in the CMI and S to S area using contacts provided by the CMI and S to S teams, and our own knowledge and networks, resulting in a base list of 100 businesses.
- One-to-one discussions with 55 businesses, by phone, Zoom and face-to-face.
- A meeting with farmers, with over 25 attendees.
- An online meeting with visitor and tourism businesses, with 4 attendees.
- Internal team analysis workshop and additional discussions
- Reporting.



## 2 A BIT ABOUT THE BUSINESSES WE TALKED TO

The information in this section is drawn from our conversations with 55 businesses on a one-to-one basis.

### Location

Gwynedd	4
Carmarthenshire	6
Powys	10
Ceredigion	35

The intention was to sample across the geographical area covered by the two initiatives, particularly in the ‘crossover’ area. We deliberately took a ‘fuzzy boundary’ approach, including businesses that might be located just outside the area but working in some way within it, e.g. selling produce, and which were also keen to take part.

### Types of business

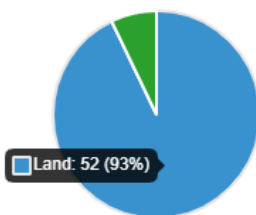
We have assigned the businesses which responded to categories:

Farming	23
Forestry & woodland management	7
Marine	5
Horticulture	6
Visitors & tourism (including outdoor pursuits)	13
Other	8

*Please note that the total is more than 55, reflecting the fact that some respondents talked about more than one business venture.*

Others include: hedging; auctioneer; dressage; willow growing & courses; non-school education; outdoor therapy; honey; photography.

### Natural resource base



Nearly all of the businesses which responded are land-based, 5 are based on the resources of the sea.

### Business control over the resources they use

We wanted to understand the basis on which businesses had access to the natural resources that were the foundation to their businesses.

31 businesses own the land that is the basis for their business. Of these, three also buy in resources; four have additional land that they tenant; and two also harvest from someone else’s land.



Seven businesses have a tenancy arrangement.

Four businesses have a management arrangement.

Three businesses visit the land but have no other arrangement.

One business buys in the resources it needs.

#### **COMMENT**

This suggests that most of the businesses that responded hold control over the natural resources that are the core of their business. However, farmers described how their decision-making is driven – and to some extent also controlled – by agri-environmental policy and the schemes that they have entered into, as well as their experience of market opportunities, and their own philosophies and aspirations.

### **Markets**

We asked businesses to tell us about the location of their direct markets, using the categorisation of ‘local’, ‘further afield in Wales’, ‘other UK’ and ‘overseas’.

Most businesses sell across a variety of market locations, although just 12 sell into an overseas market. 10 businesses sell only into a local market.

For 12 businesses, local markets are the most important, representing between 75 and 100% of their sales.

Conversely, there are as many businesses (13) for whom local markets are much less important, where they represent 25% or less of their sales.

For 8 businesses, the wider UK market is their most important sales outlet. Only 1 business (a sea fishing business for lobster, crab and prawns) noted the overseas market as taking the significant majority of their sales.

Looking at the picture as a whole, the Welsh market (combining ‘local’ and ‘further afield in Wales’) represents nearly two-thirds of all sales (63%); of this, the local market represents over one-third (35%). A further 26% of sales are into the wider UK market, and 10% of sales are to overseas markets.

#### **COMMENT**

This data shows that there is considerable variety in the markets, which is not a surprise considering the many different types of business within the sample. However, sales within Wales are important. We are aware that in many cases, the markets that businesses reported to us are just one step in a longer supply chain, e.g. livestock sales at mart, with further sales then into European markets.

Comments from the interviews show that marketing is an area where business owners often do not feel confident and would like to be able to access marketing support which they feel fits their business size and approach, and relates to their markets.



### Who works in the business

24 of the businesses we spoke to are sole traders.

28 of the businesses have one or more members of their family working in the business.

26 businesses have others working in the business who are not family members.

The employment status of the other people involved in the businesses is broadly shared equally between employees (17 businesses), contractors (14) and other (15). 'Other' was variously described as including casual labour, company directors, sub-contractors, business partners and self-employed.

33 of the businesses have at least one full-time worker. Two of the businesses have more than 10 full-time workers.

Across the businesses, there are 90 full-time positions and 60 part-time; a total of 150 people in direct employment.

#### *COMMENT*

Nearly all of these businesses fall into the category generally termed as 'micro-enterprises' in the UK, i.e. they employ fewer than 10 people.

Notably, just over half of the businesses employ a family member, which suggests that the businesses are significant contributors to an immediate or wider household income.

Although small, the role of these businesses in providing work for others should not be ignored.

We are all aware of the rural – sometimes deep rural – situation of these businesses, and we can see that these businesses provide valuable contributions to local employment and maintaining local livelihoods.





### 3 WHAT WE HEARD FROM THESE BUSINESSES

This section summarises what the businesses told us; there is no analysis in this section.

#### 3.1 How the businesses benefit nature

There is a wide variety of ways in which the businesses described how they benefit nature.

Theme	Action
<p><b>Actively increasing biodiversity</b></p>	<p>New pond; amphibians attracting grass snakes.            Growing berries attracted blackbirds and song thrushes.            Growing lots of flowers attracted pollinators and butterflies, hoverflies for the aphids.            Biodiverse grasslands – no pesticides or fertiliser, traditional breeds of sheep, cattle to keep the grass down.            Mixed grazing for sward biodiversity; cow pats are insect food, and thence bats.            Cattle and sheep grazing maintains a diverse sward.            Flower growing provides a nectar source.            Tackling <i>Molinia</i> through grazing.            Herbal leys for a biodiverse pasture.            Flowers for pollinators, early in spring.            Woodland management to diversify the number of species and make the structure more varied.            Bees pollinating flowers and crops.            Wildlife pond.            Managing for water vole.            Feed the red kites.</p>
<p><b>Habitat maintenance and creation.</b></p>	<p>Pond.            Wildflower meadows.            Streamside wildlife corridors.            Fencing off streams.            Traditional sheep farming to maintain upland habitat e.g. keeping the heather short for breeding birds.            Tree-planting.            Fencing livestock out of woodland.            Double-fencing hedgerows.            Maintaining rhos pasture, not draining.            Sheep off the hill for 6 months in winter for heather regeneration and blanket bogs.            Cut flock size to allow more vegetation on the hill.            Growing barley on lowland for bird habitat.            Coppice rotation.            Encourages flowers for pollinating insects.            Woodland habitat restoration – removing conifers, drystone walling, tree planting, grazing.            Maintaining hedgerows and ancient woodland.            Sheep excluded from woodland and most watercourses.            Cutting down conifer forest and replacing with native hardwoods and a lake.</p>



