

Collaboration and Incentives – Achieving environmental benefits at large spatial scales through Environmental Land Management

Final Report

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List of acronyms

AES	Agri-environment scheme
CS	Countryside Stewardship
CSFF	Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund
E.L.M	Environmental Land Management (scheme)
FCN	Farming Community Network
NFU	National Farmers Union
PCF	Princes Countryside Fund
TFA	Tenant Farmers Association

Executive Summary and Recommendations

This project aimed to identify ‘what works’ in farmer collaboration for environmental delivery at larger spatial scales. The first phase of the research took the form of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of collaborative mechanisms, incentives and alternative approaches used to achieve environmental outcomes at large spatial scales (see Ingram et al. 2020). This report presents the results of the empirical phase of the project, which covered 15 case studies of large spatial scale coordinated and collaborative land management initiatives and included in-depth interviews with 69 land managers, facilitators, coordinators and a range of other stakeholders. Throughout the report we distinguish between *collaborative* approaches, where some form of joint-working between land managers occurs, and *coordinated* approaches, where activities are organised and directed by a facilitator but carried out on an individual basis by land managers who may never directly interact with each other.

This research has revealed rich insights into the operation and effectiveness of a range of different approaches to delivering environmental management at scale i.e. beyond the individual farm holding. The key findings from our analysis are:

- There is no single ‘blueprint’ for delivery at larger spatial scales. Different approaches suit different environmental issues and local circumstances, and attract land managers with different dispositions. For example, those less keen on collaboration might be happy with a coordinated or auction approach. Therefore a key design principle for E.L.M is to offer the flexibility for different approaches to be supported according to local requirements.
- It is clear from this research that farmer collaboration is not strictly necessary to deliver environmental outcomes at larger spatial scales. Coordinated and auction-based approaches deliver environmental management at scale with little or no farmer-to-farmer interaction. However, collaborative approaches are associated with a range of benefits and outcomes over and above the delivery of specific environmental management practices. These include social and personal benefits including reducing social isolation, providing supportive spaces for discussing agri-environmental management and lots of mutual learning and gaining of knowledge through groups, speakers/discussions, visits, and advice.
- Both collaborative and coordinated approaches have a role to play in achieving environmental benefits at large spatial scales through E.L.M, with each potentially serving slightly different purposes. For instance, collaborative farmer groups (either led by farmers themselves or third parties) may act to harness interested farmers’ enthusiasm and enhance the depth and quality of their environmental management, whereas coordinated approaches (whether led by arms-length bodies, private stakeholders, partnerships or communities) may be effective at securing broad participation from land managers, ensuring that specific actions are taken across a target area.
- Effective facilitation is essential for successful collaboration. The attributes of an effective facilitator were seen to be trust, knowledge, excellent organisational skills and passion. If collaborative approaches are to become more common there will be a need for more effective facilitators and for facilitators to be able to learn from each other.
- Similarly, farmers often learn best from other farmers. They have an inherent understanding of each other and speak the same language. It is important therefore to consider how the experiences of farmers in collaborative and coordinated initiatives can be used to encourage farmers to think about taking part in these forms of agri-environmental management.
- Environmental monitoring should not be seen as an expensive add-on but as an essential part of effective delivery. This should include feedback to farmers to create positive feedback loops, reinforcing positive

environmental behaviours in addition to identifying where additional steps need to be taken. The emphasis on public money for public goods means that farmers are increasingly aware of the need to be seen to be delivering public goods and this requires evidence. Clearly this raises challenges in the context of limited budget and a desire to maximise spend on environmental delivery.

- Time and timescale pose challenges both to the land managers delivering environmental management on the ground and policymakers, as timescales for achieving environmental gain may be out of sync with usual policy and funding cycles. In this context it is important to recognise the passage of time required for beneficial environmental change. The amount of time will vary according to the specific environmental attribute being addressed and the starting point (i.e. how much degradation has occurred) but a timescale of decades may be more appropriate than five year agreements in certain circumstances. In addition, a true commitment to collaborative group work requires sufficient lead-in time, typically 12 to 18 months. This might be a challenge in terms of public spending, as it may appear that nothing much is happening during the group establishment and building stage. It is also important to build in flexible time schedules to allow for the adaptation of farming systems (which in the livestock sector in particular is not quick) and the delivery of management.
- Evidence from this research suggests that many farmers are increasingly willing to deliver a wide range of public goods and are frequently willing to collaborate to do so. Of course, the participants in this research were already interested in environmental management so further work is required to test out the appetite for collaborative and coordinated approaches in the wider farming population. There is evidence (from our research) that non-environmental farmer groups may be interested in environmental delivery and this is an area that deserves further attention.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations derive from this research. Most relate specifically to the design of E.L.M at larger spatial scales but we also include recommendations on the importance of adopting the principle of flexibility in design and delivery; communications, and monitoring and skills development (which are also relevant to the design of the wider E.L.M programme) because these themes emerged strongly from our research and take on particular pertinence in a collaborative or coordinated group context.

Recommendations for ELM Design

- Support both coordinated and collaborative initiatives within E.L.M, as each are appropriate in different circumstances.
- Prioritise funding an effective facilitator with appropriate skills and experience as this is key to success.
- Expand the use of online auctions for delivering specific management objectives, as these are cost-effective, require less farmer commitment and can reach a wide audience, including those who do not normally engage with AES.
- Utilise support (both financial and in-kind) for initiatives from stakeholder organisations by enabling and encouraging the creation of partnerships where appropriate (e.g. in the development and delivery of coordinated initiatives).
- Encourage land manager involvement in the setting of group objectives and delivery plans, regardless of whether collaborative/coordinated delivery models are led by stakeholder organisations or farmers themselves.
- Keep landscape-scale options/initiatives as simple as possible and streamline application processes.
- Provide financial incentives for participating in collaborative/coordinated management wherever possible, particularly where the aim is to involve a high proportion of farmers in a specific area and/or land

managers with little prior experience of environmental schemes and initiatives. It is also important to integrate non-financial incentives into the design of initiatives, for example training, one-to-one advice and free environmental monitoring/feedback at the farm level.

- Avoid group agreements with shared liability, except possibly in the case of small and well-established groups where trust between members has developed, or common land where commoners are used to working together.

Recommendations for a flexible approach to design and delivery

- Maximise flexibility wherever possible, particularly in terms of how land managers will deliver objectives. The development of formal structures and planning frameworks within collaborative/coordinated initiatives remain useful for providing focus and keeping work on track, however, and should be encouraged.
- Allow flexibility over agreement length (including both short and long term commitments) depending on the type of management and environmental objective that is being sought and/or provide opportunities for follow-on funding. Long-term agreements should build in contingencies to account for major shifts within the farm business (e.g. changes in ownership).

Recommendations for communications

- Ensure communication around opportunities for landscape-scale working uses appropriate language that is clear and concise. In particular, the level of joint-working required from farmers should be clear.
- When communicating with land managers, recognise that they will be motivated to engage in initiatives by a range of different factors including environmental interest, financial incentives, improving farming practices, regulatory changes and social and reputational benefits.
- Provide funding and resources (e.g. ideas, design and information templates, sources of advice/support, case studies) to assist groups with voluntary public engagement activities, as this can result in significant social benefits both for farmers and local communities.
- Use existing farmer groups and networks (both environmentally and non-environmentally focused) as a conduit for communicating opportunities related to ELM and landscape-scale initiatives.

Recommendations for monitoring and skills development

- Support and encourage initiatives to develop clear targets, baseline data and monitoring systems to quantify and capture environmental (and other) outcomes, and ensure results are fed back to farmers. Interim environmental indicators can also help to motivate farmers where long time-spans prevent clear outcome measurements.
- Build environmental monitoring into the framework of a collaborative E.L.M component by providing appropriate funding and resources (e.g. templates, guidelines, ideas), including for monitoring delivered by farmers and local community or conservation groups.
- Enable flexibility by allowing groups to determine the type of monitoring most suited to their specific context.

Recommendations for further research

- Further research should be undertaken to establish the environmental, economic and social additionally associated with collaborative and coordinated approaches.

- Additional research is required to establish the likely willingness and capacity to participate in collaborative and/or coordinated initiatives amongst the wider farming community (i.e. beyond the existing participants who took part in this research).
- The extent to which farmers' involvement in setting objectives and monitoring environmental and social outcomes is not fully understood and requires further research.

1. Introduction

The introduction of Defra's Environmental Land Management programme (E.L.M) is part of the most ambitious and radical reform to domestic agricultural policy for decades. E.L.M aims to include opportunities for groups of farmers and land managers to work together to deliver environmental outcomes at larger spatial scales. Against this background this project aimed to identify 'what works' in farmer collaboration for environmental delivery at larger spatial scales. The first phase of the research took the form of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of collaborative mechanisms, incentives and alternative approaches used to achieve environmental outcomes at large spatial scales (see Ingram et al. 2020). This report presents the results of the empirical phase of the project which was based around structured and semi-structured interviews with land managers participating in collaborative environmental initiatives, project facilitators and a range of other stakeholders.

Following a short discussion of the methodology used in the fieldwork, analysis of contextual data (e.g. participant characteristics) and an overview of the case study initiatives, the remainder of the report is structured around three main sections: **Section A** examines the factors determining success in coordinated/collaborative initiatives, including governance arrangements, process issues (e.g. application processes), support, motivation and incentives, environmental monitoring, timescales, and cost-effectiveness. **Section B** focuses on the range of outcomes arising from the case study initiatives (including environmental, personal and social, economic and public engagement related outcomes). **Section C** summarises the analysis by case study type, drawing out the key strengths and weaknesses associated with each type of coordinated/collaborative approach. **Section D** explores wider considerations for E.L.M collaborative design emerging from the interview conversations. The report ends with a discussion of the key conclusions that can be drawn from the research, including a number of recommendations for Defra to consider when designing collaborative/coordinated elements of E.L.M. These are based on the evidence from both the REA and research interviews reported here.

2. Methodology

2.1 The Rapid Evidence Assessment

The Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) set out to review the strength of evidence for which collaborative mechanisms and incentives 'work' in terms of achieving social, environmental outcomes at large spatial scales. Overall a total of 77 peer review articles and 39 grey literature reports were judged to have met the REA's inclusion criteria.

During the critical appraisal stage a number of factors were progressively identified within two categories *Determinants and Outcomes*. These reflect the key characteristics or indicators being reported in the evidence reviewed. *Determinants* are key determining factors that affect the success of approaches. The majority of studies report on these factors, which affect the *process* of the intervention. *Outcomes* are key outcome factors that describe the impact and outputs (different approaches to and indicators for assessing and describing the impact of an intervention are utilised in the evidence). This provided the framework for the interview schedules and the analytical framework. In this report, determinants are primarily discussed in Section A and outcomes in Section B. Section C provides a summary of the strengths and weaknesses associated with each case study type, whilst Section D covers wider considerations for collaborative E.L.M design that emerged from the interviews.

2.2 Case study selection

In order to fulfil the requirements of the research, a case study approach was adopted in order to explore participant's experience of a range of different types of collaborative/coordinated initiatives. A long-list of potential case study initiatives was compiled and, in consultation with Defra, subsequently reduced down to the final case study sample of 15 initiatives. All initiatives selected had, either historically or currently, the fundamental objective of landscape-scale environmental delivery.

A variety of criteria were employed in case study selection. Informed by the REA, the principle selection criteria were i) type of collaborative/coordinated mechanism and ii) type of incentive and/or payment approach. A number of other determinants identified in the REA also informed case study selection, including a range of mechanisms across Prager's (2015) collaboration-coordination governance spectrum (see Figure 2.1), to ensure as far as possible inclusion of top-down and bottom-up approaches, as well as spatially-coordinated and collaborative initiatives. The sample of initiatives reflected a range of different group sizes, areas of spatial coverage, length of establishment and environmental objectives.

Separate interview schedules (with broadly comparable content) were designed for land managers, facilitators/project managers and stakeholders. The following topics were covered in the interviews: contextual questions about the interviewee and their farm business/organisation; experience of agri-environment schemes; involvement in collaborative/coordinated environmental management initiative(s); perceptions of group/initiative effectiveness and success; impacts on the interviewee and their business; and opinions on potential collaborative group policy scenarios¹.

Between 2 and 4 land managers from each initiative were interviewed (via MS Teams, Zoom or telephone due to the Covid-19 restrictions at the time) as well as a facilitator or project manager (in one case 2 facilitators were interviewed). In addition, 12 stakeholders associated with either organisations or businesses experienced in dealing with agricultural and environmental management were recruited (some of whom also

¹ The hypothetical policy scenarios were designed by Defra colleagues specifically for the purposes of this research in order to stimulate feedback on different ways of supporting collaborative working. The scenarios did not represent Defra policy and this was made clear to participants.

had direct experience of facilitating farmer groups). Interviews were conducted by a team of six researchers and were recorded (with consent) and professionally transcribed for subsequent analysis. The interviews took place during September and October 2020.

Prior to the main survey a pilot interview was conducted with one land manager and one facilitator. The fieldwork was undertaken with the approval of the Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences and International Studies of the University of Exeter.

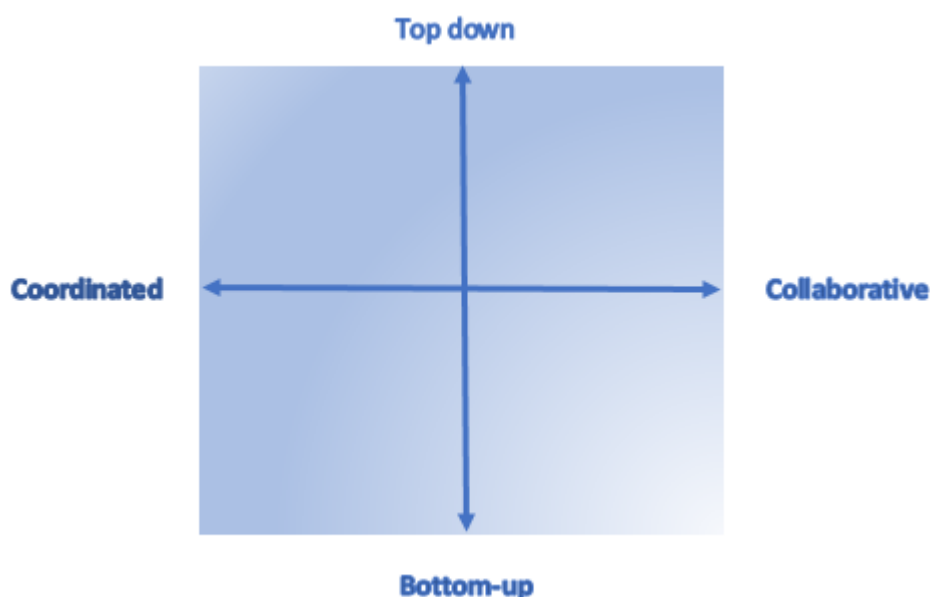


Figure 2.1: The coordination-collaboration spectrum, integrating a top-down – bottom up spectrum
(Adapted from Prager 2015: 60)

2.3 Analysis

The majority of interview questions were open-ended. Responses to these questions were coded in order to identify and organise key themes within the data, using the computer software package NVivo as an assistive tool. A coding framework was developed that, where possible, aligned with the format of the REA (i.e. identifying key determinants, outcomes and lessons for E.L.M), and which could be used by multiple analysts to ensure a consistent approach. Each transcript was initially coded by one analyst before being reviewed by another in order to provide investigator triangulation. This process involved all members of the interview team. Analysis of responses to closed questions and Likert scales was conducted by a single analyst using Excel.

2.4 Results

The results of the analysis are discussed in detail in the following sections. Qualitative research tends to be quite 'wordy', drawing on quotes to illustrate the point being made. In order to cut down the length of the report we have, as far as possible, used single illustrative quotes. However, unless stated otherwise there are multiple sources of evidence for each point being made.

3 Participant characteristics

In total, 69 people were interviewed as part of this research. This included 16 facilitators, 12 wider stakeholders and 41 land managers (12 from CSFF farmer groups, 11 from non-CSFF farmer groups, 7 from auction-based initiatives, 6 from large-scale coordinated initiatives, and 5 from community-led initiatives). Information about respondent characteristics were collected for the 41 farming respondents in order to provide a picture of the types of farming systems included in the research. This data is presented here. No equivalent information was collected for the facilitator and stakeholder respondents, as this was not deemed relevant to the findings.

3.1 Farm size, type and tenure

The land managers that we spoke to primarily represented larger farms, with 26 of the 41 being based on farms over 200 hectares in size and no-one representing a farm smaller than 50 hectares. 9 farms were between 100 and 200 hectares and 6 were between 50 and 99 hectares in size. As a qualitative research study, the sample was not intended to be representative of the wider UK farming population but it is nevertheless important to bear in mind that issues pertinent to environmental collaboration among small farms may be underrepresented in the findings. The facilitators and stakeholders that were interviewed did, however, have extensive knowledge and understanding relating to a wide variety of farms so were able to offer a broader perspective on the themes discussed.

Farming respondents represented a range of farm types, although no interviewees were based on pig or horticulture farms (see Figure 3.1). LFA sheep/beef (grazing livestock) farms were particularly well represented, in part due to the inclusion of four upland areas in the case study selection.

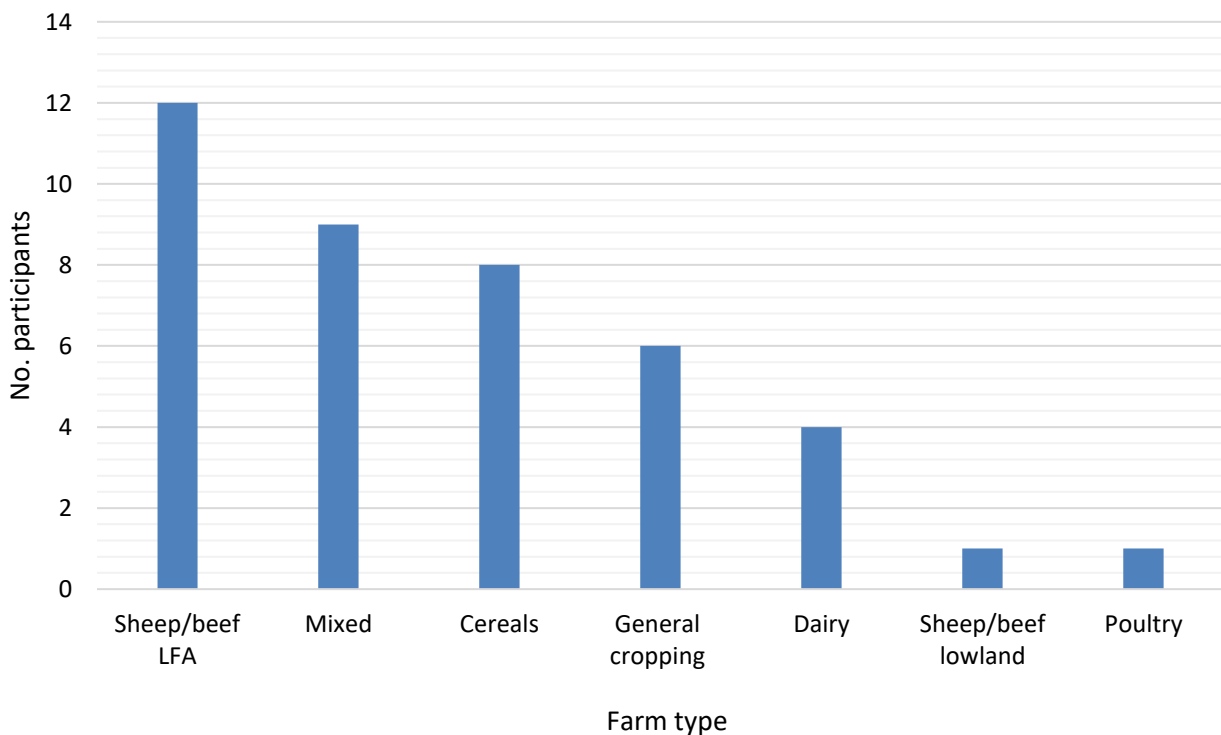


Figure 3.1: Respondent farm type

Both owned and rented farms are well represented within the data. 20 of the 41 land managers were from farms that were either wholly or mainly owned, and 15 were from farms that were either wholly or mainly

rented. 1 farm had an equal split of owned and rented land, 4 had 'other' tenure arrangements' and 2 did not answer the question.

3.2 Business structure and labour

The majority (25) of land managers we spoke to were part of a family partnership. 7 farms were run as a limited company, 4 were sole enterprises and the remaining 4 had other ownership arrangements (1 did not answer the question).

In terms of the number of people working on the farm (including the participant and their family members), there was a range across the interview sample (see Figure 3.4). Perhaps reflecting the larger farm sizes within the sample, most (28) farms had three or more people working on them on a regular (full or part time) basis (19 had between 3 and 5, 6 had between 6 and 10, and 3 had over 10 people working on them). 12 had two or fewer regular workers.

3.3 Farmer age and role in the business

Farming interviewees were, on average, younger than the wider farmer population, with 29 of the 41 participants under the national average of 60 (Defra & Rural Business Research, 2019). Most (23) were between 40 and 59 years of age but 6 were between 30 and 39 years old and 12 were older than 60 (see Figure 3.2).

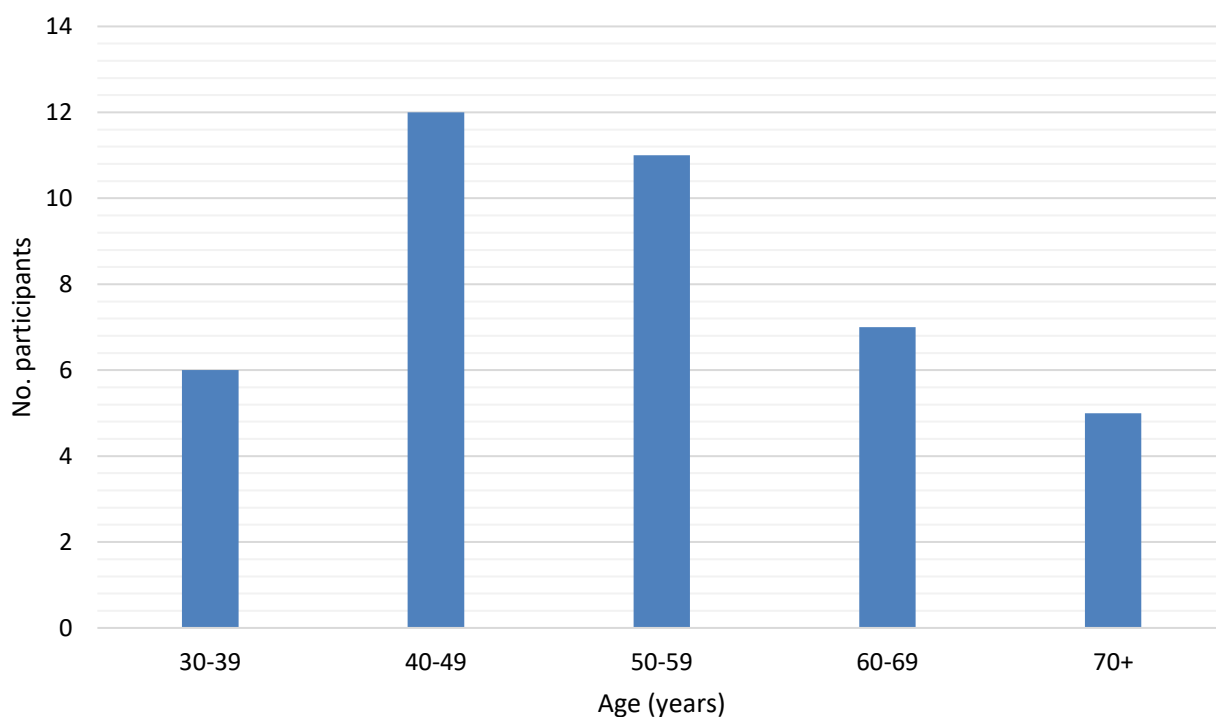


Figure 3.2 Respondent age

Only 2 participants were not the main decision-maker on their farm. 27 were the sole main decision-maker and 12 shared this role with someone else.

3.4 Experience of formal agri-environment schemes

The majority of farming participants had at least some experience of formal agri-environment schemes (AES). A relatively high proportion of interviewees (18) held a current Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement and only 5 interviewees did not have a current agreement of some sort. 12 held a current Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreement and 5 held a current entry-level stewardship (ELS) agreement.

Most interviewees had considerable experience of AES, with 25 having participated in some sort of scheme for over 10 years (11 had participated for between 11 and 20 years and 14 for over 20 years) and 5 having participated for between 6 and 10 years (see Figure 3.3). A number of participants (16) therefore had experience of multiple types of former AES. Only 4 interviewees were more recent recruits (having participated for between 1 and 5 years) and only 4 had never participated in an AES.