Theme	Action
	Restoring peat bogs. Creating wildlife corridors through planting a loop of hedgerows.
<b>Maintaining and increasing nesting &amp; roosting sites</b>	Bird boxes Owl boxes Dormouse boxes Bat boxes Left openings for barn owls when renovating buildings Spaces for swallows, bats etc. in the building eaves. Cuts gorse but leaves room for animals to nest. Retaining bat maternity roost.
<b>Minimising inputs</b>	No fertilisers No pesticides Building the soil Working organically. Very little bought-in feed. Very little fertiliser use. More efficient use of water through piping to troughs.
<b>Carbon</b>	Building soil carbon through the grazing regime. Hedge and tree planting for carbon sequestration. Peat bog management - sphagnum mosses sequester carbon.
<b>Water quality</b>	Improving soil structures to retain water. Excluding livestock from watercourses.
<b>Awareness-raising</b>	Drawing people's attention to wildlife. Explaining the landscape. Informal conversations to increase understanding of environmental issues. Promoting 'eldership'. Activity that connects people with nature. Involving local people as volunteers on the land, thus engaging them with nature and sharing values to do with living simply and appreciating nature. Activities that get people out into the countryside and enjoying it. Directs people to RSPB reserves, gives them self-guided walks. Encourage public access and engagement. Educating city children how to learn and respect nature. Education, including native birds, animals and bugs.
<b>Minimising impact</b>	Working in the woods only outside nesting season. Reducing vehicle use. Sourcing and using sustainable equipment, e.g. made using recycled materials. Removing found waste (from the sea). No longer working in the woods in nesting season. All work walked in to the peat bog. Reducing use of plastic. Cutting down on waste. Looking at solar to reduce carbon footprint.
<b>Minimising miles/travel</b>	Use local produce. Keeping bees.



Theme	Action
	<p>Trying to increase local production in order to reduce product brought in from further away.</p> <p>Providing a market close to the place of production.</p>
<p><b>Work practices</b></p>	<p>Reduced sheep numbers.</p> <p>Natural grazing system: rotational grazing of livestock; as far as possible a natural herd – mixed ages, natural behaviours.</p> <p>Organic – no artificial fertiliser, wide variety of crops, careful stock management to prevent run-off, no antibiotics.</p> <p>Regenerative farming – no synthetic fertiliser or pesticides, selective grazing.</p> <p>Providing a market for native breeds whose grazing is more suited to unimproved hill land and which require fewer inputs.</p> <p>Maintaining a species-rich pasture.</p> <p>Growing <i>brassica juncea</i> to remove lead from the soil.</p> <p>Over time, changing the woodland from conifer forest to more varied woodland using a mix of continuous cover, permaculture and forest farming.</p> <p>Environmental policies and practice, e.g. eco cleaning products, solar panels.</p> <p>Now only grazing the lowland marsh area during late summer once grasses and flowers have seeded.</p> <p>Conservation grazing.</p> <p>Agro-ecological principles.</p> <p>Rotational cropping including beans and lupins for pollinators, with sheep and cattle to naturally control worm burden.</p> <p>Use of multi-species leys.</p>

**COMMENT**

The list above is just that; we are reporting all of the different things that the businesses told us that they are doing to benefit nature. Our first impressions were the sheer number and variety of things. This provides helpful evidence to show that many businesses which depend on nature are doing good things for nature. This is a message which could help to combat overly simplistic perceptions that commercial activity and nature are mutually exclusive and it is clear to us that greater nuance is needed on this topic.

To help understand this variety better, we put them into a simple categorisation.

We can see that some of the actions are very small-scale or specific, while others are much ‘bigger picture’, which means that it isn’t possible to make any meaningful comparisons, e.g. comparing putting up a nestbox with a whole farm grazing system does not make sense.

From the interviews, we could get a sense from individuals about the motivations behind their positive actions for nature. For nearly everyone, this didn’t seem to be an ‘add-on’, but something that was part of their beliefs and work ethos, and/or core to their business model. Often, there was a strong sense of responsibility and caring, linked to wanting to pass on knowledge and understanding to others, and to work with others and/or encourage others to take action to benefit nature.

Some of the farm businesses we spoke to described a relationship between the agri-environment scheme they were signed up to and their actions to benefit nature. This was often talked about positively in terms of what it had funded them to do, but also negatively in terms of what it prevented them from doing which they thought would in fact be beneficial for nature.



### 3.2 The relationship between nature and their commercial activities

We asked businesses about how their approach to benefiting nature affects the commercial aspects of their business. We wanted to find out whether the ‘nature element’ is integral to their business model or not, whether it adds value to the business’s products and services, whether it affects their costs and pricing.

For many, working to benefit nature is completely core to their business. For example.....

*“Supporting respectful relationships between people and nature is what the business is about”. (Visitor and tourism business)*

*“This aspect is very important to us personally”. (Equestrian business)*

*“Nature is completely integral to everything. It’s all about being a commercial business, so that I can continue to do the work that is beneficial also to nature”. (Farm business)*

*“We should be integrating ourselves with the environment....having your hands on and in it is what makes it sustainable. Nature is part of us making a business out of the land”. (Floristry business)*

Placing nature at the kernel of their business plays out in a number of different ways, depending on the type of business. For some, it is the practical application of their philosophies and beliefs. For others, their business is an activity which directly and intentionally brings direct benefit to some aspect of nature, e.g. hedgelaying or woodland management improving biodiversity and creating habitat, bees as pollinators, directly connecting people and nature with the express intention of educating people to behave more positively towards nature, managing grasslands in a way that sequesters carbon. And for others, it has an influence on how they operate within their business, e.g. decisions about land management approaches.

For farms that are eligible and have entered into an agreement, it is clear that agri-environment schemes and their payments are a strong driver for farming practice. We heard examples of where agri-environment scheme driven activities were said to have brought about positive changes for nature.