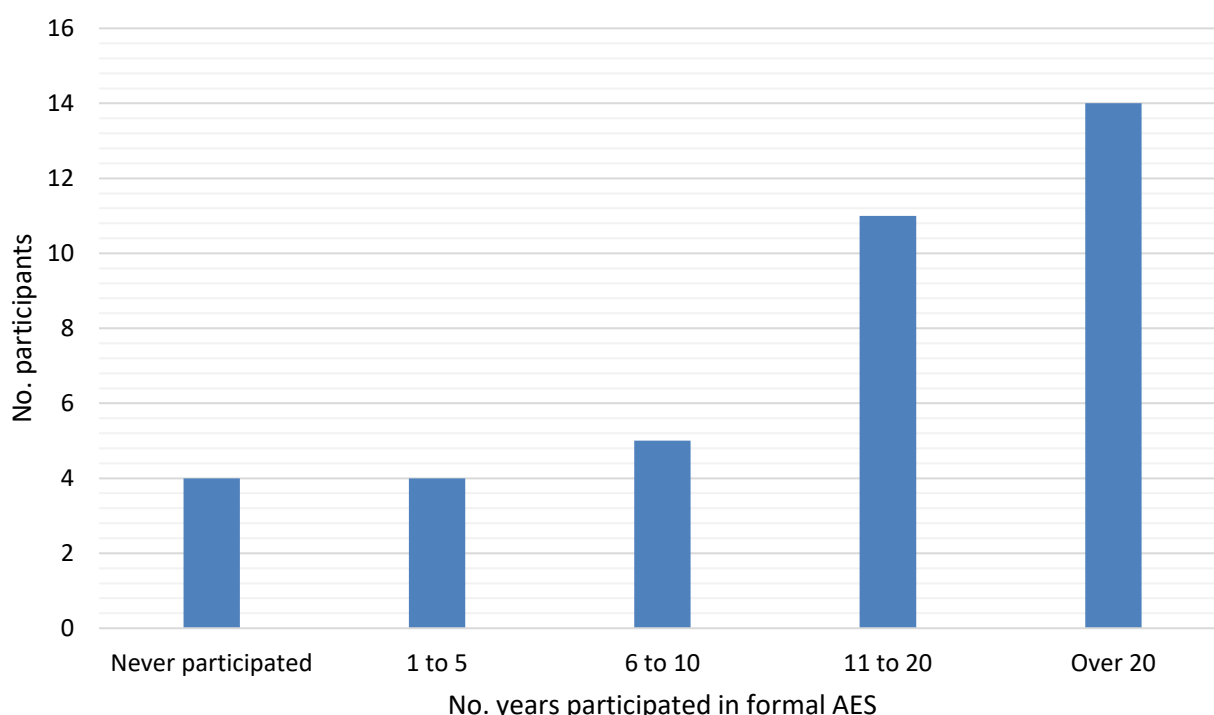


Figure 3.3 Length of time (years) interviewee has participated in a formal AES

The longstanding engagement with formal AES among most participants appears set to continue, with 34 of the 41 farmers saying that they would be ‘likely’ to participate in the future E.L.M scheme. 9 said that they were not sure, mainly because they did not feel they currently know enough about what will be on offer, and only 1 person said they were unlikely to participate. Interviewee comments surrounding their answers to this question are explored in more detail in section 8.3.

22 of the 41 participants said that they used contractors for some or all of their environmental management, most commonly for capital works and/or hedge-trimming.

3.5 Importance of profitability, food production and environment on the farm

In order to help characterise respondents’ farming goals, land managers were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-10, how important it was for them to a) produce food from their farm; b) look after the environment on their farm; and c) maximise profit from their farm (see Figure 3.4). All three of these aspects scored highly among most interviewees, and there was little difference between the average scores given to each, though looking

after the environment had the highest average score (9.05 and no participant scored this less than 6) and profit maximisation the lowest (8.35). The average score for food production was 8.95.

It is notable that most interviewees scored 'looking after the environment' very highly but (whilst there may be an element of social desirability bias occurring here) this is unsurprising given the topic of the interview and the participation of interviewees in collaborative environmental initiatives chosen as case studies. Those who commented on the question about food production did so generally in relation to this being a core objective of farming. The question on profit maximisation perhaps prompted the most reflection and offers of explanation. A common theme was that whilst *maximising* profit is often not the key motivation for farmers, obtaining some profit is essential in order to maintain business viability and enable the farm to achieve both of the other two objectives i.e. producing food and looking after the environment. In that respect, **the three elements are all interrelated and were thus viewed by many interviewees as of equal importance**. Such interdependency between environmental objectives and farm viability – and the importance of recognising this with environmental initiatives - was a theme repeated elsewhere in the interviews as well (see, for example, section 6.1).

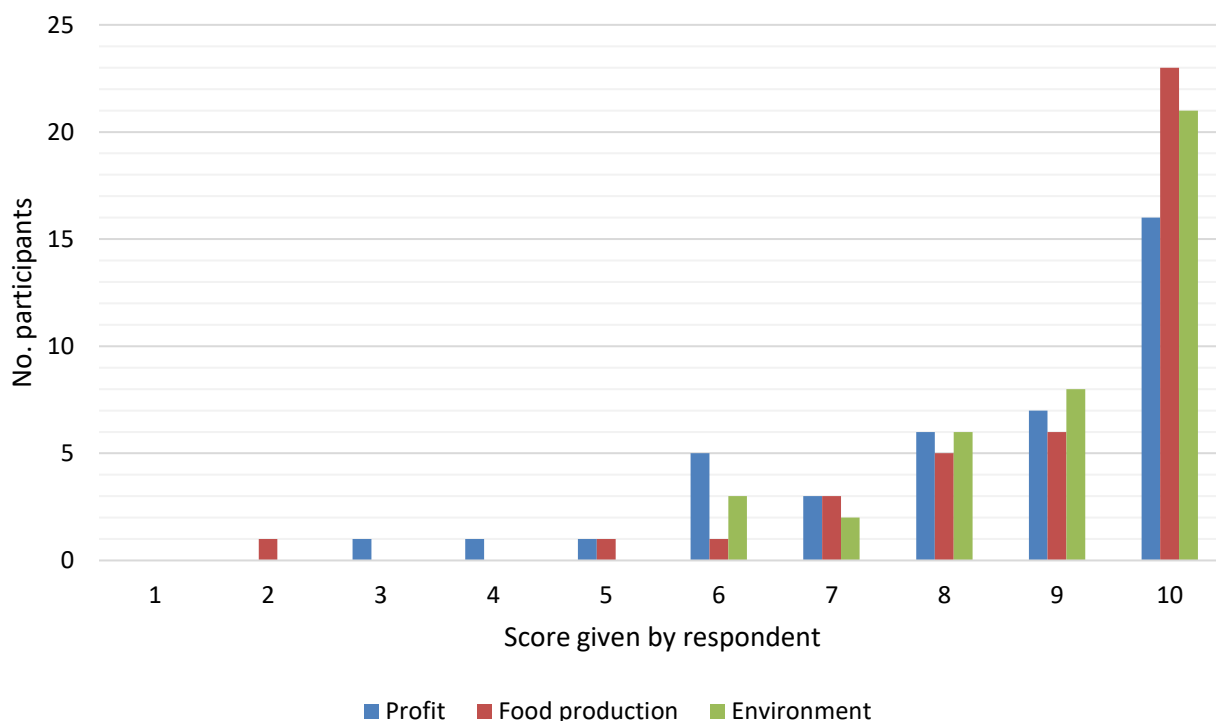


Figure 3.4: Importance of food production, environment and profit maximisation to farming respondents

3.6 Facilitator and stakeholder respondents

16 facilitators from the case study initiatives were interviewed as part of the research. This included one facilitator from each of 14 case studies and two facilitators from one case study (Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group). However, the stakeholder interviews also included two individuals with extensive experience of facilitating farmer groups.

Interviews were also conducted with 12 wider agricultural stakeholders, though two of these individuals were interviewed together (one was the sustainability lead for the organisation whilst the other was involved in the facilitation of one of their farmer groups). These individuals have been labelled as Stakeholder 9a and

Stakeholder 9b in the analysis to distinguish between them. The stakeholder respondents represented a range of organisations, which included (in no particular order):

- Utilities company
- Auction platforms
- Commercial food company
- Conservation NGOs
- Farmer-led environmental network
- Alliance of food and farming organisations
- Arms-length body
- Agricultural industry association
- Land agent for a landowner involved in one of the initiatives

4 Case study summaries

The 15 case-studies within this research represent a wide variety of approaches to collaborative/coordinated environmental land management. In order to preserve participant anonymity we cannot describe each case study in detail, but have grouped them into 5 categories representing their broad structure. It is important to stress, however, that this is not a clearly defined typology. The initiatives within each category possess a diversity of characteristics in terms of group size, length of establishment, and organisational structure and some groups do not fit neatly into a single category, particularly as they may have changed over time. Nevertheless, the following summaries describe the types of initiatives that were included in the research and how they differ from each other. Summaries of case study analysis are provided in Section C, together with tables setting out the key strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

4.1 Large-scale coordinated initiatives

(2 case studies)

These initiatives are led by partnerships between a number of stakeholder organisations, including environmental NGOs, utility companies, arms-length bodies, and public authorities. They seek to achieve habitat improvement and regeneration, including a focus on flood risk mitigation and water quality improvement, across large upland areas. They operate at large scales, both covering over 40,000 hectares of moorland. One case study is well-established, having been in existence for over 15 years, while the other is much newer (established in 2019) and is still in the process of setting up some of its activities.

Both large landscape partnership schemes (15-20 partners) are core-funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Partners include, for example, National Park Authorities, Environment Agency, National Trust, RSPB and water utilities. In both cases, environmental land management is coordinated by a partnership Project Officer across multiple holdings, estates, and common areas. One initiative also has a strong public engagement dimension, encouraging people to reconnect with their wildlife and protect the landscape and heritage (through volunteer activities for example), working with all generations. In one of the case studies, much of the work is carried out on individual holdings on a contract basis by the partnership, and the land manager receives payment through their individual HLS agreement (which the work is written into). Little or no direct collaboration is currently required between land managers in either initiative, although there are plans within one of the case studies to form a farmer-led project within the initiative (currently on hold due to Covid-19).

4.2 Auction-based initiatives

(3 case studies)

These case studies represent auction initiatives within specific river catchments ranging in size from less than 1,000 to over 150,000 hectares. All are relatively recent (less than 5 years old). Each auction targets a clearly-defined environmental objective (e.g. water quality) and requires land managers to bid to deliver specific management practices such as cover crops, grass under-sown in maize, arable reversion, aerating / subsoiling, grassland subsoiling/ slitting, fencing, ponds and wetlands, hedge and woodland planting, check dams, leaky dams, buffer strips or capital works such as slurry stores.

The initiatives are organisation-led by a variety of stakeholders, including NGOs, arms-length bodies and utilities companies, with funding from the private sector (e.g. food processing and water companies) and national river authorities. Online environmental trading platforms are used for bidding. Farmer engagement is coordinated through partners' local advisers working closely with a project officer from the auction deliverer. Two of the case studies have trialled a more conventional form of 'reverse auctions' whereby farmers compete for funding, by indicating the rate that they were prepared to receive. One has trialled a uniform price scheme building on farmer feedback. Numbers of farmers engaging in all cases ranges from around 20 to 50.

4.3 Community-led initiatives

(2 case studies)

These initiatives have both been established by one or more members of the local community to address specific issues of flood risk in the area, although one has since broadened its environmental objectives and also hosts a CSFF. They are both 5 to 6 years old and cover distinct river catchments/sub-catchments. Both case studies have the support (to varying degrees) of various stakeholder organisations (e.g. environmental NGOs, utility companies, and arms-length bodies).

One of the initiatives is primarily driven by a single individual who is a member of the local community but who also has a background in ecology and conservation. It is a not for profit, community interest company and funding is drawn from a variety of sources in order to carry out specific projects, mostly in the form of capital works. The other initiative has a more formal governing group made up of flood control specialists and community volunteers, and has received funding from the Environment Agency to deliver its flood management plan. It has a constituted volunteer group with representatives from 9 neighbouring communities. Neither of these case studies require land managers to collaborate with each other, with most acting independently from each other. Rather, activities are coordinated by the initiative and often carried out by a contractor. While land managers sometimes supply labour and machinery, they are generally not involved in the technical aspects of the work.

4.4 CSFF farmer groups

(4 case studies)

This category consists of groups funded by, and organised according to, the requirements of the CSFF, now administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and in operation as a scheme since 2015. The RPA administers the CSFF scheme, funding groups through payments made via the facilitator. The facilitator or group budget receives a set amount of money per member, encouraging an increasing uptake of members for many facilitators. Funding pays for the facilitator's time, as well as the organisation and delivery of one-to-many training and workshops.

Environmental management is primarily supported and enhanced in these groups in two ways. The first is via CS agreements group members might choose to apply for. The second is through improved knowledge and advice received as a group intended to encourage greater environmental engagement. The purpose of the groups is to encourage more 'active' methods of engagement among farmers that demonstrate a collective approach across holdings. Under this model, the intention is that every group has some level of farmer involvement in the group's setting of objectives, delivery plans and/or implementation.

Ages of groups studied range from 2 to 8 years old. One group stemmed from a previous nature-focussed group which had received more direct funding for delivery of environmental objectives. Numbers of group members ranged from around 20 to almost 100 with a significantly different area covered by each group (ranging from approximately 4000 to 25,000 hectares), and a mix of farm sizes and systems are represented within the groups. Facilitators of CSFF case study groups can run one or more group/s within their geographical area, working with both a CSFF group and a non-CSFF farmer group.

Governance arrangements vary. One group is registered as a charity. Others comprise of tiered levels of governance such as a board, a steering group, facilitation coordination groups, delivery groups, and/or the existence of a chairperson. Some groups have a company secretary, project directors, or project management teams, but such complex organisation models are rare. These groups tend to have the 'farmer voice' represented by farmers operating on the board or within the steering group. One group is split down even further and has species groups, community groups and outreach groups which members can join according to their particular interests. Others still (often the smaller groups) operate under simpler governance strategies with farmers and the group facilitator directing all decision-making processes within the group.

4.5 Non-CSFF farmer groups

(4 case studies)

Like the CSFF groups, the four initiatives in this category are characterised by a high degree of farmer involvement in the establishment, planning and governance of the group's activities. Some (but not all) of the groups in this category are sometimes referred to as 'farm clusters'. All groups in this category are relatively small, with fewer than 30 farming members in each, and have been operating for between 4 and 10 years. The area of land covered by the groups varies from around 800ha to over 15,000ha

The establishment and governance of these groups can vary. Farmers were very involved in the establishment of all four case studies, though each group has received facilitation support from environmental NGOs and/or other external organisations at some point in its history. One group has a formal steering group made up of a range of stakeholders, but was described by participants as farmer-led. Another, which was initially set up by a small group of landowners, has recently been built on to form a CSFF group so interviewees from this case study were able to reflect on experiences of both group structures.

Funding arrangements also vary, from public bodies, AES agreements, and/or use of ad hoc grants. For instance, in one group funding was initially derived from public bodies and land managers receive payments for activities through existing but temporarily-adjusted AES agreements. In another case, farmers themselves fund the group by paying a set amount per hectare (according to the size of their holdings) on an annual basis. This money goes towards paying for the facilitator but due to the ownership of the group by the farmers, use of funds is more flexible and remaining 'pots' of money are occasionally used for more direct land management purposes. Other groups did not receive core funding as such, but are supported by conservation NGOs and/or have made use of various grants and schemes.

A broad spectrum of types of environmental management is carried out by land managers within these groups, including undertaking options commonly covered by AES (hedgerow management, wild bird food mixes, field margins etc.), managing habitat through grazing livestock regimes, connecting woodlands across farms, and managing for specific wildlife species. There is significant interaction, and at least some degree of collaboration, between farmers in each group.

5 Section A: Determinants of success

In this section, we focus on the determinants affecting the success of coordinated/collaborative initiatives. We begin by discussing some of the different governance structures, farmer engagement processes and types of support (including facilitation) present within the case study initiatives and consider the effectiveness of various approaches, based on respondents' narratives. We also explore land manager motivations for participating in landscape-scale initiatives and reflect on the use of different types of incentives for participation (both financial and non-financial). We then examine the extent and type of environmental monitoring undertaken by the case study initiatives, explore some of the difficulties around this, discuss the importance of monitoring and feedback processes to farmers, and explore respondents' views about the (potential) role of land managers in conducting environmental assessments. Finally, we consider a number of issues around timescales, before exploring respondent perceptions around the cost-effectiveness of coordinated/collaborative approaches to environmental land management.

5.1 Governance

5.1.1 Approach

Respondents were asked to reflect on the approach taken by their group or initiative (coordinated or collaborative) and the leadership style employed (farmer-led or organisation-led). Coordinated approaches were orientated towards an organisation-led leadership style, while collaborative approaches were often farmer-led. However, respondents reported variations in the strength of association between group approach and leadership style. For example, there were instances when respondents identified their groups as coordinated but also farmer-led. It was clear from the responses that some land managers had difficulty in understanding and distinguishing between the different governance approaches and leadership styles introduced during the interviews and how they applied to their experiences, groups and situations.

Respondents were questioned about their experiences with, and the strengths and weaknesses of, the different governance approaches and leadership styles. It was apparent that the governance structures could change with time and be quite fluid. For example, as a group evolved it could transition from a coordinated approach to one that was more collaborative, and farmer-led, as illustrated by the following comment from a facilitator discussing the evolution of their group:

"So, the idea of it would be, it would be run by myself to start with, with a view of them taking over the reins at some stage. That was what I wanted to happen, that's, that was the main thing, and it, and then they were aware that at some stage I would be having to step back, they would have to be taking the reins." (Facilitator, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Coordination was reported to be important in bringing together and organising the activities of group members and other stakeholders. Successful coordination was seen as an important factor in effective planning, objective setting, securing resources and delivering environmentally beneficial management, particularly to give support and direction to farmer-led groups:

"I think that delivery by embedded arm's length body advice is probably the most effective way. I know that that sounds boring, and what we've done before, but it... I think having arm's length body advisors embedded in specific geographic areas, I think that that is the most effective way of delivering... yeah, of delivering collaboration as well." (Stakeholder 4)

"I suppose after all this time I suppose the word I would want to say is you know, it might become farmer-led, it might be initially farmer-led, but it has to be a partnership and they have to trust the other bodies

to work with them pretty quickly, otherwise it won't go anywhere if it's a purely farmer led thing.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

In discussing the advantages of organisation-led groups and initiatives a number of respondents valued the expertise, skills and wider perspective organisations could contribute:

“Well, I think it is useful because they know the area and you are able to contact lots of different people and they can look at it as a whole rather than one farmer looking at his little bit. And I think it is better something like this especially for it to be done by an Organization.” (Land manager 1, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Some of the respondents mentioned that ‘too much’ coordination and being too ‘top down’ could lead to tensions within the group and have negative consequences for the delivery of beneficial environmental outcomes. In some cases the process of coordination could weaken or diminish some of the other processes identified as being important, such as developing member engagement, commitment and a sense of ownership. The coordination of auctions was also perceived to create tensions within some of the groups:

“The nice thing about this is the farmers feel ownership of these groups. And when they start getting dictated to it's like being part of an agri-environment scheme, or something like that. It's difficult. But equally I can understand that if the group is in an area where there's something that's a real high priority, but they're not delivering on it, and they've decided it's not a priority, it's a real lost opportunity.” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Collaborative approaches, with an emphasis on building from the ‘bottom up’, were seen to encourage land manager engagement, participation and a sense of ownership and control of the group. Respondents reported that engagement and commitment to the group was achieved through land manager involvement in planning and objective setting. Some groups were described as already very collaborative due to a long association and already having a “*direction of travel*”. The value of good leadership and facilitation was also noted in steering the group:

“In terms of the origins and the priorities that they decided on, it was very much a shared conversation between the farmers and [two stakeholder organisations], suggesting things that they could do, but it was largely led by and suggested by the farmers.” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group).

“[Another local group] is a classic top-down and upsets people, has clashes, and stuff like that. So, the people on the ground, if they can get together sensibly, because farmers are traditionally hopeless at collaboration, but these nature cluster groups really seem to have worked because they feel they're in control of what they're doing on their own farm, but it's helping the group, and so that's a much better way of starting it than someone telling us what to do.” (Land manager 2, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Another advantage of building from the ‘bottom up’ was that groups and initiatives were more aligned with and attuned to local socio-economic and environmental conditions, as the following comment illustrates:

“When you're in there, when you're looking at stuff like catchment management or connectivity, and things, I think it does get all the farmers working together for a common aim. But it's got to be kept local. For both of my groups, I wouldn't want to necessarily get any bigger or cover any more land, because I think the important thing is that you retain that localness so that all the farmers within reason have the same kind of... similar sort of landscape, similar sort of interests and farming systems, and that sort of thing. So they've got things that bring them together as a bunch of individuals.” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

A potential weakness of farmer-led collaborative approaches mentioned by some of the respondents was that they could sometimes lack focus and that could lead to difficulties in taking ideas forward and translating them into plans and actions, sometimes an organiser, and ideas from an organisations, are needed to prompt action as the following comment illustrates:

“I don’t think that if [our facilitator] hadn’t sort of gone and chivvied people and encouraged them to sign up, then I don’t think we would have a group... So I think it needed a motivator, an organiser to make it happen. But having sort of brought people together I think we got a good collaborative group running.” (Facilitator, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

A number of respondents pointed out that there was a need to evaluate the benefits that could be gained from ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ approaches and that the balance between the approaches would depend on the particular objectives of the group or initiative. Maintaining this balance is seen to be important so that farmers do not become disillusioned, but equally are organised enough to achieve something:

“I think one of the reasons it works, it has worked well is because it has that landowner led aspect to it. But it also has had that bit of sort of coordination and I think you need both. You need the landowner buy-in and people who are enthusiastic, but you also need a bit of organising, someone to organise things.” (Facilitator 1, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

5.1.2 Creation of partnerships

For some types of initiative, such as coordinated one funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the creation of partnerships and partnership working is part of the eligibility criteria. The inclusion of partners and other stakeholders within the governance structures of groups and initiatives conferred a range of benefits according to the respondents. These benefits included knowledge and expertise on a diverse range of subjects, such as environmental management practices, local and national environmental and policy priorities, administrative procedures, rules and regulations, and resource and funding opportunities. This includes having a project manager who can bring partners together to say “hey look we have got an opportunity here” and who can write bids, although the point was made that they have to be sufficiently resourced. The role of local partner organisations was also identified:

“I mean, of course you can have some influence from local, and there will be local knowledge about where priority habitat... where national priority habitats and species are within a geographic region, and that’s where we ought to use collaboration at a local level, is using the knowledge of partner organisations in the quality and location of environmental features.” (Stakeholder 4)

The development of groups and initiatives that included a range of partners and stakeholders was also seen as an opportunity to build trust and break down barriers between different sets of interests:

“And it was truly inspirational because you know, you had [a large number of] farmers in a room, none of whom had ever talked to each other, they had always been slightly resentful, now they were all in the same room as [a well-known landowner] and the people around the partners. They were all eating lovely food together. And so it is transformative, there is absolutely no doubt about it, it is transformative. And that collaboration then enables action, because it’s us as a species that stands in the way of the action.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

5.1.3 Group membership and relations

Group membership

The importance of developing positive social relations between members depended to some degree on the objectives and purpose of the group or initiative. Discussion and interaction between members was considered to be desirable by many respondents, especially among collaborative projects. Some respondents mentioned that land managers, particularly farmers and in one instance farm workers, often worked in isolation and that there were limited opportunities to meet and discuss agri-environmental issues and management practices. For example:

“But I think you become, farming is a very isolated industry and I think it’s important that we don’t keep it like that. We go around each other’s farms, we go and do, you know, comments that will perhaps help other people or encourage other people and try and work as a group, I suppose really... especially on the environmental issues.” (Farmer 2, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

When the situation worked well, group membership was reported to provide opportunities to develop meaningful relationships, where opinions, knowledge and experiences could be shared in a supportive social environment, as demonstrated by the following comment:

“Then some of us are more passionate about grey partridges, some of us are more passionate about pollinators and so you learn off each other. And it is interesting hearing other people’s stories and then there is always a little bit of competition; there is that whole idea of lapwing envy; how many lapwings have you got? And that spurs people on; instead of having a competition about grain yields maybe down the line people will be having a competition about how much flora and fauna they have got on their farm.” (Land manager 2, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Interacting and building relationships with members who shared the same overarching perspective on agri-environmental management was a recurring theme and as a facilitator of a CSFF farmer group noted *“it’s, like-minded people getting together to learn about like-minded things.”* In a similar manner, a land manager who was a member of a non-CSFF farmer group said that, *“it’s a group of people that trust one another, like one another and are there to fulfil a goal, if you like, that they have chosen to do. We’re not being forced into it.”* This view was shared by other respondents:

“We all feel we are, we want to do our absolute utmost to encourage wildlife, to do the right thing for the environment, and I think that’s the thing that drives us, not the, not anything financial.” (Land manager 1, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Pre-existing social links between members were important in the establishment of some of the groups and initiatives, but in other cases prior social interaction was not considered an important factor. For some respondents the familiarity of interacting with people they knew was reassuring and gave them confidence about the likely success of the project, while for other respondents the opportunity to meet and engage with people they did not know and organisations they had not been involved with at close quarters before was an exciting prospect.