*“Glastir schemes: hedges, fridd, rowan – shelter for animals”.*

*“We never used to have any swifts, now we have a crew of them living here. A recent bat survey identified five types of bat on our land. More wildflowers such as the Ivy Leafed Bellflower. The difference is mainly down to improvements we have undertaken alongside organisations such as the Woodland Trust and schemes such as Glastir”.*

*“Streamside wildlife corridors, woodland, dormouse boxes, bat boxes – Tir Gofal”.*

We also heard examples of where farmers would like to make different choices on their land, where they think that they could have bigger, better impact for nature, but must continue to operate within the requirements set by the scheme.

*“The agri-environment payments associated with conservation practices are an integral part of the holding’s profitability, so benefiting the business but also limiting its ability to innovate, either commercially or in terms of conservation methodology”.*



*“We would like to do more to benefit nature but feel hamstrung in our ability to respond flexibly”.*

*“Now Glastir by reducing stocking rates further has disturbed the balance, and the curlews are gone”.*

*“The business has changed, but stuck with an outdated contract”.*

*“Glastir is not an agile system, needs to be able to respond to pressures”.*

The commercial value of nature to a business was described in various ways, over and above its intrinsic philosophical importance. This included:

- A means to attract customers, a selling point, provides a marketing ‘edge’.
- Enabling the business to meet customer demand for an environmental ethos, e.g. sensitive land management, local food, organic.
- Improving the financial value of the crop/product.
- Income from agri-environment payments.
- Providing an attractive and interesting physical environment/landscape which appeals to visitors.
- Reducing labour and other resource requirements in the longer term, e.g. wildflower meadows replacing regular mowing on glamping and hotel sites.

However, there were also negative aspects of taking a nature-benefiting approach to business, including:

- Higher costs to buy inputs and materials, e.g. peat-free compost, organic feed.
- A longer time until an activity becomes profitable, until higher start-up investment costs are paid off.
- The true cost of labour, where more labour-intensive work is not recognised in the sales prices that can be achieved, or where the skills and expertise are not rewarded through a tender procurement process that prioritises price.
- Losing competitive edge in the market when competing with other businesses which take a less ‘environmentally friendly’ approach, e.g. willing to work in woodlands during nesting season.
- Making it harder to operate some other aspects of the business.

### 3.3 Their perceptions of the state of nature locally and the threats to nature in the area

We heard about both improvement and deterioration; in general terms, and also for various species.

Observations of improvements	Observations of deterioration
More birds & butterflies	Less bird activity
More dolphins over the past year	Less sprats and small fry coming into the beach
More wildflowers e.g. ivy leafed bellflower	Fewer hedgehogs
Swifts now living on the site	Fewer housemartins
More wildflowers	Fewer breeding birds
More rabbits and foxes	Where have all the hedgehogs gone? Saw 1 this year, otherwise none seen for 10 years.
More hares.	Fewer ground-nesting birds
More small mammals.	More <i>Molinia</i> .
Lots of buzzards.	



Observations of improvements	Observations of deterioration
<p>Improved soil quality</p> <p>More insects</p> <p>More birds – kestrels, hobbies, merlins, owls, kites.</p> <p>More curlew.</p> <p>More hares</p> <p>Increase of brown crab, spider crab, prawns, lobster by about 10 times over the last 10 years.</p> <p>Heather on the hills has regenerated.</p> <p>Multi-species hay meadows have replaced perennial rye-grass.</p> <p>New woodland.</p> <p>Increase in badgers, from 1 set in 1990 to 20 now on the holding.</p> <p>More tree species in the woodland.</p> <p>More woodland vegetation at ground level.</p> <p>More butterflies.</p> <p>More woodland birds.</p> <p>More brown trout.</p> <p>More hares.</p> <p>Lots of hedges planted.</p> <p>Watercourses are less polluted.</p> <p>More insects and invertebrates.</p> <p>Pine martins and voles.</p> <p>More wildlife.</p> <p>Vast amount of red kite.</p> <p>More little egret.</p> <p>More bass.</p>	<p>More <i>Molinia</i> and rush.</p> <p>Less flowers and diversity in the meadows.</p> <p>Otters on the site believed to have stopped breeding.</p> <p>Crossbills gone.</p> <p>Meadow pipits lost.</p> <p>Fewer swallows.</p>

**COMMENT**

It is immediately evident that there is not consensus. This list shows that there are some very different perceptions based on different experiences, undoubtedly reflecting different situations in different places. Also, it is likely that some of the respondents are more interested than others, and each person will be approach nature from a different starting point, and this will have coloured the responses.

The cause of change was not always known or identified.

Some of the ‘positive news’ was attributed to management practices or specific conservation measures put into place by the land owner/manager, including: adding habitat; introducing brash piles; hedging, pollarding; stopping use of chemicals; changing to use of regenerative methods; using native breeds; reducing sheep numbers; more hardwood trees planted; reduction in horse grazing; better grass mowing regimes;



Other reasons given relate to government policy and legislation, with associated cropping/harvesting/resource management activity, e.g. in relation to numbers of sea-bass sightings, numbers of crabs, prawns and lobsters, and the requirements set by Glastir.

Reasons proposed for negative changes included: land management requirements related to SSSI status; no longer allowed to leave carcasses for raptors to feed on; cattle no longer profitable; Tir Gofal and Glastir rules; problems elsewhere e.g. river pollution (affecting the sea); Molinia and bracken increases due to increase in atmospheric nitrogen from industry; fewer livestock (so fewer breeding birds and ground nesting birds); Molinia increase due to decline in stocking and removal of cattle from the hill over winter; more monocultures on farm land; under-skilled public sector land managers.

Interviewees were asked about what they thought the biggest threats to nature are at present. The list below presents their answers, using their words. As with the list of observations of nature improvements and deteriorations (above), there is a significant variety and range of answers, reflecting people's own particular perceptions.

The biggest threats to nature were said to be (in no particular order):

- Agricultural and environmental policy – encouraging an extractive approach, not listening to farmers, 'one size fits all' approach, inflexibility, nil grazing stipulations, low priority for wildlife, pressure for efficiency, lack of accountability, lack of engagement.
- Climate change – rising sea levels, flooding,
- Intensive agriculture, over-farming, over-fishing, crop monoculture
- Sheep grazing
- Continued dredging of the seabed for scallops
- Marine litter, particularly fishing nets
- Sewage discharge
- Visitors' car choices
- Lack of understanding and knowledge of the public/visitors – food production, access, public perceptions
- Pesticides
- Largescale tree planting, conifer monoculture
- Badgers
- Lack of grazers
- Lack of predator control
- Lack of recognition of farmer knowledge and expertise
- Windfarm development
- Land purchased for conifer planting
- Procurement system – lack of engagement
- Supermarket strategy.
- Biomass "asset stripping" of trees by industry.