“I knew a few. I’m not from here. We moved here in 2007 ..., so I was completely new. So it probably has meant I’ve met, probably got to know a few, well it probably has helped with getting to know people a bit. I’m not, some of it I quite enjoy, some of it feels a little bit enforced.” (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Several respondents reported that their groups and initiatives functioned well without close social interaction between members. Land managers could be part of a group or initiative, but also work largely independently of other members. In such cases the key relationship was often between the land manager and the facilitator. As a land manager from a community-led initiative explained, *“There is not much engagement between the different farmers and land managers taking part. The engagement is more between the [Facilitation Group] and individual land managers.”* Being able to work effectively without social interaction between members was a characteristic of auction initiatives and echoed in the following comment:

“I was bidding to the auction and stipulating where to put cover crops and making sure it fitted across the farm. The decision was made here at this desk by me. So there are very few social relationships with other members. I got indirect social benefits but there’s no sense of landscape collaboration.” (Land manager 2, Case 10, Auction initiative)

The makeup and composition of group and initiative membership could generate problems. For example, several respondents queried the membership of their groups and brought up questions of legitimacy. It was reported that this could create tensions between members within the group and limit its effectiveness.

“Yes, we all get on fairly well, there are other people in the group that I don’t think, I don’t want to be nasty to anybody but some of these people that aren’t really farmers and just own a little bit of land, they don’t see things as much from a farmer’s point of view. You know, like, I don’t know, if you just take a couple of horses and you’ve got, you know, a twenty-acre field that’s sort of like rough fell grazing, it’s not just the same as farming, you know.” (Land manager 2, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

It was also suggested that as groups and initiatives developed over time the original aims and objectives may be re-evaluated and subject to change and this may in turn lead to changes in membership. It was reported that having an open and inclusive membership could help generate and sustain a dynamic and vibrant community but that group relations needed to be carefully managed to prevent conflicts developing that would be ultimately destructive to the interests of the group:

“We’ve got one guy in there who likes nothing more than to throw a hand grenade into the room but there’s also people in there who are strong enough characters that pull him back into line. And occasionally, very occasionally you might have to have a word.” (Stakeholder 9)

In their accounts of group relations, it was clear that respondents realised that membership could entail many types of interaction. It was recognised that land managers often wanted different things from their membership. Some land managers were keen to lead and share their experiences, while others were there to learn and observe:

“We’ve probably got people that sit at different levels. Everybody’s keen to try and achieve something, otherwise they wouldn’t be involved, but there’s probably, well, there is, by nature of a group, you always get people that have got different levels of enthusiasm within that subject, haven’t you?” (Land manager 3, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Trust between members

Trust is crucial to the outcome of a scheme according to many respondents, but this was particularly referred to by those in farmer-led or bottom-up style groups. The establishment of trust within focus catchment areas is believed to be a significant driver of earlier uptake and, in some cases, delivery:

“If they already know the organisation quite well and they have already done it historically, then they will be more receptive and they will be okay this is just something similar but it is a new format for it

being delivered and we can get some work done that the farmers wanted to get done and make sure we are, ensures that we are compliant and that sort of thing. It allows them to think about it more and there will be more, I suppose its trust.” (Facilitator, Case 14, Auction)

One land manager belonging to a non-CSFF farmer group expressed some nervousness that no formal contract existed within their group but believed in the mutual trust of the group as a fastener, and in the freedom that this allowed them in terms of governing the group:

“I think there is trust amongst us in order that we will do it, and we will do our best for it. And actually, that’s why it works. If it was people you didn’t get on with, I don’t think it would work as well at all. It’s a group of people that trust one another, like one another and are there to fulfil a goal, if you like, that they have chosen to do. We’re not being forced into it. We’re actually paying to do it.” (Land manager 2, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

There was some evidence that collaborative groups are encouraging new behaviours among farmers due to the trust developed between them. There appears to be a move away from what participants described as ‘secretive’ behaviour, such as being distrustful or competitive, towards an ethos of ‘group success’, as initiatives facilitate discussion of what works or does not work. Achieving group success is, according to some respondents, also becoming more important than the traditional emphasis on farms looking tidy and well-maintained. Trust among members can lead members to feel more open about sharing information or knowledge, which might be of help to other members, potentially leading to improved environmental outcomes:

“I think [members are] starting to realise that this collaboration is much, much more helpful than just being prude and standing to the side and saying I don’t want to share.” (Land manager 3, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Facilitators tend to agree that entirely farmer-led groups without any guidance from an external party, such as a facilitator, are less likely to ‘go anywhere’, but that without trust being established between these two parties any collaborative effort will struggle.

Respondents among those who have experienced the auction model believe a lack of trust might act as a barrier to uptake, but that prior involvement of an organisation with a group of farmers will likely increase uptake due a prior formation of trust:

“I think that is a big thing with the farming community and something that is hard to quantify and something that is hard to achieve quickly, you know, it seems to take years to gain it and a short time to lose it those things, so it is hard. I think there is probably no quick work around to gain the trust if you see what I mean, other than perhaps having a small project up front which they can get used to.” (Facilitator, Case 14, Auction)

Auction respondents also expressed a fear of losing trust among their peers as a result of participating in auctions:

“I’m fearful of falling out among a group of farmers which you kind of are respectful and worked with already. Because there’ll be a difference of agendas and views and aims but that, I’m not against the idea, I’m just fearful of that.” (Land Manager 1, Case 15, Auction)

Some facilitators expressed a low level of trust in certain external stakeholders, including some local councils, conservation organisations, and government officials:

“You have got some other players as well who are serial lurkers and basically who are members of other organisations who siphon off the stuff that you are trying to do and then rebadge it as their own five minutes later.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Such feelings about undue credit being claimed by some individuals or organisations clearly damages trust and this can be a significant barrier to future working relationships. Not all respondents saw public bodies in this way, however. Indeed, a small number said they were beginning to see them in a more positive light as a result of participating in a group, as this had created or strengthened links between them.

5.2 Engagement

5.2.1 Engagement and application processes

Comments about ease of engagement, application processes and levels of bureaucracy were made by facilitators and land managers from all types of case studies. The importance of having clear and straightforward means of engaging with groups and initiatives was a common theme reported among respondents. Openness, keeping things simple, having clear lines of communication, and inclusivity were mentioned as important characteristics of successful engagement with, and administration of, an initiative. This could be achieved through having meetings and guidance to explain the process and providing easy access to familiar and trusted personnel to help with questions and queries. In this respect the auction initiatives were described as the simplest and most accessible:

“We were able to say that there’s no paperwork involved, which is true. Basically farmers can just go in, click where they want to put in a measure and put in a price and then we sort all the paperwork for them if they’re successful.” (Facilitator, Case 15, Auction initiative)

Continuity in personnel is also an important consideration in terms of easy process:

“And as long as you have got a sensible person on the payment agency or whatever, you know, then yeah, it has been hard finding the right one to train to get to what you want. That is the main driver that we have had is you are never quite sure who to contact at the RPA or Natural England. I know it’s not their fault, it is because it keeps changing. It hasn’t been the same, we are onto the fourth person now I think it is.” (Land manager 2, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Some facilitators said they found the CSFF application process challenging and too bureaucratic, with one describing it as *“a nightmare”*. It was suggested that farmer-led groups would have found the bureaucracy difficult to deal with, and in many cases got a land agent or facilitator to do it for them. One non-CSFF facilitator argued that, *“the facilitation fund is far too complex, far, far too complicated; it just doesn’t need to be to that degree”* suggesting that there are other methods for filtering out the people who will try to participate fraudulently. Another respondent described how disadvantaged farmer groups are compared to other agencies when it comes to capacity to apply:

“In the initial phases, the bureaucracy. Just the sheer bureaucracy of having to set everything up, to satisfy any kind of government project. The fact that it was just, nobody had ever done anything like it before, so... whereas existing and established NGOs, for example, would have all of their policies and their bank accounts and their risk assessments, and all of that sort of thing in place. They would just pull things off the shelf. Whereas we started everything from scratch. So we literally had to set up, we had to design our project, which was challenging in itself because nobody had ever done it.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Some of the facilitators and land managers said that a strength of their groups was having the requisite skills to navigate the application process and effectively manage the administration of the initiative, some setting up their own processes to simplify things. One facilitator explained that they also had to be aware of different sets of rules, as illustrated by the following response:

“Yeah we are quite good now at reading the criteria forms for when we are trying to get money and trying to meet the objectives. We have probably been quite successful in getting funds actually, so I am not quite sure that answers the question. What I can say about the consenting process is every Local Authority has a different approach. There is a basic set of rules, but they apply the rules differently; some are light touch and some are heavy touch and there is no common factor in the charges either.” (Facilitator, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

Help with the application process and organisation was appreciated by land managers as it saves time and is more effective, as illustrated by the following comments:

“It is relatively easy for us, because we have the most amazing facilitator who makes it quite easy. So whilst I spend quite a lot of time on policy and strategy, and stuff, actually it would be incredibly burdensome if it weren't for this amazing person called [name of facilitator], who I'm sure you've spoken to.” (Land manager 2, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

“I don't think there were a lot of form filling and stuff to do really; the [initiative] staff did most of the paperwork and the office work and we just okayed it and went along from there really.” (Land manager 3, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

A recurring theme that emerged during the interviews was that administration of an initiative should be fit for purpose and this was not always thought to be the case by some of the respondents. For example, one respondent observed that there was a lack of understanding within the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) regarding the practical implementation of agri-environment schemes at the farm level. This respondent reported that the positive relationship built with Natural England advisers has been weakened and that agri-environment schemes should “*work with the grain*”. If farmers are doing things wrong, Natural England need to talk to them and guide them rather than the RPA excessively penalising them. Similarly, other respondents thought that the application process and the management of projects had become more difficult for a variety of perceived reasons (e.g. culture, inflexibility, skills base, and late payments), after the administrative transition from Natural England to the RPA, who were described as “*depressingly inflexible*”:

“And there is now a negativity about agri-environment because Natural England passed it to the RPA. The RPA are saying we don't understand them, but we will penalise you if any of the agreements aren't word perfect. And yet they were told to put these together because it didn't matter. So there is a culture, a huge cultural difference between the way that the RDS operated and the RPA. And they both acknowledge that, the RPA does not have the skills base to interpret some of this stuff, so they had to stick to the rules.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

The potential impact of this on farmer groups was a concern:

“Well having said that though Defra now, RPA are now making it so complicated they will kill some of those groups. They're making the claiming process for money and just the joining process you've got to fill in about two or three page form when you join now as a member. It's just bonkers.” (Land manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Having some built-in flexibility and adaptability to the governance and operation of groups and initiatives was seen to have a number of advantages. Being responsive to members' needs and situations was identified as

an important factor that would encourage participation, in particular giving flexibility in terms of delivery objectives and the ability to learn from mistakes. Flexibility allowed farmers to be empowered to come up with some of the suggested solutions to achieve delivery. Accordingly, too much rigidity could act as a disincentive to participation:

“We’ve set up what I think is a really good, enthusiastic group of farmers. But it just needs to retain that flexibility because different farmers are involved in it in different ways. Some love coming to the meetings, some don’t, but still do stuff. And that’s the important thing at the end of the day. We’ve got farmers that have been super keen and up for doing stuff for years, and some that are only just getting into it. But it’s the ability to have flexibility, and I just get quite nervous that Defra will take it, misconstrue it and create something that’s really rigid and inflexible.” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

It was also reported by some of the respondents that there was already a substantial amount of flexibility built into projects and initiatives. For example, a land manager who was part of a community-led initiative stated that:

“I think Natural England probably have hit the nail on the head already with all the options. There’s lots of capital items that you can get and I don’t think there’s much else really. I think they’ve just about covered everything.” (Land manager 1, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

Some respondents also thought that organisations and groups should be flexible and adaptable so that they could respond to changes in the funding landscape. For example:

“So what we have done over these years is we have adapted our approach to how those things are funded before claims and things like that to basically make it so that we fit ourselves to the process that existed in those schemes as opposed to having a scheme which had considered the scale of some of these schemes and was specifically adaptable to be able to handle schemes of that size.” (Facilitator, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

An element of flexibility is clearly important for enabling and sustaining engagement in environmental schemes and initiatives. It was also felt that flexibility can help groups and land managers adapt management prescriptions more appropriately to the specifics of their particular landscape. Developing strong governance frameworks and implementation plans may help allow this flexibility whilst also ensuring activities stay on track and within the remit of the scheme/initiative and its objectives.

5.2.2 Farmer engagement

Levels of engagement

Levels of engagement varied significantly, both between types of initiatives but also between different groups within each category. Due to the differing nature of the CSFF groups, some reported ‘very, very good engagement’ while others stated that maintaining a consistently engaged group of farmers proved extremely challenging. Perceptions of engagement success varied among group members. For some, a turnout of 30% would be considered a success (usually among larger member-number groups), while for others anything less than 80% would be considered a failure (usually smaller member-number groups). One facilitator of a group admitted having members whom they had yet to meet in person.

Feedback suggests that a number of factors influence levels of engagement, with engagement in this case referring to actual engagement of members in events or environmental deliverables. Groups reporting high levels of engagement attributed this to a number of factors, including:

- Organising events and meetings at the ‘right’ times of year, around planting, harvesting, lambing seasons, for example.
- Not relying on internet-based means of communication but also reaching out using text messages and phone calls in order to access the ‘hard-to-reach’ or those who are less computer literate:

“You have [to] push hard to make sure that there are multiple entry points for people to make their voice [heard] and she does that very well. Asking the right questions at the right time, sending out the right surveys at the right time. Making individual telephone calls to people, if she thinks they are not engaging quite as much as she would like, or more importantly quite as much as she thinks they probably would be.” (Land manager 3, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

- Establishing a workable ‘size’ of group (in terms of member/holding numbers) and ensuring that the needs and objectives of the group are common and understandable to all. Several respondents referred to the manageability of group expectations and levels of interest in terms of member numbers:

“It’s the right size that we can deliver on a landscape scale, but it’s small enough that most of them know each other, or have met each other as part of the group. There’s an expectation within the group that they do get involved and support it. It’s quite a nice atmosphere around it that means there is good engagement.” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group).

- Good communication at all stages and involving land managers in decision-making processes from as early on in the initiative as possible.

One farmer cluster group member suggested that high levels of engagement were possible due to the low expectations of the group itself. They suggested that lower expectations, while potentially leading to higher engagement in group events and activities, will not necessarily translate to effective delivery of environmental benefits:

“It’s running smoothly because, as I say, we’re at a low level, phase one. It runs impeccably. All we’ve got really now is a few people sitting round a table who’ve slightly altered their current methods of management, who are prepared to get in a car and have a meeting on a teatime once every few months. It’s no big hassle. When we want them to, as part of the cluster, to do serious stuff that could create obstacles.” (Land Manager 1, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

High levels of engagement are generally associated with higher levels of interest in nature and environmental outcomes on the part of the land managers. Such levels of interest were indicated in particular by the farmer clusters that were privately funded by the members themselves (who pay a fee per-hectare). For those less interested or less financially able to engage, the prospect of paying to belong to a collaborative nature-focussed group proved a deterrent, as did upfront costs associated with other kinds of initiative.

While references to engagement combined positive and negative considerations, many respondents recognised that their particular model required an element of fine-tuning to effect actual change across the board:

“I think the strength is in the farmer engagement in terms of scheme design and monitoring. I think the weaknesses are the need for greater engagement and understanding in terms of the delivery objectives at a site level.” (Stakeholder 11)

Time commitments also proved to be key with regards to member engagement in initiatives, including time to attend events, or to provide feedback to online surveys or group requests (for example), or time to build the group or reputation of the initiative.

Groups reporting low levels of group engagement attributed this to the following factors:

- Poorly selected workshop/training subject areas - Certain topics appear to appeal to land managers in a broader sense (e.g. general wildlife), while others tend to attract less interest (e.g. very specific land management).
- Group size too big and scale too vast so there is little in common among members or it becomes too far to travel to attend a group event: *“When you’ve got such a big members’ base, you’re never going to keep everyone happy. Big can be too vast, and you just lose so many people” (Land Manager 2, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)*. One member of a CSFF group with a large number of members suggested that splitting the group into quarters might encourage greater levels of engagement. Low attendance numbers at events were also associated with lower group morale and as contributing to a pattern of diminishing engagement, making the next event even more difficult to stimulate interest in.
- Style of meeting or event - Respondents revealed how important it is that events involving group members are designed to be accessible to all and represent all relevant stakeholders. By ignoring this, there is potential for members to feel alienated and thus disconnected from both the group and its objectives. For example:

“I have only ever been to like one public meeting, and I think there were five farmers in the room. Everyone else was from [stakeholder organisations]; there was very, very little representation from actual people who actually live on the land and live off the land. I thought that was a bit odd and the farmers never spoke. It just sounded very much like it was sort of policy level and it was a little bit over my head to be honest” (Land Manager 2, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)
- Past experience of certain auction models might negatively influence future levels of engagement so preventative measures need to be incorporated into the design: *Once they have been told ‘no sorry you are unsuccessful etc. etc.’ you may never see them again so I try and work them into the system somehow” (Facilitator, Case 10, Auction)*.
- Loss of funding for delivery - CSFF groups who had previously been involved in collaborative landscape-scale groups for which they had received significant funding, reported a diminishing level of engagement or momentum from some members once the funding ceased, perceiving the change from one of ‘action’ to simply a ‘talking shop’: *“Having had this delivery budget, if you like, [they] have never got over losing that. They want to do things, they don’t want to just talk about it” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)*.

Community-based groups stated that they experienced a good uptake by land managers with regards to engagement. For some farmer groups (both non-CSFF and CSFF), multiple respondents suggested that the more farmer-led a group, the less actual delivery was likely to occur on the ground. Possible reasons for this might be that, while social capital is high, a clear lack of guidance from a facilitator might slow down moves towards reaching environmental objectives:

“With the more [farmer-led] group, they do get together as a group more consistently and more often and more solidly than the [more coordinated] group do, but I don’t see them 1:1 quite as often. Therefore, I have perhaps less time for 1:1 advice and support and therefore that translates into perhaps a bit less

delivery on the ground because I'm not there and helping them and advising on things and I'm doing less monitoring." (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Younger groups, having been established more recently, stated that it was too early to tell what engagement might be like, but so far *"we do have a lot of interest"* (Facilitator, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative).

Of those initiatives interviewed, the youngest or most recent tended to fall under the large-scale coordinated initiatives or auction models. Both referred to the need to *"try and build momentum"* (Land Manager, Auction). One avenue for achieving this included organising preliminary get-togethers/meetings and training opportunities with potential members, while others published information on the effect of what has been carried out to enable farmers to understand the effects of previous efforts on a wider scale, and thus potentially sustain future interest in engagement. One auction facilitator described high uptake for one particular project where almost half of the holdings in the specified catchment area had put in applications/bids (of which half again were awarded). Previous interaction with farmers also appears to be an important factor influencing recruitment. In one catchment area it was reported that *"90% of the participants in our auction are people that we've worked with in the past"* (Facilitator, Case 15, Auction). The depth of farmer understanding also appeared to improve over time with repeated engagement in such initiatives:

"We've noticed that over time, so there's been the same kind of farmers are coming, applying for the auction each time and they're definitely getting more engaged and we're noticing that they seem to be understanding and kind of taking on the behaviour change more readily than they were to begin with" (Facilitator, Case 15, Auction)

Trust, previous experience and word of mouth are all factors believed to increase uptake and repeated delivery is stated as being more likely to encourage behaviour change. The importance of word of mouth in recruitment of potential participants for the varying schemes was mentioned by respondents participating in all types of initiatives. For instance:

"We're in the second year now, the first year there wasn't that many farmers that participated, quite nervous, quite new, this year there was a lot more." (Land Manager 1, Case 15, Auction)

Many respondents described having either met with or felt scepticism at the outset of new schemes or initiatives, but that word of mouth from already participating peers softened perceptions and attitudes and assisted in greater uptake of members. For those groups for whom direct funding is not an explicit incentive of the scheme (such as farmer groups), the possibility of access to external funding as sought by the facilitator also proved a significant draw.

[Involvement in objective setting](#)

Land managers' interest regarding involvement in objective-setting varied and, for some CSFF and non-CSFF farmer group members in particular, clarity around objective specifics appeared somewhat blurred. Again, group size and governance model appeared to play a role, as for larger groups or those operating across levels with steering groups, committees or boards, land managers were more likely to be represented by a small group of farmers rather than directly representing themselves, therefore affecting their involvement. Involvement can therefore be direct or occur through indirect member requests sent via the committee or board. Where a committee was in place, respondents revealed that attempts were made to have at least 50 per cent membership of land managers. Smaller groups or those without representative boards appeared to directly consult with land manager members more closely:

"The vision and the priorities have sort of been mapped otherwise you wouldn't have been successful. But the aim that we had was that we wanted to take farmers on the journey that made them feel less

anxious about cross-compliance. So the vision was that farmers who were all currently desperate and anxious about the future, struggling with Covid, climate change and all of that, you know, were taken on a shared journey as to how they could collectively learn how to survive in a positive way in line with the aspirations that were coming down” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Responses were mixed among land managers in CSFF farmer groups as to the ability or desire to personally contribute to group objectives. Some land managers do not feel sufficiently engaged to want to contribute, but most did feel that there was space for them to do so should they so wish. Another CSFF land manager believed that delivery is less likely to arise from contributing to the group and more likely to occur through one-to-one discussions spent with a facilitator. CSFF farmers who came into a group at a later stage reported having had less of a say in the setting of objectives:

“I think anyone that wanted a say would be more than welcome to have a say, but as is the nature of these things, there are always some people that say more and say it louder! But then they are also probably the people that are bothering to get stuff done. But no, I don’t think anybody involved, well, I’ve never been aware of anyone involved not being able to do or say anything that they wanted to.” (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

All bottom-up initiative facilitators agreed that land managers usually require guidance in objective setting:

“I’d say what are you interested in and they came back and said well actually we need something to interest us but we need to understand more, so we’re going to need a bit more assistance with that. So I gave them a bit of a talk in terms of what I thought the priorities were, and from that they selected things they were interested in. We gathered all that together and then met again to look at, basically, I said right, if these are your priorities that you guys have identified, how do you want to deliver those? How do you want to go about it? So we then identified our priorities and objectives.” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Land managers were also quick to admit needing that guidance from a facilitator and/or other advisors. There exists a sense that larger groups might leave decision-making processes to boards or committees and not become too involved in the minutiae of objectives etc. Several facilitators discovered successful methods for getting around this by implementing an online survey directly requesting that members choose their objectives and priorities and objectives from options presented online:

“I first did a questionnaire to all members; so all members are invited to contribute via an online survey. So everybody contributed, well, a lot of people contributed on an online survey. And it looked at what environmental objectives we should focus on, what specific activities, how we should, what sort of things we should do, what sort of support do people need.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

For community groups, it seems that decisions are also largely made through steering groups rather than having all involved land managers contribute, but their ideas are welcome should they desire to participate. One group citing itself as being very farmer-led revealed itself to be dependent upon facilitator assistance with regards to objective-setting:

“It was very much a shared conversation between the farmers and [facilitators], suggesting things that they could do, but it was largely led by and suggested by the farmers. So, they came up with around a dozen things...But people like [the facilitator] were able to point out to them - you’d be missing a trick if you didn’t include this little thing, or this little butterfly because you can easily help it out just by sowing its food plant. So, there was a little bit of guidance. It went both ways.” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

For another farmer group, it was suggested that although objectives were not necessarily set by farmers themselves, they too were guided by a facilitator and it was then agreed upon by land managers. They also suggested that a nearby group, which was set up later, had similar priorities to the older group due to having 'conformed' to their objectives:

"If your facilitator is being funded by the facilitation fund you do have to conform to the local priorities set out by NE, as you know. So it is slightly freer in this model of self-funding. But yeah, I'd like to think that the choice would lay pretty evenly between them and myself, with a bit of guidance ... It's important that it goes both ways. But ultimately, the farmers must have the final say because if they don't then their heart's not in it. They're not going to really care about that specific species or habitat and delivering conservation for it." (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Large-scale coordinated initiatives are likely, by default, to offer less autonomy to land managers, but one land manager having participated in such an initiative revealed that they would like more input into the objectives of the initiative and explained that some level of autonomy on the part of the land manager is necessary in order to want to comply:

"If somebody came to me and said we would like to plant ten hectares of trees on your farm. I would say, right, OK, well, and if they said they wanted me to plant them in fields one, two and three and no other fields I would say no. Possibly. But if they came to me and said they need to plant ten hectares of trees on your farm, where would suit you to plant them? I would say well possibly a bit here and there. Because of this and that and the other. And you get your ten hectares planted [So, you would like to have more input in the objectives really?] Yes." (Land Manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale Initiative)

Facilitators agreed that a balance needed to be struck between coordinated approaches and the assimilation of land manager input:

"They are the ones that know the land the best, but then, I think it is really key to have that experience and guidance from the experts, who are possibly impartial as well to being able to take on board all angles, because obviously you have got a farmer maybe coming from the farm business point of view initially, where sort of public goods orientated and that balance in-between I think is key. So I think a carefully managed mixed approach in my eyes is really beneficial." (Facilitator, Case 6, Large-scale initiative)

Across the board farmer input is recognised as being important, depending upon how involved the land manager actually wants to be. One auction-related land manager said that it was not important at all that they be involved in the setting of objectives. Interviews revealed a lack of confidence among respondents at the ability of land managers to know and fully understand environmental objectives in their area, so they are usually happy to receive input, be guided or fully led by expert advisors. Respondents speaking about, or on behalf of, all types of initiative suggest that the initial farmers to engage are likely to be those who already have a strong interest in the environment and in progressing farming practices, and who are prepared to make changes on-farm. Engaging these stakeholders is key to influencing more tentative land managers as the project progresses.