#### *COMMENT*

The variety of responses reflects the very different interests amongst the respondents. These present a starting point for CMI and S to S to be able to understand their concerns, but more work would be needed to identify elements of scale, importance, capacity to have influence etc., and then feed into project planning.



### 3.4 The role the businesses play in the local community & economy

The relationship between businesses, the local community and economy is multi-faceted.

There is a key theme around food, both supplying it and selling it, so that local produce is both supported and made available.

Respondents made the point that it is also really important that the businesses can stay in operation, providing livelihoods for people and enabling individuals and families to stay living in the area, using the facilities and services, and – in economic terms – supporting other local businesses and keeping spend local. Keeping people in the area is linked to maintaining the use of Welsh language and keeping local heritage and culture alive.

There is a strong social element, whether between individual businesses or at a village scale, related to how businesses work with one another e.g. the livestock mart, or how communities can come together socially, e.g. at a community centre.

In contrast to thinking about a resident community, there is another element where the businesses play a key role in enabling visitors to get to know the local area, community, ways of working and living, and its culture.

#### COMMENT

It was evident through the interviews that for these businesses, it is about much more than commercial profitability (although that is fundamental for enabling business resilience and continuity into the future). There is a strong sense of place and belonging, and of being one element of the foundations of that place.

### 3.5 Their aspirations for the future

For CMI and S to S to be able to support these businesses in the future, it is vital to understand what aspirations the businesses hold, what their priorities are, and what might help or hinder them to make these changes.

The aspirations that businesses told us about can be grouped into a number of themes, although the detail is different for different businesses.

THEME	DETAIL
Trialling new things & business development	Apple trees in shelter belts. Agroforestry An Local Energy group (co-operative to optimise energy use & prices using smartmeters and hydro) Novel crops. Composting methods. Charcoal and biochar. Horse tourism. Promoting self-guided walks on the OS Maps app. Hydroponics. Vertical gardening. Seaweed-based sheeting to replace plastic sheeting.
Passing knowledge on to others	Advising others on what will grow well on the land.





THEME	DETAIL
	Sharing results of trials/research with others. Creating awareness of food production and the soil. Enabling more access onto the land. Apprenticeships. Training grants.
Raising awareness about nature, land management and production	Photography exhibitions about Welsh wildlife and landscape. Involve farmers in wider discussions, get people together from different backgrounds. Raise awareness about local food production. Updating awareness and understanding of the public to the current situation.
Following a particular approach	Agroforestry Increasing hill cattle including outwintering Pilot scheme for wildlife-sensitive food production on a former dairy farm – horticulture, hay, improved grasslands and hedges, tree planting. Working woodland without vehicles and with hand tools, including social forestry and public access. More crop rotation, to reduce reliance on chemical inputs. Moving towards holistic grazing and regenerative agriculture. More cattle across the landscape.
Improvements for wildlife	Tree planting Hedge planting Appropriate building maintenance and repairs
Increasing local sales	Build a shop for selling local produce. Be part of a thriving local food culture. Sell Biosphere-branded meat.
Research	Whether mycorrhizal fungi can break down soil particles for plants to use. Farming's contribution to carbon sequestration. Feasibility studies e.g. incentivisation to change to seaweed packaging. Quantifying the benefits of wildlife restoration.
Building local relationships & co-ordination	Open days Discussion groups to support one another. Volunteer work parties More spaces to meet Opportunities to meet and talk to like-minded people and businesses. Co-ordination between forestry workers. Support people working for change in the area. Co-ordinate with other farmers on wildlife restoration.
Reducing environmental impact	Reducing car mileage. Sourcing 'best and greenest' materials. More renewable power generation – solar panels, PV, 12v systems. Instal electric car charging points.



THEME	DETAIL
	Buy an electric car.
Production	Maintaining the same level of food production from the holding. Retaining food production capacity in Wales. Developing crops, e.g. blueberries, hazelnuts, monkey puzzle, sweet chestnut, fruit. Widen people's views about the many functions trees can perform – fruit, biofuel, building materials, beauty. Expanding 'pick your own' produce – pumpkins, veg, fruit.

We tried to get a sense of priority by asking what was the one thing that could most strengthen their business and how it benefits nature. The responses were hugely varied and – as you might expect – quite individually tailored to their particular business, but some common responses emerge:

- Public awareness about land management and food production
- Public policy
- Funding and grant support (linked to policy)
- Land availability locally
- Marketing support
- Longer-term funding and support.

Recognising that there is a whole process related to making change happen, and this is where CMI and S to S could play a role, we wanted to get a sense of how easy or hard the businesses thought that it would be to bring about the sorts of changes they are seeking, and what might help or hinder change.

On the whole, businesses were pessimistic about how easy it is to bring about change, citing many hindering factors beyond their control. However, there were many comments about what could help.

HELPING FACTORS	HINDERING FACTORS
Changing food production to be viewed as an essential service rather than a product/commodity.	Current uncertainty about future agricultural policy.
Legislation to drive forwards production of sustainable materials/equipment.	Cost, particularly of 'environmentally friendly' materials and equipment.
More technical support available for research.	Finances
More interaction with others.	Planning permission.
More volunteers.	Shortage of guidance and expert advice – particularly based on real hands-on understanding.
More public understanding e.g. that hill farming does not have the same negative effect as intensive farming, of agroforestry.	Polarised, over-simplified thinking.
More flexible agri-environment policies.	Poor image of farming.
NRW being easier to work with and sell to.	Concern for media influencing government decision-making.
A facilitator to help people get to know one another, pull together.	NRW's ways of working.
Funding for start-up costs, e.g. cattle handling systems.	Public sector procurement requirements for Forest Stewardship Council certification, and the cost of obtaining this.
Technical support, including IT.	Public procurement favouring lowest price.



HELPING FACTORS	HINDERING FACTORS
Marketing support. Political will. Availability of university advice. More land for growing. More understanding about soil biology.	