Sense of ownership

Facilitators for farmer groups were emphatic about the idea of group members having ownership. For land managers themselves, it seemed the term 'ownership' was ambiguous and variously interpreted. Ownership appears to equate to feelings of pride, having a voice, being identified as unique groups, and feeling recognised or valued for their efforts. For example:

“They decided they wanted a mission statement, so they wanted to stand for something. They thought that was important. So I wrote something that I thought would work for them and then I let them play around with it until they worded it in a way that they felt happy [...] They’ve also got certificates for each individual farm, so they either had it in their name or the farm name to say that they were part of the group. And that that was important, they thought that it was something that they could, they had, that they could put in their office, something to be proud of and say this is what I’m involved in.” (Facilitator, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Among the community-led initiatives, one group expressed fear that involving a large estate might mean their voices were less loud or heard and decided not to accept them as members to retain a sense of ownership over the group. Another talked about the simplicity of the process used by their group allowing them to ‘get on with things’ without unnecessary bureaucracy, which meant delivery on the ground could occur very rapidly. Large-scale coordinated groups still aimed to offer some degree of ownership to land managers through building advisory groups via which they could provide input but, at least in one of the case studies, this did not always translate into a sense of ownership among the land managers interviewed.

5.2.3 Barriers to engagement

In terms of initially encouraging land managers to join an initiative, a variety of barriers or issues were referred to by all respondents. The following barriers identified by respondents were either based on their knowledge and experience of farming and land managers, or stemmed from their own lived experience. Some of these concerns related to specific characteristics of landscape-scale groups/initiatives but others were expressed in a wider sense, referring to agri-environment schemes and/or environmental land management more widely (though were also applicable to landscape-scale initiatives). These points are summarised as follows:

Cultural and relational barriers

- Culture of independence – Farmers avoid collaborative working environments due to a preference to remain private and in control of their business.
- Inertia or conservatism – Similar to above but change is prevented more by a reluctance caused by inertia or a resoluteness to continue to farm ‘their way’
- Social nervousness – Several respondents commented on the fact that groups are not for everyone, that some people are shy or reserved, and that attracting new members to already existing groups might prove difficult if any sense of cliques exists.
- Relationships with peers - Fears of falling out with friends/neighbours, as well as historical conflicts or pre-existing poor relationships with neighbours can deter some land managers from participating.
- Fear of opening farm up to outsider stakeholders – Hesitation exists over access to land by non-family or business individuals due to the potential damage caused (and in one case a farmer suggested that some land managers might fear being ‘caught’ for certain illegal or non-compliant activities).
- Mistrust of government or stakeholder organisations involved in the initiative, including as a result of poor previous experience of AES

Concerns about obligations

- Time constraints – While time requirements vary between initiatives and within initiative types, lack of available time to engage was frequently referred to by many respondents across the board, both in terms of committing time to the group/delivery and in terms of attracting new members.
- Paperwork and bureaucracy - Perceptions of bureaucracy and paperwork can deter land managers from getting involved in initiatives.
- Concern around commitments and obligations tied to initiatives, particularly for groups working to longer timeframes, or with specific obligations for members.
- Feeling pressured – Land managers dislike feeling pressured (whether by organisations or the government) to participate or having specific obligations imposed on them, such as how to deliver a particular outcome.

Issues with particular initiative characteristics

- Lack of alignment between schemes - Some respondents felt that there is a lack of incentive to 'join-up' options with neighbours, particularly where current agri-environment scheme end dates differ among members,
- Lack of financial incentive – It is believed that some farmers will only engage with the assurance of a financial incentive, which certain groups, such as clusters, cannot offer.
- Confusion due to participation in multiple groups – Some farmers might belong to a variety of environmentally-focussed or other groups and become overwhelmed with information, preventing them from joining another. A bombardment of information regarding events or receipt of requests from numerous organisations can dilute interest.
- Perceived inefficiency of using intermediaries (as in the case of sub-contracting out agri-environment work).
- Absence of key individuals – Initiatives regarding themselves as 'highly engaged' often referred to one or two group members considered to be the driving force of a group, be it through their personality-type, extensive networks or in-depth knowledge.
- Terminology - Trigger terms, such as 'nature friendly farming' or 'rewilding' can be off-putting to some land managers, who perhaps associate such terms with a perceived threat to the business.
- Inefficient targeting of scheme to new members – For example, trying to include farmers who lie geographically outside of the focus area and/or whose business is not dependent upon ties with that area.
- Lack of one-to-one advice – This is believed to be prohibitive to the delivery of environmental outcomes by some, especially CSFF members.
- Complexity / Lack of understanding – Anything perceived as complex and/or 'not understandable by farmers' is considered a 'no-go', with the suggestion that time taken at a one-to-one level to explain the various facets of an initiative's objectives might be required to catalyse uptake.

Personal or business circumstances

- Financial position of the farm business - Where tendering is involved (i.e. auctions) farmers worry about the potential financial costs to themselves of participation and also the process of tendering itself. Upfront costs of some schemes can put farmers off.

5.2.4 Enablers to engagement

A number of potential solutions to the issues and barriers to engagement (above) were provided by respondents. These enablers to engagement included:

- Offering a worthwhile incentive – The most commonly mentioned solution believed to encourage a greater uptake within all initiatives was a significant incentive, most commonly financial. However, anything that might be of direct benefit to the farm business can also be an incentive:

“A few incentives [are] out there, such as things like free soil health checks, soil sampling.” (Facilitator, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative).

Some facilitators also alluded to an informal method of persuasion in the form of a ‘trial’ membership where active projects can be included on the farm of a non-member without them having to sign up to a long timeframe, in the first instance.

- Focusing on early-adopters – Recognition that the process as a whole can be very long, but that by bringing along ‘early-adopters’, eventually those who choose to be less engaged might be encouraged to join, largely due to seeing the benefits accrued by those taking part. This has already occurred where schemes have been in place for a few years, such as clusters or CSFF groups, but also auction-related respondents reveal that land managers might be distrustful at the outset but that once having engaged, the same farmers tend to want to re-engage when new opportunities arise and, through word of mouth, this gradually draws in others. One stakeholder described the importance of focussing on ‘the coalition of the willing’ rather than then non-engagers:

“If you’ve got 80% who want to do it, and only 20% who are more sceptical, then focus on the 80% who want to do it and wait 10 years and then go back to the 20%, and you’ll probably find they’ve all joined up by then anyway.” (Stakeholder 3).

- Feedback from monitoring and evaluation – Understanding the impact of environmental management through actual feedback from monitoring and evaluation at both a farm and group level appears to be extremely influential with regards to land manager engagement in a project (see section 5.5.2 for more detail).

- Employing a variety of engagement methods to reach as many individuals as possible:

“I think we have used technology where we can, so we have like an online form where they can submit feedback, either by putting their name anonymously, and that has allowed them to say their thoughts without having to worry about it. And I think having that mechanism as well as those interactive sessions [...] where people could put their hand up and make a comment, you know, it has allowed most people to feed back.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

- Peer pressure or steer from landlord – Some respondents revealed that a sense of obligation might be felt by some land managers either by peers, by landlords wishing to participate in schemes or more generally by feeling that it is the ‘right’ thing to do:

“Many of the reasons that they decided to be active within the [initiative] was I think it was a bit of peer pressure, that was important. They were led by someone who was held within esteem within the farming community and once he got engaged then others followed.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

- Improved PR and communications – Greater, more efficient and more effective promotion of said initiative, as well as better communication with participants and finding means of recognising their efforts and making them feel more valued.
- Increased flexibility of schemes – More flexibility and adaptability within schemes was looked on favourably:

“I think some of the parameters in the schemes are too tight. So, if you took grassland, as an option, and you want to involve beef and sheep farmers, telling them they can only put 9kg of nitrogen on a hectare... unless they’re in hills, the uplands, they physically can’t get away with doing that with the level of stocking density they need in order to keep animals literally alive. So we’ve got to be realistic about what we’re trying to achieve.” (Land manager 2, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

- Increased autonomy – Providing opportunities for farmers to shape schemes and initiatives was seen as positive:

“I think giving people the opportunity to really shape their own schemes through a group [would help encourage more farmers to get involved].” (Land manager 2, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

- Obtaining assurances – Some respondents believe that by putting certain assurances in place within the design of a scheme, land managers are more likely to consider participating. For example, in one initiative farmers had originally been concerned that making certain landscape improvements would make planning permissions more difficult to obtain, however *“we got assurances that it wasn’t [going to affect it]. And I know that calmed several people down in the early meetings.” (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)*

- Clearly defined objectives and a focus on delivery – Being clear about the environmental objectives that are being sought is important for engaging land managers and convincing them the initiative is worthwhile. A number of respondents also stressed the need for initiatives to have a clear focus on *delivery* of environmental management, rather than simply on discussions, training or workshops

- A focus on business benefits – Emphasising the potential business or productivity benefits from environmental land management can help engage land managers, particularly those who may be experiencing issues with business profitability or who may not have a strong personal interest in the environment:

“If you went out as, you know, farmer and said will you join this group, we are going to be delivering countryside stewardship priorities that are designing new habitat maps, they would look at you and think you are bonkers. But if you go out and say you know, we are here to help, to understand how your business might need support through transition of climate change and Brexit, you know, there are projects that we are involved with that might give you a voice in that, you know, they tend to join. So it’s very much how you spell it.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

- Greater use of farming bodies - e.g. PCF, NFU, TFA, FCN, etc. for communication (see section 8.1.2 for more detail)

- Utilise key individuals to help drive the initiative forward – be it in terms of facilitator, chairpersons or active farmer members:

“It is one of those where finding the leader of the farmers or the peers and using them as much as we can to put peer pressure onto other farmers.” (Facilitator, Case 10, Auction)

- Make use of existing farmer networks within catchment areas (see Section 8.1.2 for more detail).
- Managing expectations – Ensure that all potential participants are clear as to what is expected as part of the group, what the clear benefits to them might be, on a farm-level, personal-level, community-level etc. Outline financial incentives clearly if they exist, assure that help will be given with any additional paperwork, form-filling bureaucracy, and other factors that have been cited as making land managers potentially sceptical or nervous about signing up.
- On-farm demonstrations – Peer-to-peer learning, particularly through visiting other farms is widely recognised as an effective way of engaging farmers and supporting mutual learning:

“Reading a bit of paper and looking at a picture in a magazine it doesn’t show you everything; but if you see it actually working and how it does work it is better.” (Land manager 3, Case 6, Large-scale initiative)

Determining how ‘engagement’ is evaluated is also important, as measuring numbers of participants attending events alone is too simplistic and does not provide a sense of depth or quality of engagement. Attendees at events are not always necessarily registered group members, but might instead be friends, family or other stakeholders who are interested in open knowledge exchange events directed at their locality. Furthermore, attendance at events cannot act as a signifier as to whether on-the-ground delivery is occurring as a result of other avenues of communication (such as email):

“The fact that they don’t actually make a big song and dance about it and come to everything is not important. The fact that we’re reaching them in a different way should be recognised. So, just because they don’t engage in person doesn’t mean they’re not engaged.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Engagement is considered to be a broad term, but facilitators generally point to the importance of aiming for total involvement from as many group members or participants as possible, at the same time as encouraging direct contributions (in terms of ideas etc.) from everybody. There exists a general sense of optimism that the younger generation of farmers are likely to want to engage more than their predecessors, although one land manager believed the opposite to be true, suggesting that landscape-scale initiatives are more suited to the older generation due to time constraints placed upon younger farmers.

5.3 Facilitation and other support

5.3.1 Facilitation

Effective facilitation is important to the success of collaborative ventures such as the case studies within this research. Numerous respondents reported this as so, and stressed that having a dedicated facilitator, in particular, was ‘crucial’ within their initiative.

Importance of Facilitation

Effective facilitation of initiatives was recognised by many as key to ensuring their success. There was widespread consensus among respondents that the facilitator was critical and without them the initiative would not have been successful. Indeed, two of our case studies that had (at different points in their histories) experienced the absence or loss of this individual reported that this had resulted in the initiative becoming less effective.

The selection of an appropriate facilitator is crucial and should be done with care. As this land manager stated, *“if you get it wrong [appointment of facilitator] I think it can all end up being railroaded”* (Land Manager 1, Case 9, CSFF farmer group). The role was widely reported as requiring a dedicated person who could offer a degree of independence from other stakeholders, as this helps to foster trust. The role should offer adequate remuneration due its complexity. Respondents often felt that the time required to conduct the necessary activities within the role would preclude a land manager. We encountered land managers and facilitators commenting in a similar vein:

“Farmers are so busy and as keen as they are, they’ve got so much going on, and their primary business is the farming side of things and they don’t have a great deal of time outside of that.” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Facilitators were seen as crucial for driving activity within an initiative, often being described in terms of acting as a ‘catalyst’ for action or ‘conduit’ to improved land management and group working. Facilitators were depicted as requiring a comprehensive set of specific (and varied) skills and attributes. The need for strong administrative and organisational skills was one recurring theme. This was associated with both running day-to-day activities and interacting with external bodies or organisations. To support this, facilitators are deemed to require an extensive level of relevant knowledge, such as around potential funding streams or other opportunities that may be of interest.

Less tangible, but no less important, are the personal qualities that respondents believed an effective facilitator needed. One of the most important was that the individual be passionate about their role, as this can be motivating for those around them:

“Someone who’s very passionate about what he does. There’s elements of what we do that interest me, and there’s elements that quite frankly don’t, but [the facilitator] has got the ability to make something that probably I don’t think interests me that much, for me to at least take an interest in.” (Land Manager 3, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Other attributes that respondents felt were necessary included an ability to understand the people that they represented, to be dynamic and both forthright yet diplomatic.

Some respondents articulated some of the personal attributes of an effective facilitator in terms of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, rather than in terms of specific competencies. As one respondent put it:

“I think if we’d got the wrong person in charge it would have never taken off. She just understands how to, instinctively, approach people. Which is something that can’t be taught” (Land Manager 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group).

The importance of these hard to articulate qualities is highlighted with a facilitator’s comment that they [the facilitator] have a *“big influence on the group”* (Facilitator, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative). Clearly, some of the qualities of effective facilitation are difficult for respondents to articulate. However, they appear to relate to the way facilitators situate themselves within group dynamics, the way they connect with group members and the influence they have over group processes.

A number of respondents also stressed that effective facilitation involved offering a 'personal touch' to land managers, whether that comes directly from the facilitator or others within their team. The availability of a project officer in auction initiatives was appreciated by the land manager involved during the bidding process:

"He can just talk me through it [the bidding platform] rather than having to sort of sit on hold for three hours or wait for a call back." (Land Manager 3, Case 10, Auction)

This sentiment was echoed by a stakeholder who, with regard to land managers, stated that *"if they're dealing with a faceless organisation and they don't know who they're going to speak to next, I don't think you will get the quality of environmental outcomes"* (Stakeholder 4). The importance of ensuring continuity regarding a point of contact was highlighted by one land manager who stated, *"you just naturally call the person that you have always spoken to...they've always got the answer you want to the question"* (Land Manager 3, Case 10, Auction). Facilitators can also act as a link with funders, enabling land managers to access funding opportunities that they may otherwise have been unaware of or that they may have lacked the confidence to apply for.

Keys to facilitation success

The following factors were cited by respondents as being key to ensuring successful facilitation within initiatives:

- Consistency of personnel - Personnel within an initiative are key to its success. Ensuring, wherever possible, the continuity of core individuals will facilitate a positive working relationship with land managers, thus building trust whilst they increase familiarity with their land:

"I probably know four, five people within [organisation name] but there's been three people that I've dealt with mostly and two of them have been involved in the [initiative name] arrangements." (Land Manager 1, Case 15, Auction)

- Knowledge and experience - People within an initiative should also be familiar with the area of operation. Respondents frequently stated that someone local and respected was considered favourably, particularly if they also had expertise and local understanding. Some respondents, however, recognised that with sufficient time and effort someone from outside the area could also develop this knowledge:

"I think key is the knowledge of the area and of course anyone can gain that as long as they put the effort in...you either already know about the local area, or you need to get to know about it and look at the bigger picture locally is absolutely key." (Land Manager 3, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Some initiatives associated with larger and/or established organisations reported that they had substantial agricultural and scientific knowledge 'in-house', and this was seen as advantageous for successful facilitation.

- Trust - Trust is key in successful facilitation and can arguably be eroded more easily than it can be built. The importance of trust was highlighted by one facilitator who commented, *"I don't want to break that trust in any way or form because that is worth so much"* (Facilitator, Case 10, Auction). Someone local to the area may already have a degree of trust associated with them if they are known. Similarly, an organisation already known to land managers will have an established relationship and associated levels of trust. If the environment is right for trust to be built, it can go beyond the professional level and evolve into something more personal, as this facilitator notes: *"My relationship with these people is genuine, so I feel I have made friends"* (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF Farmer group).

Facilitation Difficulties

As we have shown, facilitation is seen as crucial to the success of landscape-scale initiatives and effective facilitators require a range of knowledge, skills and experience. It is, however, not an easy job and facilitators discussed encountering a range of difficulties. These are summarised as follows:

- Bureaucracy - One of the most common issues mentioned regarding facilitation was around bureaucracy. Although having a dedicated facilitator within an initiative will provide some mitigation, the issue can still persist. A range of bureaucratic issues were mentioned, with most centred around dealing with regulatory bodies such as the RPA, Defra and Local Government.
- Funding limitations – A number of facilitators expressed frustration at funding limitations. The facilitator of one large-scale initiative reported years of difficulties in both staffing and ‘convening’ their initiative due to costs associated with bid-writing, drafting legal agreements, and organising and carrying out meetings not being sufficiently covered. In another case, the facilitator felt that they could have engaged more land managers if they had been able to offer financial incentives to larger numbers: *“My disappointment was that we had more farmers wanting to join the scheme than we could actually fund.” (Facilitator, Case 10, Auction)*

One stakeholder who had been employed as a facilitator on a part-time basis suggested facilitation should be a full-time position. This would likely speed up the delivery of environmental outcomes but would require more funding: *“The one thing I would say that it could have been done quicker if the equivalent of myself was 100% working on the job” (Stakeholder 6)*

Another widely reported funding issue was that, although one-to-one advice for farmers was considered desirable and likely to maximise environmental benefits of initiatives, this is labour intensive and there are not always sufficient financial resources to enable it.

- Payment issues
Another barrier to facilitation is the mechanism of payment to facilitators for their time and efforts. Some facilitators described feeling like volunteers on occasion, due to insufficient or delayed payments for their work. Some reported receiving no financial payment at all.

“I wasn’t paid for [one of my groups] for over a year! ... so I had to borrow quite a lot of money to get through. So from a personal point of view, that was quite difficult” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

This can not only impact facilitators on a personal level, but is also reported to be discouraging in terms of individuals wanting to continue their role as facilitators. Another facilitator explained how they had frequently had to pay for activities such as training events out of their own pocket (with costs sometimes running into thousands of pounds) before claiming it back, which caused cash-flow issues and imposed a risk on their personal finances. Such delays in payment (of both salaries and grants) mean that some facilitators are effectively bankrolling their projects.

- Land managers’ ability to commit to the initiative – Some facilitators experienced challenges associated with getting land managers to engage in, and commit to, events. This was primarily due to them being busy individuals with fluid work patterns on their holdings:

“Often our farmers will sign up the night before or whatever because...they know what is happening on the farm and they think yes I can, you know, come out to that on that day or they decide they can’t.” (Facilitator, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

Other less common issues associated with facilitation were; a requirement for all initiative members to be familiar with all relevant policies or obligations; and the topical issue of COVID-19 and the impacts that this has had on activities.

Linked to the importance of the facilitator, were comments by some respondents that initiatives may become too reliant upon that individual within the initiative. Some respondents noted that, should the facilitator leave the group, it may not operate as well as it has previously:

“There’s a huge risk that the project becomes reliant on the facilitator. And if the facilitator loses interest, or leaves, or moves away...or whatever, then they’re a bit too pivotal.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

5.3.2 External support

Respondents reported that external organisations were able to support groups and initiatives through the provision of expertise and knowledge in areas where they were lacking. In some cases this external support became formalised through the inclusion of organisations as official partners. External support was manifested in a variety of ways, including technical advice and information on agri-environmental land management practices, understanding of local and national agri-environment policy and its associated rules and regulations, and through financial and administrative support. Having such backing was important:

“I have had huge support from the Environment Agency, moderate support from the Local Authority, good support from the Town Council and Parish Councils; varying degrees of importance but having the EA behind you is hugely beneficial in all sorts of ways and less so the County. (Facilitator, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

Land managers were more likely to mention technical agri-environmental support delivered through field demonstrations on fencing and tree planting for example, and meetings:

“Well most of it is really agricultural-type practices. So we’re, as long as we’re told what to use, what to plant, what to put in and where to put it by [the facilitator], that’s great. But also we’ve done a number of tours of really top farms that are doing lots, like [one farm] to our south, which is in the super-cluster. They’ve done so much for grey partridge. They’ve thrown so much resource at it that it’s just so interesting to go and spend the afternoon looking round. So, that’s been something that we’ve managed to organise, or has been organised for us, is trips round other people’s farms to have a look at what they’re doing. So that’s good.” (Land manager 1, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Facilitators also commented on the value of bringing in external support to provide expertise and information about aspects of the projects and initiatives where they lacked subject specific knowledge:

“I have my areas of experience and expertise. But normally for... well, we haven’t had any events this year, as you can imagine... But in a given year, I’ll always bring in other people for workshops and to do talks, and things because I believe very strongly that the right person should be there for the right job and I’m not the person to talk about climate change and future adaptations on farms.” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

5.3.3 Training

Facilitators and land managers saw training as a valuable means of imparting many aspects of agri-environmental knowledge required for the successful execution of projects and initiatives. Training events could be formal, as exemplified by some of the training events undertaken by CSFF farmer groups.

“Loads. Because particularly during the facilitation fund because it was so focused on training and we’ve covered forestry, hedgerow management, ditch management, identifying plants and identifying bats and use of particular machinery and how to apply for stewardship and all sorts of different topics. And as I said, some of those topics were again suggested by the people themselves. So we said well, would you like us to find someone to come and speak to you about. (Facilitator, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Training could also be less formalised, such as the informal exchange of knowledge delivered as part of structured farm visits and field events. As one facilitator said *“We didn’t call it training, we called it going on to your farm and talking about what you might do in terms of delivery with a group of people from different agencies”*. Also, the requirements for it evolves over time:

“I think more, originally it was a lot more to do with how to create habitats, the target habitats and very specific training for individual farmers to deliver the combined aims of the group. In latter years, it’s become stuff of interest. So we come out to a particular farm and we will look at what insects are about, or what sort of butterflies, and learn a little bit about that. Let’s go and look at what wildflowers are present, let’s look at what bats are around... And it’s generic education rather than specific tuition.” (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

The value and beneficial contribution of training was a common theme among respondents’ comments on the subject:

“We did a sort of walk and talk on a local farm and it was absolutely fascinating to see how people engaged so much with that, at the start it was all a bit like I am not getting a net and chasing these butterflies. And then by the end of it, it was brilliant.” (Facilitator, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

However, some of the respondents said they would have like to have more support and that they had not received sufficient training:

“They’ve done odd little bits but nothing like the comprehensive programme we’d kind of hoped for. I think things would have happened this year but then Covid. Along with everything kind of else really. So no, we’ve not had the clear kind of events really to kind of explain to get the farmers up there. There have been some but not kind of enough really to kind of get them up there and sort of explain the changing goalposts and what the things are.” (Land manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Other land managers thought that they already possessed the skills and knowledge they required:

“No, not really; it is sort of common knowledge to a farmer how to do fencing and stuff like it so no we have no training really. It is just passed down through the generations of farmers really.” (Land manager 3, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

There were also gaps in training provision and some respondents identified future training needs in businesses, business management, accounting as well as resource management:

“Yeah definitely; I don’t know where to start. More than any one is soil; farmers now, especially the younger generation that have been brought up with silage and more intensified farming, are very disconnected from soil health and soil nutrients etc. and that sort of thing.” (Facilitator, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

5.3.4 Communication

Effective communication about the purpose and impacts of the initiative plays an important part in its success. At the inception of the initiatives, events such as demonstration days and site visits offer an opportunity to show, rather than just tell, land managers what activities entailed and what potential impacts of the initiative could be. These in-person exchanges were supplemented by various forms of written communications. Frequency and clarity of these written messages were noted as key to communicating the purpose and aims of the initiative:

“There was excellent communication in the beginning about the purpose of the interventions and the impact they could have.” (Land Manager 1, Case 1, Community-led)

“There was an awful lot of communication at the start as to why we were doing it and what we wanted to do. And you know, newsletters and that sort of thing to keep people updated. And tonnes and tonnes of site visits to show people what was going on.” (Stakeholder 5)

Effectiveness

The most widely mentioned form of communication was events, in the form of specific talks, exhibitions, demonstration days or attendance at farming shows. These all enable those involved with facilitation an opportunity to communicate directly with land managers or other individuals that may have an interest in the initiative. As mentioned previously, the face-to-face nature of such events is favoured among land managers who often prefer a personal touch:

“We do workshops and demonstration days etc. etc. and get information out to those farmers.” (Case 10, Facilitator)

Inevitably, due to the COVID-19 pandemic many of these events have been unable to take place during 2020. In the case of one stakeholder (who is part of an environmentally-focused farmer network), this has resulted in them developing alternative forms of communication such as podcasts and videos to deliver messages to their members.

Many land managers referred to receiving emails as a form of communication. This may often be specific to their engagement or more general in the form of newsletters. Although this is commonplace and a swift form of communication, one respondent noted that there is a risk associated with this due to the large number of these that land managers now typically receive:

“Unfortunately, farmers get so many, and I know for a fact that a lot would go into the junk drawer, or junk whatever it’s called, and wiped out and not be heard.” (Land Manager 2, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

The use of social media platforms and group communication applications was also reported by respondents. Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were all given as examples beyond more ‘regular’ methods. WhatsApp in particular was referenced regularly, with comments suggesting that it created a sense of community within group chats. In some instances, it even created a sense of friendly competition and enhanced motivation amongst its members concerning the sharing of photographs taken of rare species on their holding:

“Some of us old fogies are less good with the WhatsApp thing. But I think [...] a warm feeling of we’re all doing this together and it’s working and if your neighbour keeps on seeing something, then that makes you... you know, I need to keep up.”(Land Manager 3, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

An important consideration, regarding what for many may be ‘new’ forms of communication, is that they will not be used by everyone. Therefore, initiatives must be prepared to communicate via a range of platforms in order to increase inclusivity and, in turn, effectiveness. Care must also be taken not to forget about any group or individual that has engaged with an initiative:

“I think emails, texts, whatever, are an important part of farming lives. Because not every farmer’s on Facebook, not every farmer’s on Twitter.” (Land Manager 2, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

Two-way dialogue within an initiative between its members and facilitators is important in maximising engagement, motivation, trust and ultimately, benefits.

The importance and potential of effective communication is highlighted in comments provided by one stakeholder respondent. The organisation they represented had persisted with their communications despite initial opposition from farming groups. This resulted in a shift of position by these groups and requests for collaboration from other like-minded groups. Whilst they acknowledged there was not consensus on all matters, there was a recognition that a collaborative approach offered opportunities:

“When we launched, many of the traditional farmer stakeholder organisations didn’t like the network. They thought we were just a mouthpiece for conservation groups or whatever. So, they pushed back very hard...but we have seen them move their language. And we’ve captured a lot of attention. And moved their position which is great. But a lot of the other organisations are asking us can we support, can we share information? Can we share events?...I’m working with a number of major conservation groups to be the farmer voice for what good looks like. So that gives us opportunity”. (Stakeholder 10)

Communication is a two-way process and a lack of reciprocation can create an issue. One land manager expressed frustration at the perceived lack of communication on the part of their steering group, both in terms of disseminating information about the group to other farmers in the local area, and in terms of feeding messages about the group’s activities and achievements up to Defra. This respondent had collected extensive information about activities on behalf of the group and sent it to the steering group, only for it to seemingly disappear:

“I do a fairly comprehensive report each year, with lots of photographs for the steering group but the people - that goes to those people in the steering group - but they don’t, it doesn’t go any further than them.” (Land Manager 1, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Ideas for Improvement

Numerous respondents suggested opportunities to improve communications within initiatives. A general yet fundamental theme recurring throughout was that communications should be clear in the message that they conveyed, consistent and honest. This issue would be particularly pertinent during the inception phase of E.L.M:

“Are you honestly saying we are going to give you some money because we want to keep farmers going? Or are we expecting you to deliver some public benefit? And if it’s the latter then that has to be a consistent message and a clear one.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Further to this, one stakeholder highlighted that the language and tools used in attempts to develop collaborative action is too often expressed in policy terms. Their argument was that in order to communicate effectively with farming, the work needs to be framed with the land managers in mind:

“In terms of getting collaborative action around regulations, they failed because the language has been wrong. The tools that have been developed have been developed for the wrong people...People have got the wrong languages for each other. Farming speaks best to farming.” (Stakeholder 10)

Other suggestions included attempting to reduce the number of formal meetings. There is a clear preference for a ‘personal’ approach wherever possible. As one respondent put it:

“Informal engagement (farm visits over a cup of coffee) rather than formal meetings is preferable. There can be too many formal meetings with a danger of increasing bureaucracy.” (Land Manager 1, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

5.4 Motivation and incentives

5.4.1 Motivation

Initial engagement in initiatives by land managers tended to be motivated by multiple factors. It was rare that finance was seen as the only incentive, with environmental outcomes also motivating engagement. For example:

“With the funding available on the [project] it was there for the taking and we could use it to benefit our farming system and environment. So, it helped two-fold really.” (Land manager 1, Case 14, Auction)

The two principal reasons given by land managers for getting involved with an initiative were related to either financial or environmental drivers, but other motivating factors also emerged.

Environmental motivations

Many land manager respondents expressed some degree of interest in, and care for, the environment, which (at least partially) motivated them to participate in initiatives. Some farmers were particularly attracted by a perception of opportunities for increased environmental outcomes through working locally and/or at a landscape-scale. For example:

“I felt that to get a larger area coordinating its wildlife improvement schemes had to make a lot of sense.” (Land Manager 3, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Financial motivations

A few farmers did appear to be primarily motivated by financial benefits, which in our case studies usually either took the form of auction payments or agri-environment payments for work delivered within the remit of the initiative. One respondent said:

“It was financial if I am honest... There has to be something in it for us; we are both time and finance poor so it has to give something back to the business.” (Land manager 1, Case 9, CSFF farmer group).

However, as discussed further in section 5.4.2 below, for others financial incentives were not a factor in deciding to participate in collaborative/coordinated initiatives. Indeed, many initiatives did not offer explicit financial benefits and one CSFF farmer group even required members to pay an annual fee to participate.

Aside from environmental and financial motivations, respondents reported a number of other reasons for participating in the case study initiatives. These included:

- Anticipating future policy changes and requirements - *“They wanted landscape scale projects, so if we were in a group we thought it would be better [so you were all thinking ahead of the game, really?] Yeah.” (Land manager 1, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)*
- To improve the reputation of farmers - *“We wanted, really, to prove to people who think we’re ruining the land, that we have the interest of wildlife and conservation at heart, which we do, and this seemed to be a good vehicle to get that message across.” (Land Manager, Case 1, Community-led initiative)*
- To improve or develop ‘good practice’ - *“Basically, most of what they were encouraging was actually good farming practice that we were quite keen to do anyway [...] like with the soil erosion, we do not want to lose topsoil or soil erosion because we’re only losing the most productive soil, with the most nutrients, so we only have try and make or buy some more of that. So, if we can actually keep it in the field, it’s a good thing for us financially.” (Land manager 1, Case 15, Auction)*
- Through a sense of obligation/loyalty towards the facilitator due to pre-existing relationships (in CSFF and Non-CSFF farmer groups).
- A sense of responsibility due to being a significant ‘block’ on a map joining up other pieces of land: *“Our motivation to be involved was that we farm... we farm part of the area that everybody was making a conscious effort to enhance. So, if we’re not involved in that, then the system falls down over our block of land, doesn’t it?” (Land manager 1, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)*
- To expand social networks and learn from peers - *“I think sometimes when you embark on Countryside Stewardship it is quite daunting and it can be quite a lonely process when you are flogging away, especially for us with a farm this size it is quite intense... It is nice to actually meet other people ... and learn from their experiences” (Land manager 3, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)*
- To gain trust among the group in order to facilitate other agendas.
- To inform improved flexibility and monitoring in AES (in the case of an initiative where HLS derogations were negotiated at a group level with Natural England): *“Instead of being told, ESA was prescriptive, we were told what we had to do....We were hoping the [name of initiative] kicked in and was more farmer- led and we could tweak what we got wrong in the past, and the main thing was as it was monitored on a 12 monthly basis [so] we wouldn’t be penalised if we got to the end of the agreement and then were told that everything was wrong.” (Land manager 2, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)*
- As a way of delivering AES agreement obligations, avoiding liabilities, and managing cash-flow (e.g. by sub-contracting out environmental work): *“The costs involved in doing that [environmental work] are that great that it wasn’t something that we as a family business could deliver ourselves. And also, the liabilities that came with it were something that we didn’t want to take on. And we thought it best to subcontract that out, those liabilities out to a third party. .. The other thing is cash flow. If we had just carried out the works ourselves we would have had to pay for them and then claim it back from the RPA. Whereas if [the initiative] carried it out they can claim it straight back from the RPA.” (Land manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale initiative)*

Stakeholders' perceptions of factors motivating farmers also varied. Some were sceptical about the likelihood of many land managers being motivated by environmental delivery, while others identified several distinct cohorts:

"So the farmers that are interested in that environmental side to show that there are more birds and that sort of thing is really great. Others it is purely about how much funding they've received to do it." (Stakeholder 5)

In this view, farmers tend to fall on either side of the 'environmental interest' fence and those who demonstrate interest, especially through self-selection, are seen as 'progressive' or 'remarkable':

"I mean they effectively self-selected themselves as it were to the group [...] so we asked those that [the company] had the relationships with [...] could they bring the farmers together, so there would have been a degree of selection that they would have put in there in trying to find the farmers with the right mind-set. But because it's voluntary, we weren't insisting that they stayed in the room, they effectively self-selected. But all the farmers sat in that room are progressive. They're looking to push the boundaries of what they're doing, they're looking to farm in different ways. They all have deep concerns about sustainability and the environment as well." (Stakeholder 9b)

External drivers, such as regulatory requirements, can also be influential, particularly for land managers who may be less environmentally-minded. As one stakeholder explained in relation to an auction initiative they were involved with that attracted involvement from a variety of farm types (including some with little or no experience of AES):

"The environmental viewpoint which has not really succeeded... yeah, it hasn't worked. Regulations generally haven't worked amazingly. Finances also kind of haven't... you've got to find in an area what is going to be the thing that will cause them to come together. So you've got to have a reason to get them together. Shouting at them isn't it. The pretence of there might be some money is kind of not it. It's got to be real to them... The whole area have said they would like to take a farmer led controlled approach, for farmers by farmers. They're coming together because there is a regulatory threat. That's the driver." (Stakeholder 7)

This respondent was particularly keen to point out that there has to be a clear driver for bringing farmers together, whether environmental, economic or regulatory:

"I'm obsessed with getting drivers and action at a small scale and at a large scale [...] Number one is your ethics and your belief systems and the information that sits behind it. Number two are the regulations and contracts you have. And number three is money. And if you're going to get change at an individual level, you'll have to enact one of those things." (Stakeholder 7)

Participating in an initiative can also offer land managers opportunities to learn more about policies and regulations that may be on the horizon:

"My facilitation group just want to learn; they want to learn more whatever that subject is; whether it is soil or whether it is nutrient management, whatever it is regulations and that kind of thing. People just want to know more about what is happening and what is coming and what regulation change is coming and what is going to happen with funding." (Facilitator, Case 8, Community-led)

For some land managers, motivations for participation changed over time from their initial reasons to engage. Most often, in this case, the initial motivating factor was financial, which gradually transitioned to other aspects of participation, such as benefiting from improved social capital or showing more interest in the environmental delivery and outcomes:

“Probably the main motivation for originally joining the group was access to funding [...] I wouldn’t say they’re exactly the same now, because we are very aware of the environment and... I’m a member now because I enjoy being part of it and [...] seeing what we do actually having an effect.” (Land manager 1, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

The accrual of social capital, cultural capital (knowledge and skills) and the ability to assist managers become more regulatory compliant with less effort are often secondary motivations for, or benefits of, participating in a landscape-scale group. But as one stakeholder describes, there can be a subtle difference between motivating and incentivising factors:

“Well, I think there’s two aspects to this. There are very few farmers who are in farmer clusters who have been motivated to do so because of money. Motive is why people do something. And people go into farmer clusters because they want to. Because they want to work with their neighbours, because they want to be proud of their farms, wildlife and environmental delivery. Because they enjoy it... And none of those reasons, on the whole, are to do with money. Now where the money comes in is incentive. Because incentive is more. So they can be as motivated as hell, but if they can’t afford to do it, and if they’re not incentivised to do it, it becomes really difficult. So the money is there as the incentive to help them do more of it and help them do it better and help them do it at all. Because most of these conservation environmental outcomes require some sacrifice of economic productivity.” (Stakeholder 3)

5.4.2 Incentives

While a proportion of farmers are motivated to engage in landscape-scale initiatives by a personal interest in the environment, it is accepted by respondents that in order to roll out such initiatives on a large scale, sufficient incentivisation needs to be put in place to ensure good levels of engagement at all stages of any implemented process. Incentives can be financial and/or non-financial.

Few of the case study initiatives offer direct financial incentivisation, and indeed one of the non-CSFF farmer groups requires members to finance the project themselves, while at the same time being prohibited access to the uplift in CS points for which CSFF group members are eligible. There are currently only two cluster groups operating under this self-funded mechanism in existence, as far as the authors are aware. Respondents suggested that group members prefer this model to that of the CSFF due to a lack of obligation, regulation or expectation exerted by an external body, allowing freedom to self-govern. However, it is important to bear in mind that members of these groups tend to be large land owners who are less time-limited (and may have greater financial capacity) than some of the small to medium sized farms. Using an uplift in points to encourage uptake in future schemes is likely to be effective, however due to the fact that many CSFF group facilitators have reported that depth of member engagement can be low, it is important to consider all of the means to ensure actual engagement occurs over and above simply signing up to a group.

Groups without direct financial incentivisation might have access to external funding opportunities via an informed facilitator, but this will be on an *ad hoc* basis and is not sufficient to incentivise uptake at initial stages. One respondent stated that *“there has to be some sort of incentive there for that privilege of being told what to do”* (Land manager 2, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group). Another said:

“There’s variation in the extent of altruism amongst farmers, and very many farmers are quite altruistic about the environment and they will make a lot of effort, and they’re very keen on securing environmental benefits on their land, but they still have to make a living. And there will be some owners who have land and they can afford to be very altruistic and make fundamental changes. But even with somewhere like, for example, [one estate], which has been in the news a lot, they do receive very high

payments of pillar two money and whether... it's unlikely that that would have taken off if it wasn't for public monies. They still have to survive and make a living somehow." (Stakeholder 4)

Where financial incentives were not present, for example in CSFF groups, facilitators would refer back to motives:

"I think the incentives are personal motivations rather than incentives, per se." (Facilitator, Case 4 CSFF farmer group)

Financial incentives

A number of comments were made by respondents about the role (or potential role) different types of financial incentive might play in encouraging land managers to participate in collaborative initiatives, and in AES more generally. These are summarised below.

Extra points for CS application

This is available to CSFF group members only, and is a contentious topic for other groups offering comparable models but who are not eligible for the uplift by default. Members of some farmer cluster groups not funded by the CSFF felt that due to the fact that their model and objectives were, in effect, the same as those of a CSFF group, they should be eligible for the same uplift on their applications.

Income-forgone

Some respondents (whose agri-environment agreements were delivered in part through the landscape-scale initiative they were involved with) expressed dissatisfaction with the existing AES payment model, stating that it did not sufficiently compensate for the normal gains that would be lost by implementing certain environmental interventions instead of management for production.

Capital works grants

Capital grants tend to be viewed favourably by many respondents, partly due to the potential for achieving economies of scale through delivering capital works across multiple farms at the same time, particularly if applied for and coordinated by a facilitator or other third party. The perceived simplicity and transparency of the grant system is important, as is being clear about the environmental objective that is being sought:

"Our agreements are very much focused on grant rates and sort of habitat management area payments. But with a really strong emphasis on why we are doing it... the way we deliver our sort of habitat management payments is on kind of a flexible scale, so the more of those objectives that a farm can achieve, sort of slide them up the scale... we have the flexibility to change what intervention rate we offer. So we might offer 100% if it's going to deliver something absolutely fantastic." (Facilitator, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Bonus payments

Few case studies provided bonus payments for environmental work, although one stakeholder (who was also a facilitator of a landscape-scale group) referred to a possible bonus which land managers were unaware of (and had not, therefore, acted as a driver in their decision-making process):

"We have got money for the farmers but again I haven't made that abundantly clear to the farmers. So they are doing it all at the moment without getting any payment or they don't think they are getting any payment. Again I wanted them to be involved in this because they wanted to be involved in it, not because I was paying them to be involved. I wanted it to be a bit more of an honest transaction in that respect." (Stakeholder 6)

A number of respondents felt that the financial incentivisation of land managers to belong to landscape-scale groups would negatively affect the purpose of groups already in existence, attracting people for the wrong reasons:

“I just think that’s a recipe for getting a load of people in a group who don’t really want to be in it... Or groups set up solely for that purpose. And then it will just dilute everything and lose what we’ve got.” (Facilitator, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Group payments

Several respondents criticised the administrative design of some financial incentives. For example, in the case of one initiative that (as an area containing large amounts of common land) has experience of delivering agri-environment agreements and receiving payments as a collective, respondents cited experience of unfair advantage to certain cohorts and individuals benefiting without directly affecting delivery. For example:

“If the ambition was to have parts of the [scheme] delivered through collaborative working, then how you pay is incredibly important and I would have a conversation with the RPA, some of them have aged 20 years trying to pay collaborative groups. And what DEFRA decided a long time ago, wrongly or rightly, was that when you have a group of farmers working together you pay one person. And that person takes the money and distributes it to the others. And they wash their hands of it frankly, that is it.... So every common on [this upland] that is in an agri environment scheme, gets an annual payment for distribution. Now some commons are incredibly well set up with a group of trustees and internal deed and clarity on everything. Others are not. There are also differences on how those people get paid. So, one common might decide it’s going to pay a man with a cow more than another common. So there are already discrepancies, it doesn’t always cause problems, but it can cause problems. So payment to a collaboration is really complicated... I mean I think you know, if there was a right structure with a proper internal deed that was the same across everybody’s working and the payment rates were the same and that people only get paid if they actually did what they said they are going to do, then fine. But DEFRA will never say those things, therefore it is left to some poor soul who has signed the agreement to dish the money out.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

When asked about how they would approach payments to collaborative groups if it was up to them, this facilitator went on to say:

“I would have a process that everybody used, I would get away from this local decision making. And I have to make some hard decisions about who benefits. I think at the end of the day the people who do the work on the ground should be the ones who get paid...I wouldn’t [include the non-active graziers], I would call their bluff.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Comments around financial incentives state the need for timely payments to land managers and facilitators, both of whom are put off by poor experience with delayed payments under previous AES.

Payment levels

Most respondents who had received financial payment in some form for their environmental work stated that these had been sufficient for the management required. Some respondents suggested that they would be doing some of the land management they were being paid for even in the absence of payment:

“The brilliant thing about them is because of the financial incentive, they’ve got us all doing them and I’d be, if you took the money away a lot of us would continue doing it anyway.” (Land manager 3, Case 10, Auction)

Nevertheless, the presence of payments does enhance existing management for many farmers. As this land manager explained:

“I think some of them are fine. Some of them cover the cost and a bit more which is, I guess, good from my end anyway. Some of them only just. Really would we do it for less? Well, in our situation quite probably because of that whole thing about the benefit for me. So we would have let’s say margins around fields and things like that anyway. Would we have quite so many? Maybe not. I don’t know. I think there’s probably a bit of both. Generally I’d say they’re not too bad.” (Land manager 2, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

And for other land managers, payment was essential to their participation (and this is also likely to be the case for many land managers not currently participating in environmental schemes and initiatives):

“So long as it pays, then I’ll certainly be keen to do a bit more. There’s ten metres more, there’s another ten metres a mile up the road on my other land that’s in stewardship and that’s going to be the same to rebuild. So we’ve already carted an awful lot to it. It’ll be a big boost to our bank account as there’s always something to be paying. There’s always something to be buying.” (Land manager 1, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

Some land managers were less content with the level of payments provided by environmental schemes (including those delivered through/in conjunction with landscape-scale schemes). They felt that providing payment for the costs of management alone is not sufficient, and that compensation should also be provided to cover income forgone. For example:

“We do get some money but it’s not really enough... They cover the cost of what work you have to do fine. But I wouldn’t say they cover the cost of what you could lose, what you are losing.” (Land manager 2, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

One stakeholder also emphasised the importance of providing sufficient financial incentive to land managers for undertaking environmental land management as part of a coordinated or collaborative scheme:

“It can’t just cover costs because you’ll be outplaced in the market very quickly because somebody else will come along and give you a higher return. Farmers are looking for what they can get for their business. So if something’s only breaking even and they’re having to put a lot of time and resource in it, what’s the benefit?” (Stakeholder 10)

There was recognition that standardising payments is difficult because holdings vary so significantly according to multiple factors, such as topography:

“It is very difficult to put a cost on something because like I can see from Natural England’s point of view they have to put a cost, a standard cost on fencing. But obviously fencing the green part of that field is different to fencing moorland that is undulating and is inaccessible. So that two pounds fifty a metre nowhere near covered the cost of the moorland fence.” (Land manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale initiative)

In the case of one auction, the facilitator discussed how payment levels were adjusted in response to farmer feedback. Instead of farmers being driven to submit the lowest possible bid for delivering the management a standard price was set for the intervention, which was considered more equitable:

“What we had first was a pure reverse auction; so some saw it as a race to the bottom and that didn’t sit well with me and it didn’t sit well with the farmers. So we listened to them and then we came up and we devised a new scheme; so we have now got, we call it [name of scheme] so it is a uniformed price for

a certain measure intervention everybody receives the same price per kilogramme of nitrogen that they are saving and if they are saving more they all get paid more.” (Facilitator, Case 10, Auction)

According to respondents, incentivisation can only be appropriate if it targets the right sort of management and remains consistent. One respondent from a large-scale coordinated initiative expressed concern that current outcomes might be wasted and require re-doing further down the line:

“We need some proper grant mechanism in place that is in place for at least five years when you’re controlling bracken. You’ve got to have zero tolerance and year after year stop bracken coming back. Because they’ve done ... If you don’t do follow up treatment it would cost just as much as the initial treatment.” (Land manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale initiative)

Non-financial incentives

The term ‘incentive’ was typically regarded in financial terms. Non-financial incentives were otherwise described as ‘merits’, ‘benefits’, ‘sweeteners’ or ‘gestures of goodwill’. Some respondents felt that financial incentives can be ineffective at achieving significant behaviour change and favoured other means. For instance, one stakeholder (representing a commercial organisation) talked about why, in a voluntary group initiative they had set up for their producers, they had not offered a financial premium for taking part:

“Premiums tend to incentivise the wrong kind of behaviours. Premiums also mean that if you’re paying them a premium, you’re asking them to do something. And if you’re asking them to do something and you’re paying them money and the bean counters get involved you then have to audit it. So you set up an industry of auditing what we’re doing as well. So you know we’re sitting there thinking well, we can trust farmers, we’re not going to pay them a premium. I can remember the first, particularly the first meeting we had up in the north actually we sat there and we invited about twenty, twenty five farmers into the room and sort of explained the concept, what we wanted to do with them. And I’d say about half the farmers stood up and walked out. They just couldn’t get their head around the fact that we weren’t paying a premium.” (Stakeholder 9b)

Despite losing some farmers from the initial meeting as a result of not offering a premium, this respondent nevertheless felt that it was the right decision, as the farmers that remained were very committed and had implemented a number of environmental interventions on their farm.