**COMMENT**

These responses tell us what the businesses are hoping to do in future or what they would like to be able to do. It also tells us their thoughts about what tends to help and hinder them in their business development. This is vital information for CMI and S to S for making decisions about what business-based or business-focussed interventions to try to put in place. This information has been key in informing the choice of proposed project concepts presented in this report.

Working with businesses is based on an assumption that strengthening these types of businesses also brings benefit to nature, and is therefore a good thing to do. (This may mean that a bit of explaining and some evidence is needed for some stakeholders who may have doubts about a positive relationship between business and nature, or who are uncomfortable about financial support to individual businesses).

Moreover, it is clear that a number of the aspiration articulated by these businesses are very much about activities through which they intend to bring about even more benefit to nature. With this way of working, support from CMI and S to S to these businesses would help to unlock increased nature benefit.



## 4 ANALYSIS

In this section, we present a summary of the Nearly Wild team's subjective analysis of the information gathered.

### **The relationship between businesses, community/culture and nature**

Ultimately, this research showed that these are all intimately intertwined. One doesn't come before any other. One shouldn't happen at the expense of another. One element contributes to the success of the others. The importance lies in recognising the importance of each of the different elements, that they are part of a whole.

For many of the individuals running these businesses, supporting the local community, economy and nature is fundamental to why they do what they do. They see themselves as managing and balancing this complex relationship in a way which enables them and the other elements of the network to sustain others and be sustained themselves. A successful commercial business is a positive and contributing part of a community, culture, place and nature that can continue into the future itself and thereby help to support other elements of that web of activity to continue.

### **Businesses and nature**

All of the businesses that we spoke to could give examples of how they benefit nature. We can't say whether these businesses are any more 'nature-friendly' than any others of that type, or whether these businesses are exhibiting 'best practice'.

However, we can say that these businesses are all doing something positive for nature. It is striking just how much is being done, and the variety of different things. This is something to celebrate, and to share. It is evidence of how important it is to recognise that there isn't a simple 'business bad, nature good' situation.

What these businesses have in common is that they all have a significant relationship with nature and natural resources. For some, it's a direct relationship where they manage, use or harvest the natural resources. For others, it's an indirect relationship but where nature is absolutely core to their business model.

### **The importance of agri-environment and natural resource management policy**

The context for our work was the on-going uncertainty about the direction and content of government agri-environment policy. This is a key driver for commercial decision-making for farm businesses, and without this, several farmers did not see the point of contributing to this work, whilst others felt that they couldn't give very definitive direction about the future or about specific activities or business plans. Any actions which emerge from this work must be structured in such a way that they don't preclude any participants from future government policy initiatives.

Farmers and other land managers hold their own views about the success or otherwise of agri-environment schemes for the management, production and nature value of their land. We did not hear a unified message.

Looking to the future, many of the farm businesses and other land/natural resource managers were keen to be able to influence government policy. At the most basic, this is about having their voices heard and recognised as having value and being respected in relation to policy development. In terms of content of message, there were various proposals for supporting nature within production systems, with a core theme running through that any policy approach should be fit for purpose at a



local level (rather than a blanket 'one size fits all' approach), and recognising local expertise and information.

### **Natural resource management, not just agriculture**

In this work, we tried to hear from a variety of types of businesses that directly manage, use or harvest natural resources, going beyond farming to include forestry, horticulture, fisheries, nurseries and more. Each business has its own perspectives, concerns and aspirations that relate to its own way of working and natural resource relationship. This creates a pattern of distinctiveness across the landscape, as well as the natural resource-based economy.

We heard that these want this distinctiveness to be recognised, so that the many different types of nature-based businesses are included in the perceptions that policy makers, legislators and the general public might have about the impact of commercial activity on nature.

### **Carbon**

Carbon sequestration and offsetting were 'hot topics' with the farm businesses that we spoke to, particularly in terms of wanting others to understand the role that farming can play in sequestration, and concerns that farmers have about land purchases for tree planting for offsetting.

It is not a simple situation. There are nuances to the debate, and there are a myriad of questions and few well evidenced answers.

It was evident that there is a lack of accurate information, for example, what do different agricultural practices achieve in terms of carbon sequestration, and how does this compare to tree planting? But first of all, it is key to identify which are the most important questions to try to answer. This will require more attention.

Also, concerns were expressed that land purchases for tree planting would have negative effects: for local communities, if farming families move away; for water and soil quality, and ecosystem diversity, if there is mass planting and in due course, harvesting; for food production, as land is taken out of crop or livestock production.

### **A productive landscape**

A clear message from farm businesses was the importance of continuing to be able to produce food from the land. There are concerns about limits and threats to production, as well as ideas. Our interviews showed that there are farmers and other producers who have been putting a lot of thought into new or different approaches to food production, who have ideas that they believe would be good for nature and good for business. Some of these are just developing concepts, some of these are more ready to go; some might relate to a single holding, some might need several locations.

However, productivity isn't just about food. The businesses we spoke to want other aspects of productivity to have more visibility, and to have the opportunity to develop ideas relating to increasing other forms of productivity, e.g. fleece and fibre, seaweed packaging.

### **Local-ness**

In any future project initiative, and in national policy, businesses want to see something that is fit for purpose for their local situation.



Also, any project initiative needs to recognise the individuality of an area, and the natural 'locale' of a community which is unlikely to match a specific administrative boundary. In reality, it's a sense of place that is not easily given a precise boundary on a map.

### **The narrative**

There was a recurring thread in our conversations about how to create and contribute to a narrative that gave an accurate picture of the area's natural resource management and use, and one that helped members of the public to understand more about food production.

It is clear that many farmers and land managers feel frustration: feeling unable to get their voices heard where they think it matters; feeling that their work is misunderstood and taken unnecessarily negatively; feeling that their positive contributions to some of the big issues of our day (e.g. climate change, carbon sequestration, local food supply) are not recognised. The question is therefore what can local initiatives such as the Cambrian Mountains Initiative and Summit to Sea offer? What can they do that another organisation or agency is not doing? What are they particularly well placed – or even uniquely – placed to be able to do? What is appropriate given their circumstances?

### **Meaningful research and evidence, locally owned and created**

Several interviewees talked about the need for more knowledge to inform their decision-making, e.g. soil condition, as well as other people's decision-making, e.g. the contribution of grazing to carbon sequestration.