Examples of non-financial incentives offered by initiatives to their members included:

Advice and training

This might include free advice on applying for individual stewardship schemes, or on soil health or monitoring or evaluation. Free training events to improve environmental management and knowledge was also considered by some respondents to incentivise land managers to either engage with an initiative or deliver on the ground. As this facilitator explained:

“The only incentive was that they were going to be helped. I mean it was at the time the Countryside Stewardship began, we had several farmers in the group, were in HLS but a number of them were ELS and I think one of the attractions for them was that we were going to hold workshops on Countryside Stewardship, so they would be helped in applying. Not directly helped but they would get that information without having to pay for it.” (Facilitator, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

If non-financial incentives are the principal means of recruiting or engaging a land manager, it is believed that one-to-one advice should form part of the package in order to be able to give site-specific advice, rather than

expecting land managers to be able to apply general information from one-to-many events to their own holdings, without sufficient knowledge:

“If they’re not going to fund delivery, if they’re not going to fund actual projects, if you like, and they’re only going to fund talking, then one-to-one talking is the key. It’s crucial.” (Facilitator, Case 4 CSFF farmer group)

Free monitoring, evaluation and feedback

For some farmers, receiving tailored guidance, habitat mapping and/or environmental monitoring on their farm can also provide an incentive for participating in an initiative, particularly if they see this as putting them in a good position to apply for schemes in the future:

“Another incentive just quickly is that they, everyone involved in E.L.Ms is going to get quite a high level habitat map and hopefully a natural capital appraisal of their land, which provides them with a base line, not only for E.L.Ms but open up funding opportunities for complete other sources as well.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Incentivisation is seen as critical to recruitment and engagement. One respondent suggested that a financial incentive might encourage land managers *“to step over that first step to be part of something”* to start with, but payments might gradually be reduced later on, as other benefits and opportunities materialise from their participation in the group (Stakeholder 10).

5.5 Monitoring and evaluation of environmental objectives

In this section we discuss some of the environmental monitoring strategies employed within our case studies and explore a number of issues around this theme. Whilst many of the points raised in the discussions below are clearly also pertinent to agri-environment schemes in general (i.e. not just landscape-scale approaches), these issues emerged strongly from our research and are perhaps particularly drawn into focus in a collaborative/coordinated context. Some of our case studies also provided positive examples of where environmental monitoring can result in additional benefits, particularly in relation to farmer motivation.

5.5.1 Extent and type of environmental monitoring within the case studies

There was wide variation between the case study initiatives in terms of the amount and type of environmental monitoring that had been carried out, with some carrying out monitoring sporadically or on an individual farm basis, and others implementing more formal and extensive environmental assessment programmes. In a number of cases, monitoring occurred on an *ad hoc* basis rather than being integrated into the planning and design of the initiative itself. Others had benefited from monitoring undertaken as part of affiliated or wider projects taking place in the area. Examples of the types of environmental monitoring taking place across the initiatives included:

- Informal biodiversity assessments (*All initiative types*). Respondents cited numerous examples of informal assessments, particularly bird and butterfly counts, having been carried out by local volunteers, conservation NGOs, and/or academics. These were usually either driven by the facilitator (who in some cases also personally carried them out) or proposed by the assessors themselves. Some had been commissioned by individual farms with a particular interest in knowing the outcomes. This type of monitoring has clearly been useful and can provide substantial amounts of data at a low cost. It can also have the benefit of forging/strengthening links between farmers and members of the local community. However, the voluntary and *ad hoc* nature of it can be problematic in terms of providing consistent information, particularly in relation to creating a baseline from which to measure subsequent progress. As one facilitator said:

“I’d like to have somebody who was responsible for it... it would be great if we could make a contribution to [a local NGO who have done some monitoring] and then I could demand the data rather than just hoping I got it!... It would be nice to have something that we could do that was a bit more systematic” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

One facilitator also raised concerns about the capacity of local groups to carry out any monitoring on a large or consistent scale and stressed that the presence of such groups (particularly community volunteers) is very dependent on the local area, with some locations having access to a greater range of active groups than others.

- Mapping (CSFF and non-CSFF farmer groups). Farm habitat mapping, including in some cases natural capital mapping, had been carried out in at least two of the case studies, but this appeared to be an initial activity rather than providing any ongoing assessment of environmental outcomes.
- Water quality and nitrate monitoring (Auction initiatives). In one case study this included providing detailed feedback to farmers about the amount of nitrogen-leaching they had saved from implementing management actions. This helped inform their input-use and can demonstrate a positive cost-benefit. As one land manager explained:

“The last two years, they’ve monitored and then given me the results of how much nitrogen I’ve lost within the cover crops. So I’ve made a reduction in inputs, like on nitrogen and phosphate, especially based on that...so it will be somewhere in the region of a 10-15% reduction in input [this year] which is all very positive” (Land manager 3, Case 3, Auction initiative)

In another auction case study, water quality monitoring was carried out as part of an affiliated project, and an environmental NGO had been working with farmers to help them understand the impact of their interventions.

- Farmer-operated App (Auction initiative). In one case study farmers used an app to upload photos as evidence of their management. This proved popular with farmers, who found the app easy to use.
- Scientific monitoring by stakeholder organisations (Large-scale coordinated initiative). In one case an extensive environmental monitoring programme was implemented across the area by the initiative/stakeholder organisations, including regarding water and hydrology, habitat health and biodiversity. This created/contributed to a large resource of scientific evidence and research on a number of environmental topics and has demonstrated a range of beneficial outcomes from the activities of the initiative. However, the facilitator felt that a lack of funding restricted what was able to be achieved, particularly in terms of monitoring the impacts of interventions at the farm level. Perhaps related to this, the land managers interviewed were not aware of the results from environmental assessments and had not received feedback about the effects of their management:

“Rarely [have results been fed back]. That is something that really is a bit of a gripe for me because a lot of this environmental work is done but not monitored. So how do we know that it has been a success or not?” (Land manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Such lack of feedback on environmental success/failure – but also the importance of receiving it was reiterated across the interviews, as we detail further below.

- Farmer assessments of SSSI status (Non-CSFF farmer group). In one case study, farmers had received training to enable them to carry out assessments of SSSI status (which was integrated into HLS

management objectives) and this had fed into Natural England datasets. This was deemed extremely successful, with farmer uptake far exceeding the facilitator's initial expectations. Involvement in this monitoring was felt to have been hugely beneficial to farmer engagement, understanding and motivation. This example is discussed in further detail in section 5.5.4 below.

- Hydrological monitoring by the Environment Agency (Community-led initiatives). Both of the community-led case studies (which both included flood mitigation objectives) had had at least some hydrological monitoring put in place by the Environment Agency.

5.5.2 Monitoring issues and difficulties

In general, there was a sense among respondents that monitoring and evaluation relating to both AES and collaborative environmental initiatives has been insufficient in many cases. There are a number of reasons for this, including both difficulties associated with measuring complex ecological processes, and more practical or structural issues related to initiative governance and resource. Respondents' views on the key difficulties surrounding efforts to monitor and evaluate environmental change are summarised below.

Lack of resource

A lack of funding/resource for monitoring was identified by a number of respondents as a key barrier limiting greater and more consistent environmental monitoring. For example:

"My entire career has been in environmental work and some of it was in the private sector before working for [this initiative] and there is never any money for monitoring and that creates issues. So it is almost the same as what I was saying about convening; everybody wants it and realizes that it is fundamental to be able to justify the next thing or create an opportunity to do the next step, but like convening monitoring is under represented in terms of how it is funded. And certainly a great prominence for that in the next scheme I think would be sensible, particularly if it is linking to natural capital outcomes." (Facilitator, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Respondents were not blind to the realities of funding limitations, but nevertheless asserted that environmental monitoring of some sort was essential and provided a number of arguments for why it was important (discussed below). There are of course a number of different ways in which monitoring can be implemented, as demonstrated by the range of examples present within the case studies. Indeed, the diversity of initiatives in terms of their governance, objectives and processes would likely preclude a standardised approach that was over-prescriptive. Flexible funding for implementing a bespoke appropriate monitoring programme would thus be warmly welcomed by all those involved in collaborative/coordinated initiatives. One stakeholder presented a cautiously realistic view of the issue but argued that some monitoring could be done at a relatively low-cost using a 'basket of possibilities':

"There isn't going to be enough money for the environmental side, let alone the monitoring. So I think we have to find ways that the monitoring can be done within the cluster. And I think that will inevitably end up being a basket of possibilities: use of local volunteers, perhaps the adviser doing more monitoring, or getting paid to do more monitoring than they are at the moment, because that would be very cost effective." (Stakeholder 3)

Lack of group targets

Many respondents felt that environmental improvements were being achieved within their initiative, but this came with the qualifier that benefits were hard to assess because the group had not set out clear targets from the outset:

“But no, we didn’t have any specific targets to achieve in a timescale. However, I would say about half of our priorities we’ve made significant progress on across both clusters. But again, because we don’t have anything to hold ourselves to, it’s difficult to say whether or not we’ve achieved what they set out to do.” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Facilitators in CSFF remarked that they tended to have priorities rather than set goals or targets, and a number saw this lack of target-setting for environmental outcomes as problematic, as it limited assessing achievements of the group:

“In the facilitation fund, you don’t have any targets, you just have ‘this is what we’re going to talk about’.... there’s no environmental outcome targets....., My targets are all about how many meetings I’m going to do... all the rest of it, but the actual delivery is up to the farmers through their individual schemes.. How can I possibly say that my group has achieved anything over and above what they were going to do through their own agreements? That’s my real problem with the facilitation fund, is that it’s not coherent.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

This facilitator went on to say that whilst the CSFF can claim as a group to have created or restored 16 ponds, or planted 11,000 bulbs, ultimately these are created/planted by an individual person or a holding, so it is hard to disentangle the collaborative effect.

Ecological complexities

The difficulties associated with measuring environmental outcomes due to, for example, extraneous factors, ecological complexities and the long timescales involved in realising environmental improvements (see section 5.6.1 for more detail) were widely acknowledged. Providing statistically robust assessments of environmental improvements achieved by initiatives were thus often seen as too difficult to do:

“I think there’s some good stuff, but as is always the way with any natural biological system, there are so many variables that in a lifetime of record keeping, could we actually statistically demonstrate we’d achieved anything? Who knows..? I think there is good things... And of course, we haven’t exactly got records from before for comparison.” (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

The number of variables affecting environmental changes, including extraneous factors such as the weather and climate, were also seen as difficulties in attempts to demonstrate outcomes. For example, the effect of variable weather events on grey partridge breeding seasons was raised by a land manager in a non-CSFF farmer group.

Nature of the evidence

The nature of the evidence and how it is presented was also raised as important. In one non-CSFF farmer group, a land manager commented that, although they have created grey partridge habitat, they have not counted them, so when compared to neighbouring land where they have, and can show this visually in a map, it appears that they have achieved very little. Even though they have now started adding numbers to an online map, this respondent felt this discrepancy gave a distorted picture of achievements.

One respondent discussed how “discovery evidence” (Stakeholder 3) - where farmers identify particular wildlife species as present on their land – is not necessarily taken seriously by official and academic bodies. They gave an example of where 25 farmers had discovered 400 field mice nests in their area but, when reported, Defra and ‘the scientists’ had been “a bit sniffy” about it this type of evidence.

5.5.3 Importance of environmental monitoring and feedback to farmers

There was strong consensus among all respondents (land managers, facilitators and stakeholders) with whom monitoring was discussed that monitoring of environmental outcomes is very important, and that feeding the results back to farmers is crucial in order to sustain and strengthen their engagement with the goals of the scheme/initiative. There were a number of aspects to these arguments that we explore here.

Celebrating success and boosting motivation

Perhaps the strongest theme emerging from discussions about monitoring and evaluation was around praising and encouraging farmers. Many respondents talked about the importance of feeding back environmental success to farmers as a way of acknowledging their efforts, giving them confidence that what they have been doing is worthwhile, and motivating ongoing and future activity. Celebrating success and praising farmers for what they have done well is important. As one stakeholder put it:

“A thing that would then delight them is being praised for having delivered more wildlife. So you look at what’s happened. In general farmers have been in schemes for thirty or so years now, they haven’t been praised at all. And it’s kind of like, oh my gosh, would you bring up your child like that? No.” (Stakeholder 7).

Both facilitator and land manager respondents felt that being able to monitor environmental improvements is key to this in terms of providing farmers with evidence of success and motivating them to continue. For instance:

“Just to encourage people to continue and you know, environmental or financial or whatever it might be, we need to hear positives in order to be motivated to keep moving on.” (Land manager 3, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Accordingly, in cases where consistent species monitoring had taken place within the initiative, this had proved highly beneficial to farmer engagement and motivation. Some land managers – notably in farmer groups (both CSFF and non-CSFF) that involved a strong element of collaboration – talked about such activities creating an element of competition between peers in terms of the species that they could evidence were present on their farm. For instance:

“And also, the strange thing was, it became very competitive, but in a very nice way. [The facilitator] set up a WhatsApp group, and... I never expected this to happen, but someone would take a photo and you’d get real envy. You’d get WhatsApp envy that they’d found some bloody rare butterfly and of course, it was real one-upmanship.” (Land manager 1, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

In another (non-CSFF) farmer group, the facilitator discussed how annual butterfly monitoring carried out by Butterfly Conservation (organised through the initiative) had similarly garnered new interest among the farmers, who now chatted about butterflies on a social basis in a way that would not have happened previously. The monitoring had also included advice from the NGO about tweaking their land management to support butterflies and over time this had increased the farmers’ understanding and enabled them to make their own informed decisions about how best to create the suitable habitat conditions:

“And that has worked really well. And now, I mean I was overhearing a conversation, you know, socially between two of the farmers talking about how the butterflies were doing. I think in a way they have received the training because they are making some decisions without the need to go to Butterfly Conservation. (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group).

Improving understanding and informing management

The example above demonstrates an argument frequently made by respondents that part of the importance of environmental monitoring is its ability to improve farmers’ understanding and inform their ongoing management (particularly if farmers are involved in the monitoring in some way, see below). Although in some cases it may be difficult to demonstrate environmental improvement, helping farmers to learn more about the habitats and wildlife on their farm can help them to understand more about what success looks like and what is needed to achieve it – i.e. why they are being asked to carry out particular land management activities. One facilitator, referring to a different group they had been involved in (not one of this project’s case studies), certainly felt that in that case they were seeing the benefits of being able to provide such feedback:

“I think they have achieved as much as they have done in a short amount of time largely thanks to the amount of time I’ve been able to spend with them doing species monitoring and giving them direct feedback and direct encouragement and one-to-one advice.” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Farmers and facilitators also commented on the necessity of environmental assessments for identifying what biodiversity is present in order to determine how to manage for it. As one land manager simply put it: *“If you can’t monitor it and you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it. Simple as that” (Land manager 2, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group).*

Developing a baseline is particularly important to this process:

“If we want to get there, we’ve got to know where we’re starting from. You know the starting point is so important. And no, I couldn’t do it... I could not do this if it wasn’t monitored. Because I do and everything you do is monitored. You know, we’re monitored, that’s how we progress through life. We need to know where we are and where we’re going and how much we’ve improved things. It’s a bit like someone just planting a whole load of wheat and then combining it and not bothering to find out how much he’s got. So it’s important. Essential, I’d say. It’s essential. (Land manager 1, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Understood in this way, monitoring becomes not just a supplementary activity or addendum, but an integral part of the management itself.

Demonstrating value

In general, farmers involved in collaborative environmental initiatives are keen to know that the actions they are implementing are worthwhile, and to be able to demonstrate this to others. As one respondent said, *“if you can’t show that you’re doing things, then what’s the point of doing it?” (Land manager 3, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group).* Part of this sentiment is about providing encouragement, as discussed above, but some of it is about being conscious that AES, and the CSFF in particular, are publicly funded and thus need to be able to prove that they are of value. Not being able to do this where there has been insufficient environmental monitoring (often due to a lack of resources) can be a source of frustration for facilitators:

“I am acutely aware that we are delivering, we are spending public money and as I said on numerous occasions I can’t quantify the benefits from that” (Facilitator, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

One facilitator also pointed out that being able to demonstrate benefits can help groups to sustain and attract funding: *“if you can show that you are a success, then you’re much more likely to be supported to do other things” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group).*

Farmers are also conscious that they receive public funds for environmental schemes and being able to cite evidence that they have provided value can be important for instilling a sense of pride and furthering motivation. One facilitator talked about how a different initiative they were aware of had been very successful in this regard because farmers had been able to cite clear evidence of environmental improvement (in this case relating to numbers of a particular bird species):

“The project officer spent tons of time talking to [the farmers] about what the benefits were and I just remember years later meeting one of the farmers I had met at that time who said to me, he said that was fantastic, ‘I could go into town and hold my head up high, because I was taking public money and I was delivering, I got more birds, I got more this and that. We had a meeting in the village hall and I could stand up and told them what I had done.’ And he thought that was wonderful.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group).

Establishing baselines and measuring progress is essential to creating this sense of value. Such clear, demonstrable outcomes may not be possible in all cases, as environmental objectives are often complex and it can take decades for changes in land management to bear fruition. Other management may simply not always be effective at achieving the objective, for a multitude of reasons. Nevertheless, being able to evidence change or progress in some form wherever possible is clearly desirable for facilitators, farmers and funders alike.

5.5.4 Farmer involvement in environmental monitoring

Most of the case studies had not directly involved farmers in the process of environmental monitoring and a number of respondents were sceptical about the idea of doing so. For land managers, this caution primarily centred on feeling that they do not have the time and/or expertise to carry out formal environmental assessments. Comments made in this vein by respondents included:

“As far as standing out and counting the amount of birds in the sky, I just haven’t got the time to, to be honest.” (Land manager 1, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

“I monitor it when I pass, if I walk past I monitor it and I can see how it is doing. But obviously we are not specialists. We have not got the degrees and we don’t pay the money.” (Land manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

These sentiments were echoed by the views and experiences of facilitators of farmer groups too, who felt that farmers were unlikely to voluntarily carry out environmental assessments themselves on a regular or reliable basis:

“I think part of the problem is [members of the group] have tried to do a bit of that but a few people who are interested will take part in that sort of thing but mostly they just haven’t got the spare time, or they don’t think they’ve got the spare time, to do that.” (Facilitator 1, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Some respondents were also concerned about a lack of rigour associated with farmer self-assessments due to both a lack of specialist expertise and the potential for self or peer bias (particularly if future payments are linked to results). However, whilst this may indeed be an issue for creating scientifically robust datasets, it does not necessarily prevent self-monitoring being used as a way of providing an indicative measure of environmental progress and of increasing farmer understanding and engagement. As one stakeholder argued,

farmer involvement in monitoring can provide an idea of trends and has the potential to improve over time as relevant skills are developed:

“So if you start in a way which is accessible there’s a difference in science between precision and accuracy. And perhaps having precision is better than being accurate. So accurate is hitting the middle of the dartboard every single time. Precise is not hitting the middle of the dartboard but having your darts all grouped together consistently. Now if they’re all doing consistently or being precise then over time you’ve got something that is meaningful. It might not be as accurate but who gives a toss. You’re understanding the trends. And over time you can incrementally get to being in the middle of the dartboard. Let’s not be obsessed with accuracy, let’s be more interested with being precise over time and just evolving.” (Stakeholder 7)

This stakeholder had themselves been involved in one of our case study auction initiatives, which had successfully engaged farmers in monitoring through the use of an easy-to-use app and through involving them in water quality assessments. Based on this experience, the respondent argued that, if approached correctly – and also ideally funded – this type of monitoring can help give farmers a sense of ownership:

“I think farmer-led approaches are super effective. But you need to be able to come up with those, and I think you can, in ways where they are simple and representative across their farm. So you know, you kind of work to some standards, but they need to be paid to do that as well because it’s part of what they do..... I know from [my experience] farmers would love to be taking out their own porous pots and doing little tests on nitrates in the water because then they would feel connected with it. They would own it.” (Stakeholder 7)

Another example of successful farmer involvement in monitoring was a non-CSFF farmer group, primarily covering upland commons, in which a Natural England advisor trained commoners to carry out ecological assessments of a SSSI they managed as part of an HLS agreement. The organisers were surprised at how popular this training was with the farmers and found that it had benefits both as a way of improving farmer understanding about what they were trying to achieve, and as a way of using farmer knowledge to improve the monitoring itself:

“[Over 60] people, farmers, went through that training. Completely voluntarily. [The Natural England advisor] had no idea, I think he had to run it three times. And the take up was phenomenal. And they said it was, (a) it was really interesting and (b) they felt that this was something they can do, a quadrant, the monitoring opened all their eyes ... and Natural England changed their monitoring program in view of some of their comments. The whole thing really worked well and that bit of training again is something I am sure [the lead for the commoners] will talk to you about, because I think she felt that that was a turning point, that was really important engagement. It empowered the farmers to understand it better. It gave them confidence.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

One of the land managers involved in this initiative was equally positive about having been offered this opportunity:

“I think that is one of the best things that has come out of [the initiative], is the buy in by the members once they start actually looking at that level. And start to understand what they are looking at. It’s enormous...they have a lot more understanding of what the ecologists are trying to achieve.” (Land manager 1, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

This type of monitoring had only taken place in one area covered by the initiative and was made possible by a proactive Natural England adviser, as well as the presence of a relatively standardised method of measuring SSSI status. It may not therefore be directly transferable to all types of environmental management but it

demonstrates that – with appropriate training and resourcing – farmers can play an active role in monitoring, with positive benefits for engagement and understanding.

Some land managers from other farmer groups also felt that some species monitoring could be delivered by farmers: *“The monitoring can be done by farmers. You know, can you tell us how many grey partridges you’ve seen in the last two weeks, and so on.”* (Land manager 3, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group). In one case study where this had taken place with advice provided by experts, it had again had a positive impact on farmer engagement and understanding:

“For example; this last year across all the [parcel of] land of about nine thousand acres, which encompasses the cluster, we have started doing a biodiversity baseline survey. All of the farming birds, pollinators, wild flowers and rare arable plants and things like that, and we have had someone come in, an ornithologist and then also an entomologist and then also a flower man, but I don’t know what you call a flower man, a botanist. And that has been interesting and people learn the different flowers, and there is a WhatsApp group and someone takes a photo of a flower or something and sends it around. So you sort of learn a lot from other people; farmers definitely don’t want to be lectured; if they want to learn they learn.” (Land manager 2, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

These examples demonstrate that farmer involvement in monitoring can prove successful, not just in terms of providing an idea of environmental outcomes but also as a means of boosting engagement and improving management through increasing environmental knowledge and understanding. There must, however, be recognition that not all farmers will be willing or able to participate in monitoring programmes (for a whole range of reasons). The land managers we spoke to were also, for the most-part, relatively engaged individuals who had already had experience of environmental land management, often in a variety of forms. In terms of future E.L.M, similar uptake or positive attitudes towards the concept cannot necessarily be expected across the board, at least without substantial resources and input from facilitators. The potential benefits on offer, however, would suggest that a flexible approach which provides groups with funding and a framework or ideas for monitoring approaches, but which allows them to determine the most appropriate method for their specific situation, would be valuable.

5.6 Timeframes

5.6.1 Timeframes for achieving environmental objectives

It was generally recognised by respondents that habitats take a long time to change. One land manager made reference to how long this took under ESAs. The ESA was originally thought to have been ineffective, but now there has been *“a mood change”* and the successes of the scheme have become recognised as time has passed (e.g. for farmland bird species). The respondent went on to say that:

“Turning a habitat round takes a hell of a long time. So we’ve had the criticism. The Uplands Entry Level Schemes haven’t delivered, they weren’t in for long enough. You know, we have to kind of think what would have been there if they hadn’t been there. It’s no good just saying just because the species haven’t come flooding back. That takes a long time to actually happen.” (Land Manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale initiative)

Moorland in particular was identified as a habitat requiring a long time to change:

“I think they [farmers] do feel that it’s getting slightly better in some areas, but of course that is the other issue, we are dealing with a moorland habitat that takes a long time to change. So the [common] has been in continual agri-environment schemes for 30 years almost, 25, they expect it, now just about

now, they expect it that it should be showing signs of improvement.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

The slow speed of ecological processes mean that change can be very slow, as one land manager said, *“I know we were with, our previous project officer, he was all the time saying to us that you are not going to see any really big improvement in the blanket bog for 50 years” (Land Manager 1, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group).*

For this reason it is not always possible to demonstrate specific change but instead to say, *“it is going to take 50 years but we are heading in the right direction” (Land Manager 1, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group).*

“I think there is much more acceptance now that these agri-environment schemes, they might be five years or ten years in duration but they are just stepping stones in a longer term journey, certainly with things like changing moorland habitats and things you don’t just do that overnight.... yeah I think the time scale of an agreement needs to be at least ten years.” (Stakeholder 11)

However, it was recognised that there are different timescales for different types of environmental change. While agreements need to be about ten years for managing moorland, for habitat recreation or creation other considerations have to be made:

“Say we’re doing a woodland agreement and you’re going to reward farmers for converting land that was worth quite a bit to them into woodland where it’s going to bring a very low return, or returns are not going to be for decades, you need something like a 25 year agreement for that.” (Stakeholder 11).

This is relevant to E.L.M, as noted by one respondent:

“But where you are looking to do what might be an E.L.M tier-3 project you know peat & restoration or tree planting for carbon there is a lot where you are effecting a longer term change. I think it would be great if the Government gave us the capacity to lock in to something that is twenty five to thirty years. I think if you go much beyond that it would give the majority a challenge so I won’t go beyond thirty... I think if the payment rate is right or at least there is a review or an indexation of the payment then people will be quite keen to go for these sorts of things particularly with BPS going because of course it is likely to be a major income stream.” (Stakeholder 11)

However, a land manager of a moorland habitat contested this:

“Because there was talk ... that you were going to have to sign up for 25 year agreements and that is not going to work, it is too long.You can’t [commit for that long], you don’t know what your situation is going to be in 10 years, let alone in 25 years.” (Land Manager 2, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Although also concerned about committing to long-term agreements, a different perspective was taken in arable land where there was awareness that farmers do not want to risk missing out on future opportunities. One land manager said that he would be very happy to lock away parts of his farm on a ten-year basis and other parts of the farm where he would like short serve options as they would not want to:

“remove ourselves from agriculture completely because the other option is who knows what wheat prices are going to be in two-years-time. And so, do I want to be locked in to a ten-year scheme when the wheat price goes to £250 per ton and actually there is a food-security issue and there is certainly a profitability issue.” (Land Manager 2, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

With respect to water quality, farmers in catchment initiatives acknowledged that there is a lag involved, that it can take forty years for nitrogen to work its way through the soil/rock and into the aquifers and finally out to sea. From a water company perspective the water quality has not improved.

According to one respondent involved in a large-scale coordinated initiative, it is *“just a massive lesson learned...takes a very long time to restore natural processes”* (Stakeholder 5). Data shows that, in this case, when they factor in all the other political and environmental changes, they have stabilised water quality and this may be the best that they can do to avoid the need for any future kind of chemical treatment.

Although long time scales are needed to achieve environmental change at a landscape scale, one respondent pointed out that sometimes quick returns do occur:

“Well, not as long as you think, actually, because some things... we started work on some projects with long term goals, and a lot of things, you see the results a lot quicker than you were expecting, which is fantastic.So, yeah, that’s been very encouraging.” (Land manager 2, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

5.6.2 Allowing sufficient lead-in time for engagement

The importance of lead-in time in the creation of landscape-scale initiatives was noted by respondents in relation to gaining engagement from land managers and allowing time for agreements to be signed. A period of 12-18 months was proposed for non-CSFF farmer groups and large scale initiatives:

“There is a lot of stakeholder management and engagement that you have to do before you can get any agreement from anybody to do anything. So typically it took eighteen months to sign agreements with landowners on average to actually get boots on the ground and start delivering something because there are a lot of agents involved, accountants because of the way the financing works between the agreement holder and us as an agent.” (Facilitator, Case 12, Large-scale initiative)

Not only is lead-in time required for the signing of legal agreements groups need time to develop and to find a common interest:

“So I don’t know how you actually, you know, I mean even though this was farmer led it wasn’t a group, if you like, when we started and it takes time to become a group. So I think that is one of the main issues particularly with groups which are seen from above as being, ‘oh that would make a natural group’...you need to have... some background before you can decide...where is the interest? Where is the theme?” (Facilitator 2, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Time is also needed for the farmers to think about implications for their farming systems:

“You would still need to leave sufficient time as I think has been proven so far to let the ideas and the things sit with farmers so they can actually process them. Not go in [saying], ‘this is what it is’, ‘this is how we do it’, ‘this is natural capital’, ‘right, do that’; that wouldn’t work, you ...need to get the information, let it sit, then go back and then give a bit more information or talk about scenarios and then let that sit and now I’m in the position I’m going back again now with the actual implementation options.” (Stakeholder 6)

Another respondent described the need for preparedness, for example in a moorland/upland setting where farmers had been engaged already in a dialogue about the future due to past crises, so had lead-in of approximately five years. The facilitator said that for this reason:

"[Land managers] were prepared in some respects to the challenge of being constructive and coming up with a solution. Now... you go to another part of the country and you choose six farmers who happen to live in the same neighbourhood and [without] a word, they will lack that preparation. And I am always stressing this, that ... you get that preparation right and then they will grab the opportunity. But it is quite intensive that preparation, in time, for them and for someone else. And that is why I think facilitation is absolutely essential. It cannot work without I don't think, that is my experience." (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

5.6.3 Implementation schedules

The common feeling was that agreements and implementation timeframes for environmental schemes and initiatives should be very long term. Part of this, as noted above, is related to recognition of the long-term nature of ecological processes, but it is also related to a need to ensure continuous investment for businesses:

"My opinion is it doesn't stop! You have to... it's a constant investment. We have had problems in the past with schemes that have only lasted for a short amount of time, and they've provided capital infrastructure, but there's no money for maintenance of that infrastructure." (Stakeholder 4)

A number of respondents also pointed out that changes to environmental management cannot always be implemented quickly. As one respondent argued, *"so I think some changes can happen really quickly, and others take a lot longer"* (Farmer 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group). Whilst some things can fit into a 4-5-year time plan, other things need to happen more gradually or with more lead-in time. Farm planning is long term and the pace of change to farming practice can, in some instances, be quite slow:

"Farming and environmental stuff, it all takes time to implement, things don't happen overnight. It's not an industry that changes. I mean plans on the farm are made at least a year in advance, but most of the time you've got your, you've made your plan for next year, but in your head you've already got your plan for the year after floating, or just waiting. You're planning long-term. Farming is a long-term thing." (Land manager 1, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

This was a common theme for initiatives concerned with hill farming, which cannot change rapidly due to livestock having been bred to suit particular grazing regimes:

"And there is its own rhythm really, so if there is, if it is going to require changes, being able to start thinking about the preparation for that, you know, it's all very well for an agency to come in and say we want you to put more animals on the moor... These animals are accustomed, they have grown on the moor, that is how they survive. And therefore you need two or three years of a breeding programme to give you what you want. So time is very important." (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Agri-environment schemes and initiatives thus need to take account of where such management practices require longer implementation times.

Inflexible schedules for delivering actions within AES agreements alongside procedural issues can also create difficulties for land managers. Late approvals, late payments and bureaucratic issues in particular were noted as causing problems for farmers:

"With the Countryside Stewardship if you are having to do the capital works over a longer period of time you are still tied to a five-year agreement then that would work. ...but delays in RPA approving these things on time. To deliver the amount of capital that I have had to deliver you need two years, and so, to try and do it, well in theory I had twenty-one months, but you have lost that first half of winter so, you have got to do it in just over a year." (Farmer 1, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

This becomes important when jobs are sequential, creating a rush to deliver and meet the deadline. Slow progress and delays can also be caused by bureaucratic processes, such as planning permission for ponds as one land manager said, *“we have to go through lots of different government bodies. And it’s all very slow”* (Land manager 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group). For this reason, it was suggested by one respondent that a Stewardship Scheme should be five years capital and ten years management.

Respondents made a distinction between the expectations of different projects/agreements. With one project where there were not any particular timeframes, a facilitator in a non-CSFF farmer group said they took the view that *“we’ll get there as we can”* and that was felt to work, as you’re not putting too much pressure on anyone and you have got the time to take advantage of opportunities as they come up. They went on to say that structured programmes can be demanding on time:

“In terms of a more structured thing like facilitation fund, because we had twenty landowners and it was very focused on training when we applied, we had to come up with a schedule that involved about twelve events a year which is quite a lot... So, I would say we would have put together, tried to put together a different programme that wasn’t quite so many events throughout the year.” (Facilitator, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

5.6.4 Continuity and keeping the momentum going

A common theme that emerged was the importance of building momentum and capitalising on engagement. When there was an option to continue the group there was often a wish to do so: *“there is obviously a desire among the majority of the group to keep it going”* (Facilitator 2, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group). For this reason, having a plan for follow-up funding was an important factor in capitalising on interest and group momentum:

“But then you build up momentum and you get people engaged and they’re like yes, what next? What shall we look at now? You know I’ve heard about tree planting. Shall we look at what we could do? And that’s when you need to go ‘right so now we’re going to be supportive’ and that’s when they need the next bit of funding to then allow you to, say unlock carbon credits, or [act] as a bridge to getting the next thing, where the fundamental activity is to bring people together, raise awareness, kind of motivate them into doing something.” (Stakeholder 5)

Farmers see the process as continuous, and are thinking ahead saying that you need to be developing the next agreement while you’re finishing off the previous one, *“So, you’ve got a kind of continual kind of work kind of coming on”* (Land Manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale initiative). Indeed, many farmers saw the group activity as a long-term commitment extending to the next generation:

“I think that they very much see this as a permanent fixture. And I think that’s a good thing. I think these groups should be well capable of lasting for generations. It should go beyond short-term delivery of conservation goals and, I’ve said it before that these groups are all about people and relationships between people. You don’t get those overnight. You don’t even get them in 3 years, usually.... So putting time limits and constraints on projects can dampen the spirit in some ways.” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

This view was supported by other respondents. For instance, one stakeholder emphasised the importance of long timeframes for ensuring that momentum that is built up during the course of a scheme or initiative is not lost:

“Well, you need long timeframes. I don’t know a group of farmers who’ve come together to be a farmer cluster in the expectation that this is going to last 3 years and then stop. If it was going to last 3 years and then stop, why would they start? So, they are... in the groups that I’ve helped set up... they’re starting to think next generation in the first meeting, or two. So they were already thinking next generation. And there will be a presumption in every farmer cluster’s mind that their facilitation fund will be renewed.” (Stakeholder 3)

For this reason, having confidence over the extension and renewal of agreements was also seen as important:

“So for them, 3 years is over in a flash. And if they then run the risk of not getting it extended, or renewed, well, they’re feeling well we’ve done all this work, we’ve done everything you’ve asked us to, and now you’re saying we can’t continue! What’s that all about? And also then, if you have a gap, so there’s a time delay between when their grant finishes and when the next one starts, that’s very damaging. So really, if government wants these farmers to take a generational attitude to their conservation and environmental work, they do have to put as long a timescale on it as they possibly can, and make extension and renewal as easy as they possibly can.” (Stakeholder 3)

“I think it would be reassuring for people in our position if there was at least provision written into it that it might be able to carry on. But of course, there’s no guarantees in anything, is there?” (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group).

5.7 Cost-effectiveness

5.7.1 Farmers

Cost-effectiveness can depend on the initiative type and processes involved for application etc. and the importance of reducing time spent on the application process and attending events was noted. Some respondents criticised CSFF as time-consuming and requiring too much paperwork, for instance:

“[Our approach] takes up a little bit of time but we’ve always tried to make sure it’s not too much. So there’s no application process, there’s no kind of requirement to come to a certain number of events or anything... I think when we had the facilitation fund, because we had so many events per year, some of them probably felt like they were getting a bit evented-out, sort of. And there was quite a bit of paperwork associated with the facilitation fund as well.” (Facilitator, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

The popularity of interventions that were short in timescale and did not require too much commitment, or time in decision-making time, was also identified. For example, maize management options in auction initiatives are preferred to options which require a longer term commitment, as found with other schemes, according to a facilitator.

One view from a facilitator in a non-CSFF farmer group was that the burden of work largely falls to the facilitator, not to the farmer, especially where farmers delegate to agents or use contractors. Another facilitator quantified the time involved for facilitators and farmers for a community-led initiatives as follows:

“Well probably each individual farm scheme will probably tie us up ... group members for, let’s say, depending on the size between ten and twenty man days. I must have personally spent six, seven, eight days on this, just me, and I can add my other colleagues in. So maybe on average fifteen man days to do a scheme and one to two man days for the farmer or landowner.” (Facilitator, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

With respect to covering costs, the feeling is that payments cover direct costs but, for example, if you are spending time planting a hedge, *“it’s time out of your working day” which is given for free (Land manager 1, Case 7, CSFF farmer group).*

One respondent in an auction initiative indicated that as a farm manager of a large estate, they had to be cost-effective:

“I wouldn’t do it for less. You have to answer to the shareholders here, and everything has to be quantified. If you spend 1000 pounds on seeds for example they want to know why. That’s the business.” (Land manager 3, Case 10, Auction initiative)

5.7.2 Funders and stakeholders

From the funders’ perspective the opportunities collaboration brought in terms of savings were identified by a number of respondents. For example:

“It’s [collaborative environmental management] the only way to go forward. If we really want to achieve biodiversity improvement net gain, a network across a landscape and better value for delivery of money you’ve got to get farmers working togetherthere’s huge savings to be had or the public and for farmers.You’ll get better delivery, you know a percentage of the cost.” (Stakeholder 10)

This was supported by other respondents who pointed out that collaborative initiatives cost less than supporting individual farmers with dedicated advisors and demonstrators and that this is significant, given the limited finances available:

“We know finances are going to be very tight so you might say well actually it would make more sense to be more collaborative approaches with all farmers so they can all access the one point of advice.... definitely when it comes to catchment scale and landscape scale priorities that the Government or Local Authorities has identified, it often makes no sense to do it on an individual farm unit unless you have got really resistant farms in which case you might need to do one on one work” (Stakeholder 8).

A similar recurring theme amongst a number of respondents was that, given that budgets are not particularly large, what is achieved represents good value for money, as this remark shows:

“It is not a great deal of money really that they are putting into it. It is really hard for Natural England to try and engage with a whole group of farmers in a catchment really and they would struggle to do that. So, for what they are actually spending I think it is good value for money... I do think that Natural England are getting a pretty good deal.” (Facilitator, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

This idea is taken up with other respondents who argued that the CSFF represented good value to the government on a number of fronts:

“The cost of the facilitation fund relative to the cost of the agri-environment scheme that it is enhancing is miniscule. I presume somebody in Defra has done that sum. But it’s tiny. I think I worked it out as about £7 a hectare, or something. In the scheme of what goes into agri-environment on a per hectare basis, that’s a very small sum of money. So it’s very good value for government....And then of course you get all the... .. intangible economic benefits of the farmers probably spending more money on this than they should.” (Stakeholder 3)

This stakeholder also referred to the hidden financial gain when groups are working well that is probably impossible to quantify, and the personal spending by very motivated farmers to save *“lapwing or curlew or*

their nightingales". They went on to argue that government officials think this is "wonderful" as farmers to "do it for nothing", giving an opportunity to environmental advisers to "earn a fee to deliver what they exist to deliver". (Stakeholder 3).

However, it was noted by one respondent that collaboration is not always cost-effective, as in some cases there are there are difficulties in getting farmers to collaborate, which protracts and stalls arrangements.

There was also some feeling that for certain initiatives things could be done more efficiently. In a large-scale coordinated initiative and a community-led initiative the use of outside contractors in particular was criticised as being expensive. In one large-scale coordinated initiative for example, one land manager remarked that "the amount of money spent by [the initiative], the figures are eye watering" (Land manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative). They suggested that it could be done cheaper by local contractors and the farmers themselves. Where private estates had elected to do the management, the actual cost per hectare of restoration was significantly less than the initiative's costs. The land manager argued that:

"For Defra, the government to get value for money they need to kind of open the market up by allowing ordinary farmers to be able to bid to do this work, you know. farmers need more control, if brought to the market it could be done more cheaply because don't have large overheads like others [NGOs national parks]." (Land manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

They acknowledged that although some kind of organisation is required to decide what needs doing, "it's more the kind of delivery where you could bring other people in rather than getting outside contractors in. Using the local people" (Land manager 1, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative).

This was supported by another land manager in the same large-scale initiative who agreed that a lot of the work could be done for less money, arguing that a lot of the initiative's budget was taken up with the research and development. When asked if they had learned anything from being involved the response was:

"I think we have learnt a lot about bureaucracy and politics. ...and how the systems work. How inefficient they are. On the back of the bureaucracy and the politics." (Land manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Two facilitators (large-scale initiative and a community-led initiative) also described Natural England as expensive, the latter pointing to Natural England and NGO inefficiencies and the large Natural England management fees incurred, which are not available to larger farms who want to manage their own projects.

Stakeholders involved with auctions tend to agree that, both as a mechanism and in the way the management is monitored, they are cost effective, particularly when compared to other AES:

"If you look at the rate that we got farmers down to for cover crops is something like £60/hectare and yet stewardship pays £120/hectare. So we've just halved the cost.... Because it paid instantly. So they do the work, they send us a photograph of it being done and the money goes straight into their bank account." (Stakeholder 5)

This ease of using the auction platform also attracts those who would not go into another AES:

"You know, the, yeah I mean we found that some of the measures that have been, that have been half, they are willing to do the measures for half of the countryside stewardship cost and there is really something else going on there as well, you know, farmers that have been engaging in this, haven't engaged in countryside stewardship, because of the complexities of the system. This is a relatively, you

know, they do the platform and then they design a contract with FWAG to deliver it and you know, it's just a, it is an easier process and there is more control of." (Stakeholder 1)

This was recognised in one auction initiative as being efficient in that it engages with those who are willing to do the work, which is an advantage, especially if there is a reduced amount of time or budget. In this case the facilitator described how they themselves had done 25-30 farm plans and almost all of those resulted in works taking place, whereas normally they might do 70 farm plans and still get the same results. This point was expanded by another facilitator:

"I think for the capital items yes because the normal way that we work would be going out on a farm visit and identifying opportunities for natural flood management and then coming up with a design and then going back and forth and getting it delivered. Whereas it takes away a lot of that process. So they've already come to us with a site so we just have to verify if that's suitable or not which we can largely do [remotely]." (Facilitator, Case 15, Auction initiative)

This facilitator also judged it to be cost effective as there is only one farm advisor doing the work, beyond the actual auction system, so it was relatively low cost on the basis of staff advisory budget compared to some schemes. Furthermore, because the auction invite goes out to all people in the catchment it is effective at raising awareness and reaching a large number of people:

"Compared to regular catchment work when "you might be in there for two years and there might be 30 farms there that still don't know you are doing the work there, you haven't got around to them yet." (Facilitator, Case 14, auction)

The value to the funders of auctions was recognised by many because of the large sums of money involved in water treatment. One land manager could understand from the funder's perspective this value but was less sure about the value to farmers:

"I can understand why [the water company] at the time wanted to do an auction because, if they are allocating a million pounds it probably gets more done for their million pounds because if you are really, really keen you're going to offer better odds than someone who is not so keen, so ask for less money. So I suppose from their perspective it would be a better way of doing it, from a farmer perspective I don't really know what to say on that one." (Land manager 2, Case 14, Auction initiative).

However, not all agreed that auctions that aim to reduce nutrients flow into rivers and the sea are cost effective:

"Do you know what, the answer to the question is, is it cost effective? I can't imagine [this] nutrient management scheme is cost effective at all. I think it's going to cost a fortune and it will cost the farmers a lot of money in order to be trading in this way." (Stakeholder 7)

This was supported by one land manager who said, *"I don't like the bidding war to try and get it because it takes up too much of my time just keep putting in lower bids" (Land manager 1 Case 15, Auction initiative).*

Efficiencies were judged by some respondents to be long-term in nature, rather than about saving costs in the short term. One stakeholder, for example, pointed to the sustainability of the approach saying, *"we wouldn't say it is all about costs, it is about the long-term cost which means we have to keep the farmers happy. To protect our investments" (Stakeholder 2).*

There was also an interesting comment made by a facilitator, who believed in the principle that if you get it right at the beginning, then you are going to save a lot of costs later on:

“If you cultivate initial ownership like [in this initiative], the farmers really understanding what they are supposed to be doing, you haven’t got this obsession on getting all the prescriptions right, so there is far less to go wrong, and therefore you can front-load it, get it right and then it will run its course. So I think you have to be prepared to pay up front in the money. I have a suspicion that it’s pretty cost effective because once it is up and running then really the only commitment from the agencies is agreement in terms of monitoring and in terms of communication and to see whether they are going in the right direction or not.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

One of the stakeholders also argued that there were opportunities to enhance efficiencies by leveraging private actors, specifically working with food companies, because they are the businesses that can pull the farmers together to actually deliver something. This is explored in more detail in section 6.5 below.

6 Section B: Outcomes associated with environmental management at large spatial scales

Where Section A focused on the *determinants* affecting the success of coordinated/collaborative initiatives, Section B focuses on the various *outcomes* that were reported by respondents. We consider, in turn, the extent and nature of i) environmental; ii) personal and social; and iii) economic outcomes that were associated with the case study initiatives and other groups that stakeholders were aware of. We also explore respondents' views about the extent to which public engagement is/should be incorporated into the activities of such initiatives and the potential benefits and concerns arising from this. We then discuss the extent to which collaboration, coordination, and landscape-scale approaches in general are considered to be effective in terms of providing additional environmental benefits (over and above individual land manager actions).

6.1 Environmental outcomes

6.1.1. Environmental gains (group level)

Achievements

Environmental gains were recognised but, as discussed in section 5.5.2 above, respondents frequently found them hard to quantify and difficult to judge, particularly where there were no clear targets or baseline data. Most respondents agreed that progress was being made but felt that often there is no one big achievement or project outcome. Rather, there is a sense of gradual improvement, both in terms of environmental benefits and understanding. While some respondents pointed to, and enumerated achievements, others were more circumspect because of the limitations of evidence and targets.

A number of respondents were able to point to achievements. Some were definitive about these and how they connected to goals:

“Well I mean as I say we had a set vision that had milestones, that we had to achieve based on that vision and I would say that we have achieved a lot of it. So, I think if we were asked to produce evidence of what we have done, that would be easy to do.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Others were enthusiastic, although they could not necessarily remember the specific goals:

“We have achieved some fantastic successes in terms of habitat creation and securing species diversity and greater numbers of species... it really is profound what has happenedActually, if you asked me what the goals are, right now I'm not sure I'd be able to trot them out one to five, but it is enhancement of key species, key habitats and have they been delivered? Yeah, in spades.” (Land manager 2, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Facilitators were more likely to be able to enumerate environmental achievements in terms of citing, for example, numbers of hectares managed or trees planted. Across the case studies, examples of achievements included: revegetating 34 square km of bare and degraded blanket bogs; sowing 300-400 hectares of herbal leys; planting 50,000 trees across a catchment; creating a series of wildlife ponds and scrapes; and establishing multiple hedgerows.

Other respondents referred to evidence from maps and photographs showing the total area of different habitats created through stewardship and through farmers' own funds, describing achievement as “really impressive”. Some also noted that experiencing changes, rather than seeing quantified numbers in a report, is more meaningful:

"I can go out and walk on a farm down a margin that wasn't there 3 years ago and it's alive with butterflies and insects and I can hear corn buntings above me." (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Such personal observations are mentioned by a number of land managers who report seeing things on their farms that they had not seen for many years.

Fewer respondents questioned the beneficial effects. Whilst recognising that the facilitation fund was a good platform for sharing experiences and resources, one facilitator questioned the environmental benefits, partly attributed to lack of measurement:

"...but it's very limited in terms of what it actually delivers....I know this sounds really cynical, but I'm not really sure what we've actually achieved on the ground over and above... and there's no way of measuring that either because we have no funding whatsoever for any kind of monitoring." (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

One land manager could not attribute any additional benefits because the area in question was already set aside to a certain extent and the habitat was already there.

With respect to objectives and goals, there was a comment that over the years the focus shifts, for example, different functions of a restored peatland have been prioritised over time. Similarly, one land manager (CSFF farmer group) suggested that the goals were evolving, that they have achieved some things and then other things evolve from that in a rolling fashion. The difficulty of setting goals or a mission statement in a non-CSFF farmer group due to limited time was identified by a land manager.

Many habitats take a long time to change and this was seen to be a frustration for people because of the lack of clear visible change and farmers had expectations that were not yet met. As such, one suggestion was that rather than set a target of 5 or 10 years for achievements, it is better to say, *"this is going to take 50 years but we are heading in the right direction"* (Land manager 1, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group).

Other measures of benefits were mentioned including *"enthusiasm....and the understanding has improved tremendously"* (Land manager 3, Non-CSFF farmer group); broadening the capacity of the group which ultimately leads to more take-up of any Agri-environmental scheme (Land manager 3, Non-CSFF farmer group); enabling farmers to look a bit wider than just their own land (Land manager 1, CSFF farmer group); connecting things together enhanced by land mapping (Land manager 1, CSFF farmer group); a much higher general understanding of the value of environmental work and how it could be done (Facilitator 2, Non-CSFF farmer group). One land manager (Land manager 3, Non-CSFF farmer group) identified two outcomes: *"I suppose there are environmental goals that relate to physical changes on the farm and those that relate to knowledge changes"*.