Also, there was a clear message from farmers and other land managers that they felt they had valuable knowledge and skills that could contribute to creating a new knowledge base, but at the moment it felt like a mechanism for this wasn't available.

The value of outside agencies or organisations in research and information-gathering design and delivery was recognised, e.g. by universities or government departments, but there is a strong desire for the relationship between the resource owner/manager and the institution to be more equal, with more mutual respect, and for the resulting data to be jointly owned and used.

### **Supporting businesses to be part of the solution**

The business people who contributed to this work believe that they could be part of solutions to some of the knotty problems that we face at the moment, e.g. farmers' grazing regimes helping to sequester carbon, woodland managers' long-term woodland management plans helping to conserve and improve biodiversity, marine fisheries practices helping to rebuild fish stocks.

There is also appetite for adopting business practices which would be less environmentally damaging, and (as many already are) working in ways which encourage others to have more awareness and understanding of nature and natural resources.

At the same time, we know that there are individuals, businesses, and organisations which – for various reasons – want to take positive action. The CMI and S to S initiatives sit within a bigger context – nature recovery, climate change, sustainable communities, agricultural policy, food production, to name just a few. From local to national, individuals to agencies, there is support for the kind of direction that S to S and CMI are taking or looking into; the big question is how to harness it, so that there can be a win-win situation.



However, at present, there is no mechanism in place that could connect the nature-positive businesses that we met during this work to any of the individuals, corporates or organisations who want to be part of tackling these big knotty problems and are already putting money into it. How could the farmers, foresters and other natural resource owners and managers of this area benefit from those people and organisations who have the will and the means to do ‘good things’ for nature and the environment, whilst local ownership and control is kept? Could CMI and S to S help to build this mechanism, perhaps as some kind of brokerage linking potential supporters to the ‘do-ers’.

This would be experimental, and long-term, and with no certainty of success. A ‘rewarded risk’ approach could be helpful in thinking this through. By this, we mean thinking about how a relatively risky project or activity would be worth supporting if its success would bring a significant amount of added value, i.e. that extra risk would be worth it because it could make a really important difference if it’s successful. This is particularly relevant when we consider the enormous pressures that we face at the moment in relation to climate change, meeting net zero commitments and achieving nature recovery.

We can take the example of carbon, which was something ‘top of mind’ for several of the businesses who engaged in this work. They told us about threats/downsides including: farms selling out to corporates with a single aim of tree-planting and therefore a threat of loss of biodiversity, loss of food production, negative impacts on rural communities etc.; national policy-makers making important decisions about financial support to agriculture and climate change without accurate information; the small farmers and other land managers in the local area being unable to access financial resources targeted at carbon sequestration (whatever the source of that finance).

But on the other hand, we heard about a variety of opportunities for potentially significant value creation: sequestering carbon through continued land management (with monitoring/research to evidence this), contributing to national efforts to tackle climate change and knowledge about monitoring methods; making use of existing land and natural resource management operations, therefore building on existing resources and good practice; retaining farmers and their families on the land and in the community, and therefore continuing to be able to make use of their knowledge and skills, and retaining the wider contributions to the community and economy, and continuing the area’s heritage and culture; continuing to produce food and other products within the local area.

S to S and CMI may wish to position themselves as initiatives that are prepared to take bold action towards tackling the really knotty, but immensely important, issues of climate change, net zero carbon and nature recovery, and supporting innovative – and therefore – risky activities. There are businesses in the area who believe they could be part of a solution, if they have the support to try out their ideas.

### **Fit with existing initiatives and work programmes**

Any direction and ideas that come out from this work need to be considered in the light of who’s already out there and what they are doing. What can they take forwards? What falls between the gaps? Is there a need for S to S and/or CMI to do anything, and if so, what? Which gaps are CMI and/or S to S suited to?

Our impression is that CMI and S to S could fill a gap at the ‘cluster’ scale, i.e. working over an area which brings together multiple natural resource owners and managers. We don’t see an ideal cluster



size, rather a situation of bringing together whatever the right grouping is for the purpose, and bringing together different clusters for different purposes.

Using examples raised by contributors to this work, there could be a cluster of farmers within an area that is a meaningful community/landscape for them, and which is logical in a landscape sense, e.g. a catchment. This would bring together those farmers with a particular interest in trying out a new working relationship to join up lowland and upland farms for mutual production benefits. Or there could be a cluster of woodland managers and woodland product businesses over a relatively large area, bringing in enough resource and commercial market to make shared milling equipment viable, and sharing problems and solutions around product marketing.

The other aspect of fit with other initiatives and programmes relates to where future work projects are hosted, which entity holds accountability. Is there an existing body that would work, or is a new entity with a different set-up needed? This is not a question that can be answered immediately, as it will depend on what decisions are made about what project work to take forwards through S to S's ongoing co-productive development work and CMI's future planning, and what the underlying principles are for that project work. For example, the governance of a truly co-productive and process-driven initiative is very different to a traditional grant-supported project-based initiative; an initiative that engages and supports individual business enterprises is very different to one that has purely charitable objectives.

### **What's in a name?**

In this case, quite a lot! Whatever is done in future needs to feel right to its stakeholders and participants.

Summit to Sea had a difficult start, and its turnaround and real potential for a positive future would be supported by a different name.

Future work is likely to be done through a co-productive approach, and the name would ideally reflect that collaboration in a new name that is owned by the new collaborators, whether this is S to S and CMI, or a wider – or different - collaboration. Realistically, with several of those collaborators being existing initiatives, each with their own 'baggage', so a name that is new to all may be a good thing.

### **Visible change**

The history of projects coming and going, with variable success in the eyes of stakeholders, means that at least a part of the future work which follows from this needs to be swiftly visible. We recognise that there are potential activities which will take a while to make happen, particularly if they are taken forward in a co-productive manner where the process is as important as the product. However, there will be reputational damage that would negatively affect the ability of the initiatives to deliver on the longer-term work if local stakeholders don't see some changes on the ground and in the shorter-term.

Recognising that there is a suite of potential project options coming out of this work, it is feasible for CMI and S to S to pick out some 'quick wins', and through this to create support and goodwill for the longer-term work.





## 5 PROPOSED PROJECT CONCEPTS

As external contractors, we are not in a position to say what projects that CMI and S to S should take forwards, and even more so given the community development and co-productive approaches used by each of the initiatives.

However, we can make proposals for project concepts that CMI and S to S can then use as the next step in their decision-making processes. These proposals have been informed by the interviews and workshops undertaken throughout this work. Our intention in this section of the report is to introduce each concept, together with some ideas for delivery and also looking at what difference these projects could make (potential outcomes and impacts).

### 5.1 Principles for support

If CMI and S to S are to be of real, practical help to these businesses, and at the same time work towards positive change for nature in the area, we suggest that there are certain ways of thinking and working – principles perhaps - that would be important.

**Businesses need to be able to act as businesses** e.g. swift decision-making, reactive to change, proactive to enable business development, subject to the demands of cashflow, competitive within a market, seeking a profit etc. Anything that CMI or S to S does should not undermine a local business's ability to operate effectively.

**Long-term commitment** to match the long-term perspectives of a business owner aiming to maintain a robust and resilient business which contributes meaningfully – or is their entire - livelihood.

But...**Be agile** to be able to support the businesses as they need to flex or change direction to meet changing circumstances.

**Strong business, strong nature** i.e. recognising that if these businesses survive and thrive, they help nature in the local area to survive and thrive. Help to debunk the myth that all business is bad for nature!

**Mutual respect, listening to one another.** Recognising the value of what each player brings to the table.

**Steering clear of Government policy-supported action.** Not replicating any support offered through Government support. Ensuring that CMI and S to S support doesn't jeopardise a business's chance to access government support.

**Aligning with local landscapes and communities.** Understanding the localities that people and their businesses 'belong to', associate with and value. Respecting and working with these invisible relationships, histories, geographies and cultures.

**Visible action.** Some work that provides visible evidence to demonstrate CMI and S to S supported work in action, and early on in the process.



## 5.2 Project concepts

Businesses raised a wide variety of suggestions for the types of changes they want to make that they think will help both their business and nature.

We used our discussions with them to tease out their thoughts on where CMI and/or S to S could potentially play a useful role in furthering their ideas and aspirations. What could CMI and S to S bring that the businesses couldn't do themselves? And that currently no-one else is doing either? What interventions or ways of working would actually help, and which might hinder?

Through our internal analysis process, themes began to emerge, and we have developed these into potential project concepts. Each one would need further investigation and development, and – in tune with CMI and S to S's ways of working – would best be done with the businesses, building on this initial expression of concept. Please note that they aren't mutually exclusive projects, but rather form an interesting overlapping set of ideas (presented below in no particular order).



Figure 1: Summary of Project Concepts



# Natural Resource manager/ user inclusive research

## Issue/background

- Farmers feel that their knowledge tends not be valued, particularly in relation to their ability to influence policy or support package design.
- Land managers are keen to have more data about their holding, and want to be part of owning that data.
- Land managers' priorities for improved data include biodiversity, soil health and particularly carbon sequestration.

## Solution/project concept

- Farmer / land manager led 'priority topic' research which incorporates their local knowledge.
- Partnerships and collaborations with technical experts and resources
- Work with Welsh Government to provide knowledge-based input to development of funding mechanisms and policy.

## Outcomes/impacts

- Land managers begin to influence agri-environment policy, and feel valued and involved in decision making processes.
- Land managers are part of the ownership of data relating to their holdings.
- There is a growing body of data for the priority topics for land managers, which can then be shared for wider benefit.



# Landscape-scale Nature Improvements

## Issue/background

- Many business owners are taking active steps to promote nature improvements and noticing the difference. They welcome support for this.
- Farmers have had mixed experiences with the conditions set for their land management through government agri-environment schemes; some positive, some less so. They don't want to do anything with S to S and CMI that might affect their ability to take part in whatever scheme comes next.
- The 'gap' seems to be in support at a larger scale than an individual holding, and which enables holdings of any size to take part; there is some appetite for collaboration across holdings.

## Solution/project concept

- Identification of suitable collaboration areas, e.g. a catchment, or an existing collaborative group of farmers
- A project to tackle a self-identified, locally important nature priority (recognising the need for long-term, multi-year support).
- An opportunity for trialling more innovative and potentially risky solutions.

## Outcomes/impacts

- Land owners/managers are instrumental in bringing about nature improvements, whilst also maintaining robust commercial operations.
- Measurable positive changes to a particular nature priority.
- Valuable learning about suitable new approaches for nature improvement.



# Supporting businesses to be part of the carbon solution

## Issue/background

- There is a considerable interest from the public, conservation bodies and business in largescale stewardship for finding carbon solutions.
- There is concern from farmers and other landowners about the potential impact of carbon sequestration activities on land management practices, food production and community life.
- There is currently insufficient evidence about the potentially valuable role of grazing and pasture in carbon sequestration.

## Solution/project concept

- CMI and S to S to support farmers and land managers to deliver carbon solutions (reduction and capture).
- CMU and S to S to take an active role in carbon solutions knowledge gain and transfer in the local area through supporting research, trials and information dissemination.
- Investigate how CMI and S to S could play a more direct role in carbon solutions, e.g. the potential for a brokerage role; a mechanism to bring supporters (individuals or business) and land owners/managers to combine resources and work together towards multiple outcomes including nature recovery and carbon sequestration.

## Outcomes/impacts

- A growing body of evidence and knowledge about the role of grazing and pasture in carbon sequestration, relevant to the local area.
- Land owners and managers are partners in gaining this knowledge.
- Locally based carbon solutions are found which work both for existing landowners/managers and the local communities, as well as wider society by contributing to tackling climate change.



# Productivity – in many dimensions

## Issue

- Concern that new agri-environment policy may not place sufficient value on local food production.
- Concern that members of the public lack understanding about food production.
- Barriers to trialling new things, e.g. new crops, new approaches to production.
- The need for awareness that production from natural resources encompasses more than food, e.g. fibre, timber, nursery crops.
- Some producers lack confidence and ability in marketing.

## Solution/project concept

- Take farmers' and other producers' voices into the policy arena, underpinned by accurate local evidence, including about the different nature-based production businesses in the area.
- Build an active network and collaboration of local producers to promote and realise the development of local supply chains.
- Provide a support mechanism for trials of new ways of working, scaling up and learning.

## Outcomes/impacts

- Farmers and other producers feel there is a locally based mechanism to get their voices heard where it matters.
- Understanding is growing, and producers see a more accurate reflection of their reality.
- Buyers (individual and larger scale) can readily find local produce.
- The area becomes known for its nature-based, 'nature positive' economy.
- Trials are leading to effective solutions for businesses, nature and climate.



# Build and Promote the Narrative

## Issue/background

- Perceived lack of public understanding about the positive role of farming and other natural resource managers in nature conservation, carbon capture, food production and community resilience.
- Concern that media messaging tends to be over-simplified, losing valuable nuancing.
- Businesses feel they have something to say with expertise and experience but they are not being heard.

## Solution/project concept

- Involve businesses in building and maintaining an evidence base, as a source for accurate messaging.
- CMI & S to S are pro-active in creating messaging and build new narrative.
- Provide a means for businesses to take their voices into debates and decision-making; identify effective channels.

## Outcomes/impacts

- Key stakeholders and more of the public understand nuances around land management, nature, food production etc.
- Problem-solving at grass-roots reaches and influences more widely, with businesses' knowledge valued.
- There is accurate information available in the public arena.
- Members feel that they have a voice and present responses and solutions to relevant bodies, media outlets and agencies.
- CMI and S to S are seen as 'go to' sources for information.



# ‘Environmentally friendly’ equipment, materials & practices

## Issue/background

- There is a high level of awareness and interest in running businesses in a way which is positive towards nature and the environment, and much good practice is already built into business models.
- Whilst there is interest in further development and trialling new things, barriers include cost and access to sound information.
- Besides the intrinsic benefit of working this way (which is often the driver), there can also be commercial added value.

## Solution/project concept

- Identifying things where a collaborative approach could help, e.g. collective buying, sourcing advice, setting up a trial.
- Facilitate shared learning between businesses about what works.
- Use the learning from this to contribute to the narrative being developed and disseminate about how local businesses benefit nature.

## Outcomes/impacts

- New solutions which enable businesses to operate in a way which is positive for nature and the environment are found, learning shared and adopted more widely across the area. Whilst also delivering commercial benefit.
- Measurable benefits to local nature and the environment.
- Supporting businesses to adapt to the effects of climate change and enabling them to contribute to mitigations.





### 5.2.1 COMMENTARY

The project concepts proposed above are a first step, described in a way that enables S to S and CMI to take them back into their wider development processes and use as a basis for productive discussion with stakeholders.

With the co-productive and engaged ways of working used by both initiatives, it is vital that the right stakeholders for each project concept can now be actively involved in taking these forwards. In this way, the all-important priorities and detailed delivery plans belong to them and are driven by them.

There are a few additional considerations that we would like to provide for these stakeholders to bear in mind as they move forwards with these concepts. We cover these here.

- Creating an accurate evidence base will be a result and a resource across multiple project activities. It is inevitable that there will be tension between what is desirable from an academic scientific perspective, what farmers or other land managers need for their own management purposes, and what is needed to provide accurate and effective messaging for the public or other external stakeholders. We believe that it's important to recognise this tension from the beginning, and then to discuss what is workable in practical terms, and what is therefore an effective compromise for different parties.
- Any comms work ('getting the messages out there') needs a defined purpose and audience. What are we trying to achieve with a particular communication or comms campaign? To provide a clear brief, CMI and S to S need to decide their intentions, thinking about big picture goals, and also during delivery at a more targeted level. Big picture could be: active campaigning/ advocacy; targeted messaging on a small number of key topics to put accurate information into the public arena, e.g. land management and carbon; getting the voice of farmers and land managers heard by policy- and decision-makers.
- And following on from this, effective comms work is time-consuming and specialised. For these reasons, we suggest that it would be worthwhile considering a dedicated role.
- In terms of ambitions to change people's understanding about land management and food production, CMI and S to S are extremely unlikely to change national awareness about food production, but it is possible that they could bring about local change. And indeed, that's where CMI and S to S would have a niche, and situational advantage.
- In relation to trials for products and new ways of working, contributors to this research suggested various ideas; undoubtedly there are many more out there, so a targeted piece of work/call for ideas would be necessary. CMI and S to S would also need to work out a process for deciding which ideas to support.
- And in all of this, there is a fundamental question about what CMI and S to S can offer or do which others can't. What is their niche? What are the 'knotty problems' that other agencies or business support programmes are not tackling?



## 6 CONCLUSION

In this work, we have focussed on businesses that have a relationship with natural resources where that relationship is completely fundamental to their commercial activity. Whatever the terminology used – nature-based, nature-positive, nature-benefiting, etc. – there is a basic understanding that we are talking about businesses that have a direct relationship with natural resources through using them or harvesting them, and businesses that have an indirect relationship but where the natural resources are still core to the business model.

We have explored the hypothesis that these are businesses which are in essence ‘doing good things for nature’ through their commercial activity, and found that each business can give many examples of the ways in which they are benefiting nature. There is considerable potential to build on what they are already doing and there is appetite to do so. We look at how to translate this into action through the project concepts that we propose.

We believe that it could be very helpful for CMI and S to S to look at the potential of working with ‘nature-based/nature positive/nature-benefiting’ businesses. In this way, CMI and S to S can engage with and work with the businesses that have common interests to themselves (not just nature, but also community, culture, heritage, livelihoods), thereby harnessing the energy and activity of the individuals who run these businesses, for mutual benefit. It is likely that many of these businesses are planning for a long-term future because they represent people’s livelihoods (and in the case of farms for example, the livelihoods of future generations), so they offer a long-term vehicle for delivering nature benefit.

However, there is also the potential for S to S and CMI to use this work as an evidence base, to move ahead from this and really ‘grab it by the horns’ and take the attitude that these businesses offer serious potential as a means to help the two initiatives towards the most important goals of all – tackling climate change, reaching net zero, driving nature recovery. This makes sense when you understand the common ground that exists: to nurture local communities, to have productive landscape, to enable nature recovery and capture carbon.

We believe that there is an appetite amongst these businesses to work collaboratively, with one another, and with CMI and S to S, to take forward ideas that came out during this work.

The next step is for S to S and CMI to integrate the findings and proposals from this work into their wider planning and development work.

**We hand the baton back to you, to take forwards in collaboration with your local businesses.**