Specific benefits

A number of cases achieved a range of environmental benefits. These included:

Increased environmental connectivity

In one non-CSFF farmer group, the main outcome was increased woodland as well as connectivity achieved with hedgerow links where people were planting or gapping up hedgerows or coppicing to encourage the links. This was supported by mapping the quality of the hedgerows on everyone's land to identify where they might need to be improved to get a corridor. According to both the facilitator and a land manager this mapping has demonstrated that progress is being made towards the goals of the initiative.

Habitat and species

CSFF farmer group respondents tended to prioritise outcomes relating to wildlife and habitat improvements over other, perhaps less tangible, environmental objectives. One land manager remarked, *“our heart is always the wildlife. That’s number one priority. And most of what we do is seeking to improve the environment for the wildlife”* (Land manager 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group). Increased numbers of priority bird species like the yellow wagtails and tree sparrow colonies have been recorded in this initiative, although this was qualified by one respondent who said, *“to actually prove that with statistical analysis would be very difficult”* (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group). Another respondent mentioned an endorsement of their initiative’s environmental improvement by the RSPB and Natural England as a sign that they were doing the right thing.

Whilst habitat is the priority, it was noted that habitat improvement can result in multiple benefits. For example, according to one stakeholder, encouraging bog-forming species can itself support insect communities, which then support the rest of the food chain and bring back bird species and other mammals (Stakeholder 5). Visual benefits were also thought to be powerful in some habitats:

“And now, after seventeen years, a lot of that and nearly all of the really extensive areas of bare peat have been re-vegetated through our work. That is not to say that they have reached a point where they are fully functioning ecosystems with all the species you would expect. But they are now no longer these bare and eroding black square kilometre sized areas of degraded bog they are green again and so the place looks different... there is still a long way to go in terms of returning full blanket bog functionality in terms of having all the species that you would want to see. But there is a dramatic visual difference on a site.” (Facilitator, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Water quality and flood risk

Respondents across a range of initiatives noted improved water quality. For example, in CSFF and non-CSFF farmer groups there have been some good success stories. Catchment auction initiatives farmers noticed reduced runoff with cover crops, while Stakeholder 5 (referring to a large-scale coordinated initiative they were involved with) agreed there was improved dissolved organic carbon, which improves aquatic life.

In one auction case, nitrate calculations are used by the coordinators to show farmers that interventions are working. For example, they are told that x numbers of tonnes of nitrogen have been saved from going into the sea. However, in general it is acknowledged that trying to monitor change on a catchment scale is difficult. One facilitator in an auction case remarked that they can only be guided by knowledge of interventions known to work. One land manager believed that catchment management would indeed improve water quality, with consequent benefits for wildlife. Another, however, questioned the causal connection between agriculture and nitrate in water, arguing that water quality in their catchment is getting worse regardless of interventions.

In a community-led initiative addressing flooding, a land manager reported that feedback from the group assures them that they are having an effect in reducing flooding. Although focused on holding the water back from coming downstream, a few of the farms have also benefited, who otherwise would have had waterlogged land. Also, land managers in this initiative reported seeing very clearly how things they did a couple of years ago have benefited habitat, encouraging more wildlife than was there before. These dual benefits are appreciated, stopping the town flooding but also increasing the environmental benefits to the farm.

Soil quality

According to some land managers in one of the auction initiatives, soil organic matter benefits are on the increase due to cover cropping, although benefits are longer-term and gains are difficult to quantify. More notable in this case, according to one land manager, has been the effect of under-sowing maize on reducing soil run-off. Again, referring to maize management in another auction case, flooding interventions stopped soil erosion as maize fields were harvested in a timely fashion and cultivated to prevent run-off, according to the facilitator. The fact that very few people leave their soil exposed was also noted by a CSFF facilitator, who

said “it is very unusual now to go up this catchment and find exposed soil”. Soil nutrient management gains have been assessed through soil analysis in a Community-led initiative according to the facilitator, but there was no mention of benefits.

Fire risk reduction

This was a specific benefit in Case 5 where the facilitator remarked:

“Fire prevention is probably the biggest success of all. We have had no big wildfires since this was put in place. Mainly because the farmers have got their act together and if anyone lights a fire they come straight down and put it out.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Archaeology

In one non-CSFF farmer group, the facilitator described how they had identified six at-risk archaeological sites to turn into good condition by the end of the agreement, and according to one land manager it worked really well:

“The archaeologist is absolutely over the moon with what we have done on this area, he cannot believe the difference we have made. Yeah. I am not saying the ecologists are so happy.” (Land manager 1, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Recreation, wellbeing and public access

Non-CSFF farmer groups and Large-scale coordinated initiative farmers have installed footpaths, and enabled access by widening the area suitable for walking. This has helped to restrict the amount of erosion and trampling by walkers on the habitats. One land manager described how being a member of a group meant that they could easily arrange with others to allow access for disabled riding.

6.1.2 Environmental gains (Farm-level benefits)

Respondents did not necessarily separate environmental, productivity or economic benefits (see farm-level economic outcomes in section 6.3.2). Rather, they tended to refer to co-benefits of certain management interventions at farm level. For example, in a catchment auction initiative, adding a slurry store not only drastically reduced risk of contamination, run off, and leaching, but the land managers were also able to utilise the nutrients from the manure which meant reduced use of artificial fertiliser, so overall far better management of nutrients. Distinctions between farm level and group level benefits tended to be blurred.

6.1.3 Appropriateness of management

In order to maximise environmental outcomes and sustain land manager commitment to initiatives, it is important that participants have confidence that the actions they are taking are both environmentally effective and complementary (or at least not detrimental) to their wider farming goals. When discussing environmental outcomes, we therefore asked respondents whether they believed the management they were undertaking was appropriate for their particular farm or landscape, and whether they thought there had been any negative impacts, or trade-offs, as a result of the initiative’s activities. Their comments in response to these questions are discussed, in turn, below.

Perceived suitability of management

Most respondents did not express concerns about the appropriateness of environmental management or any associated restrictions. A number felt that it worked very well, saying for example, “the ideal thing about it is, especially with me, is that it just blends in with what we are doing” (Land manager 2, Community-led initiative).

Similarly, according to one auction initiative facilitator, managing the maize and grassland subsoil and the hedge planting are all regular things that farmers are familiar with and might be doing anyway. Others in large-scale coordinated initiatives involving grazing management appreciated the incidental benefits that came with stock control, like helping to keep the livestock where they want them and looking after their welfare.

In a community-led initiative, one land manager was satisfied with the intervention, despite some minimal inconvenience:

“I could show them that the interventions that we put in didn't affect the farm or the profitability of the farm at all because the sheep are still grazing that land in between. Except for the build-up of water and that happens probably twice a year.” (Land manager 2, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

Most land managers thought intervention at catchment level in auctions was appropriate and an effective way of addressing nitrates.

The system of identifying priorities was thought to be important in one non-CSFF farmer group initiative for ensuring management was appropriate. Compared to larger areas designated by spatial planning, the value of a local approach under the CSFF to achieve relevant management was appreciated:

“Trying to create something local and that is exactly what a facilitation fund does in my view. And therefore you know, what you are being asked to do is immediately relevant because it's a group decision ... the fact is that it's so local that [those that] have them that do the same thing and the same weather and same species, all this sort of stuff.” (Land manager 3, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

In terms of farm workload, according to one non-CSFF farmer group, this can depend on; the farmer and their situation; whether they are in stewardship; their ownership or tenancy arrangements; and their size. While some larger farms delegate, smaller farms would have to do all management themselves, which was described as a reasonable workload on top of their normal farming activities.

Where management options were considered inappropriate, this was for a range of reasons. For some it was individual experience, for example, one land manager remarked that *“it didn't really fit into our business model of what we were doing”* (Land manager 1, Case 15, Auction). In another case that involved rewetting in a large-scale coordinated initiative, a land manager described the disruption to livestock management:

“They're wanting to keep it wet which is obviously no good for farming. ...So, I'd want it dry really. They want to block drains up and really, I wouldn't have agreed to it. I would say it's even worse now they've put the fence up than what it would have been. And obviously now the wet is fenced off and if you put animals in it, they're in wet and that's it.” (Land manager 2, Case 6, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Others questioned the appropriateness of the objective or target. One land manager recalled inappropriate spatial planning at landscape-scale and highlighted the need for some fine tuning:

“I was [initially, referring to another scheme] compartmentalised into a larger landscaped area where the options didn't fit my farm at all. So I think you have got to be slightly careful on scale, that is why I say it should be individual as well as collaborative.... the size starts to become prohibitive and has negative factors.” (Land manager 3, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Other farmers contested the rationale for the objectives. According to one stakeholder who was involved with a non-CSFF farmer group, there was also a question about the appropriateness of a management objective in HLS for commoners to establish heather in their area, which was considered to be dominant historically.

Farmers contested this and were reported as saying ‘well we have been here for four or five generations and there has never been heather here and we don’t think that we will ever get it back’.

Negative environmental impacts and trade-offs

The majority of respondents did not identify any specific negative effects associated with their initiatives, however some indirect impacts were noted. One stakeholder noted that if incentives cause people to extensify in some parts of the farm but then have to intensify in other parts, this can have negative environmental impacts. This is exemplified with the incidence of stock being moved around in some habitats, as in one case where a land manager explained how he/she moved the stock onto the land that was not in the scheme because he/she likes to keep livestock. In another case, a facilitator identified the consequences of moving stock off the moor:

“Up in the moor there, the edge of the moor was that with the change in stewardship a lot of livestock were now brought off the moor in the winter, so the moor was in a better state, but they have bought them to their home farms and home farms don’t have the infrastructure.” (Facilitator, Case 14, Auction initiative)

In a large-scale coordinated initiative case where stock has been removed from moorland habitat, there have been concerns amongst all the land manager respondents that the moor is now “grossly understocked” (Land manager 2), and they worried about fire risk following the regeneration saying “if you don’t manage the vegetation load then when you get a dry period you get a wildfire” (Land manager 1).

In a couple of cases respondents referred to the limitations of AES rules and other systems in hampering progress:

“I think we’re held back at times by the stewardship rules and regulations because there’s so much inflexibility in them, in order to actually really be able to push getting some of the targets we want to do.” (Land manager 2, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

This was also hinted at by a land manager in a CSFF farmer group who said that “there are still the odd things that you look at it and think maybe that isn’t quite all joined up”, which they attributed more to the actual management prescriptions rather than the management of the habitat itself. In another example in a non-CSFF farmer group, both the facilitator and a land manager remarked that, although there were good processes in place for risk assessment with the trustees and Natural England, sometimes they had not responded in time and this became an issue.

6.2 Personal and Social outcomes

6.2.1 Social capital

One of the areas where initiatives differ most markedly is in the production of social and personal outcomes. Initiatives which facilitate frequent meetings, gatherings, and networking among the same group of farmers reveal rich social outcomes that are perceived to be of substantial benefit to participants. Farmer groups are likened to traditional farmer forums that enabled the exchange of ideas and knowledge, such as the livestock market, many of which have now closed:

“Because there isn’t the livestock market... that’s a well-trodden theme in terms of farming and social interactions, so maybe it’s replacing the livestock market.” (Stakeholder 3)

Groups are considered likely to assist with issues related to social isolation, a common theme among the farming fraternity in the current climate. The implications of this are that collaborative initiatives might positively impact upon mental health. Respondents stated feeling a sense of belonging and of feeling respected and supported as a result of belonging to a landscape-scale farmer group:

“In our last session we were having a real reflection on what has gone well and we had one guy who just broke down in tears. He was in floods of tears, he dragged all of us, all of us in that room were in floods of tears by the end of it. And was just talking about how hard life had been with his father and how he’s been trying to run this farm and make things happen and his father always stands in his way. And then his father has died and you know all this sort of thing came flooding out into this group. And we were able to as a group just wrap our arms around it and say you know it’s okay, you know it’s all okay. If we hadn’t been there, where else might he have gone.” (Stakeholder 9b)

Such benefits appear most common among CSFF groups and some non-CSFF farmer groups, and will be dependent not only on how many events are organised on an annual basis but also on how these events are organised, as well as how engaged farmers choose to be within their own initiative. Social opportunities afforded by participation in initiatives were widely noted as important. For example:

“I have enjoyed the fact that I have been able to meet everyone who farms around here. Without a doubt. I bet you anything there are older farmers who have been farming for years who haven’t met nearly as many farmers as they would had they not been part of the group.” (Land manager 3, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Developing new social relationships through collaborative groups can also help build social cohesion and peer support networks within local farming communities:

“You are a member of a group with them, therefore you’ve got every reason to call them or talk to them. They’re not just a faceless neighbour. And it’s meant things like we, we’re looking out for each other much more, I think. I think that if we see something going on, we’re more likely to pick up the phone and tell each other.” (Land manager 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

While social outcomes are considered multiple and significant for groups who meet regularly, it appears that initiatives such as auction models, where no defined group exists and especially not outside of each specific auction, are not party to such benefits:

“[Have there been any social benefits arising from participating in the auction?] Not really apart from the chat down the pub to who done what and what they will do next time.” (Land manager 1, Case 14, auction)

Similarly, this might be the case for non-CSFF farmer groups that either have limited gatherings, or have lost momentum and not managed to sustain high levels of engagement among their members:

“I don’t think we’ve become increasingly greater buddies. I suppose we do have 2 or 3 meetings a year, and so we see each other on a more frequent basis [...]. But I don’t think it’s made a great deal of difference really as to how I view my neighbours.” (Land Manager 1, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

The building of new networks, at the same time as establishing trust, allows for further opportunities to present themselves beyond those formally offered by groups, for example labour or machinery sharing. While such outcomes are still relatively rare among the case study groups, there was evidence of machinery sharing reported, particularly by one of the non-CSFF farmer groups.

6.2.2 Increased knowledge, skills and mutual learning

Another important outcome of the more cohesive groups is so-called cultural capital benefits through increases in knowledge and skills either through top-down education or as a result of mutual learning. Farmers are known to be influenced by peer-to-peer learning and experience, and this therefore plays a critical role in the overarching aims of these groups.

Mutual learning

As noted by a number of respondents, mutual learning can occur through both the sharing of expertise and through acknowledging what does and does not work as a result of prior experience, potentially saving costs and time for the information recipient. The following is just one example of the many comments made in this regard:

“It was very much about the learning and the sharing of, of what they’ve done, the successes and they’re failures. I made it quite clear, you know, it’s not all about the successes, you need to talk about the failures that you’ve had as well so that people can learn from your mistakes.” (Facilitator, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

For many respondents, group membership provided an opportunity to learn about practical agri-environmental management, for example:

“I was keen to learn more about what other people were doing in the area because our landscape is a bit unique in terms of what options will work well and how to make them work well and all of that sort of stuff. So there is a lot to learn from people who have been doing it for longer than me as well.” (Land manager 1, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

For others it was the creation of a safe and supportive space within which they could share experiences and learn about agri-environmental management without fear of criticism from sceptical peers. The opportunity to learn from others’ mistakes and have the support of the group was seen as important:

“The other things that have been said to me is it gives those people who are less confident environmentally enough confidence to have a go. So I had one farmers who joined a group. He said, I’m not even in an entry-level scheme and I haven’t got the confidence to go into countryside stewardship on my own, but if I become part of this group, then I’ll do that, because I’ve got all of you helping me.” (Stakeholder 3)

All respondents state that, for those participating in an initiative, interest and knowledge in the environment usually stays the same or increases but never decreases.

Shifting of social norms

Respondents also noticed that an increase in knowledge and awareness tends to cause shifts in social norms, such as competitive behaviour between members. Some group members use social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook or Twitter not only to communicate but also to demonstrate their environmental credentials, ‘boasting’ about biodiversity gains instead of, or as well as, good livestock or crop management. For example:

“Probably 10 years ago if you met up with a neighbour, one would have said, ‘how’s harvest been’ or something like that; I think probably now the opening thing is ‘how are your stone curlews?’ or ‘how are the tree sparrows doing?’” (Land Manager 1, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

“We used to show off our oil seed rape crop because we were particularly proud of it. We now see the conservation stuff and the outcomes as important as our agricultural side.” (Land manager 1, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Land managers were also said to be moving towards an appreciation of non-commercial advice from facilitators or advisors. Where previously land managers might have been hesitant about demonstrating an interest in wildlife or having expertise in a particular area of biodiversity, groups have changed these attitudes so that more farmers feel they can now talk at ease about their interests, enthuse others, and express pride in knowledge. Shifts in thinking were also noted in terms of land managers becoming more open to, and appreciative of, taking a landscape-scale and joined-up approach to environmental management, although this may be the case more for highly engaged, rather than peripheral, group members:

“I think people are getting to understand that idea as well. But rather than just looking at what you’re doing on your farm, if you look at it on a wider landscape and it would be good to know where next door put their particular bits of habitat or whatever to try and work much more in a kind of a bigger picture rather than just focusing on your own little bit.” (Land manager 1, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

One facilitator from a non-CSFF farmer group, on the other hand, suggested that shifts are limited; those who are interested are, and those who are not, are not: a challenge exists to bridge this gap. Adjustments to *practice* in terms of working together for environmental outcomes also appear to change at a slower pace than changes in attitude (i.e. to the hypothetical notion of collaborating). It might be that more work needs to be done to persuade farmers to actually collaborate on the ground, or that specific methods to achieve such outcomes require honing. Although, one auction-related respondent stated that *“it is collaborative but I am not necessarily sure that the farmers know that they are collaborating” (Facilitator, Case 10, Auction).*

There was also some evidence of a shift in some cases from land managers being ‘secretive’ to sharing tips and methods for success. As one respondent acknowledged:

“We share our knowledge as well, as a group, in terms of where we’ve had different successes... I think the biggest problem with farmers is that they want to see their own business succeed, and when it does succeed on something they don’t want to share it, quite often... And I think that’s a real shame, and that’s something that we, as an industry, need to get over, get round.” (Land manager 2, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Such transitions usually only occur, however, with those land managers who have thoroughly engaged with the initiatives, rather than those who are signed up (with a CSFF, for example) but do not really participate in the project.

There is a sense that, were an initiative to stop running, some aspects of environmental management might be continued by farmers regardless, simply as a result of increased awareness around issues. This is, however, unlikely to be the case for all environmental issues, especially those requiring more time or capital to implement.

6.2.3 Personal benefits of participation

Respondents referred to a number of personal benefits arising from their participation in a landscape-scale initiative. For example, several land managers gained personal enjoyment from being able to enhance environmental benefits on their farm:

“I felt really happy that we were doing something to improve the environment and so that meant a lot to me.” (Land manager 1, Case 6, large-scale coordinated initiative)

Land managers also gained satisfaction from other aspects of their involvement with initiatives, including: being able to benefit the local community (such as with flood prevention measures); engaging the public with farm activities; boosting the image of agriculture; “seeing other farmers blossom” (Land manager 1, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group); a sense of achievement; a sense of pride; and gaining a sense of autonomy: “It has given the farmers that feeling of actually being able to discuss and influence what they are doing.” (Stakeholder 11)

Another respondent stated how the provision of a certificate from a well-regarded environmental organisation had given their group ‘credibility’ (*Facilitator, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group*). A gain in confidence to approach environmental challenges was also revealed, as well as the potential to raise awareness, not simply among the group or initiative itself, but also in terms of the wider community.

In addition to environmental management, some respondents reported having learned other skills, such as working in groups, listening to others or the ability to mediate in the event of disagreements. Others pointed out the importance of including other members of the local and farm community, such as family and farm workers, not only to ensure that knowledge exchange and extension reaches all relevant parties but also so that other hard-to-reach or socially isolated groups can have access to the social benefits that some of these groups provide.

6.3 Economic outcomes

6.3.1 Benefits to the rural economy and wider society

Environmental initiatives produce a range of economic benefits through local procurement and job creation. For instance, the economic benefits attained through land managers and initiatives purchasing materials and using local services and contractors can be significant in large-scale coordinated initiatives. In one example this was substantial, with the facilitator reporting that the project had directly spent £40 million on commissioning conservation work from local contractors. In some cases farmers can also financially benefit from doing contracting and agricultural construction work associated with landscape-scale management themselves.

Benefits for the local economy were questioned by some respondents, however. Reflecting on the impact of an initiative on the local economy, one facilitator thought that it had “*probably not [brought any benefit]. Not in any massive way*”. There was also a view that the benefits did not always reach the land managers, and this could cause some ill-feeling:

“One of the bits of ill feeling has been that you know its massive money ... spending. And there’s a feeling that that hasn’t filtered down to some of the farms... But then when we push that and [the initiative] did a real push to try and involve you know farmers so they could tender for elements and all that kind of thing then yes, some people, some farmers tendered for work. But some hadn’t. All the paperwork involved that kind of puts people off and complexity.” (Land manager 1 Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

Spending at a farm level can be impactful locally and one respondent raised a concern about poor uptake of E.L.M and the consequences of reduced income for farmers:

“The farmers that I’m dealing with, they are very local and therefore whatever they earn they spend pretty much locally and they support a lot of local, their staff and everything else and if their income goes down then that is all going to go down, therefore the economy is going to have a knock-on impact negatively” (Stakeholder 6)

Larger scale initiatives bring the biggest employment benefits. A facilitator described how an initiative employs 35 full-time staff with over 80 casual staff that help do survey work and environmental monitoring, including many young people, university leavers, students and retired people returning to do outdoor work. The reach of some initiatives also goes beyond the farm, providing employment opportunities to a large number of people who support the management of the land:

“It can be tractor drivers, it can be gamekeepers, it could be someone who’s done a whole load of the stewardship planting, or what have you. But it is... it’s trying to buy in everyone on the farm rather than just the owner, manager, whatever.” (Land manager 2, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Less tangible community benefits also include motivating people locally and enhancing their attachment to the land. In a large-scale coordinated initiative this has been achieved by making a dramatic visual difference on a site (e.g. as noted in section 6.1.1 for bare peat restoration). This connection to the local area was mentioned for other cases. For example, in one CSFF farmer group it became apparent to the land managers involved how every field sits within a parish and a water body:

“And the farmers can very much start to realise that they need to not only collaboratively manage natural assets, but they can you know, become emotionally and very much more connected to their community if they start to collaborate in other ways as well.” (Facilitator Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Wider benefits to society (which can have economic benefits/savings at the societal level) were also mentioned with respect to improved resource management. Benefits from reducing the water flow (and therefore flood-risk) for the local community, and from improving water quality were highlighted by respondents, with positive implications for water utilities companies flagged. Carbon-savings from the reduction of fires on peatlands (both from reducing managed burning and mitigating fire risks) were also noted.

6.3.2 Economic or productivity benefits at the farm level

Respondents provided examples of positive productivity benefits at the farm level, direct or indirect, although these were specific to the type of initiative and management required. For example, some land managers in catchment auction initiatives identified slight improvements in yield with the use of cover crops, as well as reductions in inputs (fertilisers) due to nitrates and phosphates being captured by crops and in the soil.

The benefits of land restoration with topping, liming, and heavy cattle grazing in a habitat in a large-scale coordinated initiative were noted, and consequently the opportunity to support a lot more livestock than before was identified by one land manager. For the auction initiative where capital works were available, the new slurry lagoon had positive benefits as land managers reported utilising the slurry better, spreading at the right time, using less artificial fertiliser and growing better crops and more grass.

Regarding farm level economic benefits, there was a recurring theme that although costs are often incurred, there were indirect economic benefits and intangible benefits that farmers accrue:

“No. We’ve not made any money, but we’ve got a dew pond, we’ve got some nice hedges, and I think the other thing, which you can’t put money on, we’ve got boundless enthusiasm for trying to do things right for the environment on the farm. And you can’t put a figure on that.” (Land manager 1, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

“It's covered the cost so it's neutral. But it's added value in terms of reducing nitrate losses and reducing fertilizer costs, and soil improvement but it's difficult to put value on that in the longer term.” (Land manager 2, Case 10, Auction initiative)

In this sense, although there are slight negative financial implications as land managers typically spend more money than they receive, often with additional unfunded ponds, trees and hedging, the *“positives far outweigh the negatives” (Land manager 1, CSFF farmer group)*. As one remarked *“I've had more value out of being given the hedge plants than I've had to pay in. I'm a net beneficiary!” (Land manager 4, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)*.

A facilitator in a CSFF farmer group supported this, noting that, although they may not be able to quantify the benefits or attribute them directly to the scheme, the level of engagement from farmers indicates that farmers consider it to be valuable and worthwhile.

One stakeholder was convinced of the benefits and savings:

“There's absolutely no doubt that farm level collaboration can deliver benefits ... that's where the real savings are from a collaborative point of view, at that sort of level is actually sharing fixed costs... the work's been done and it proves it over and over again.” (Stakeholder 9b)

He went on to describe sustainability benefits from a productivity and economic point of view, directly by sharing machinery and using less fuel, and the knock-on effects. Working at group scale enhances their capacity to research new systems like min till, and to invest, and to be able to achieve change.

Land managers pointed out that environmental and business drivers overlapped. For example, although some land managers had to take out a loan to complete the capital works in one auction catchment initiative, the facilitator thought this would probably make their businesses more resilient, especially with rainfall in winter worsening. This respondent also referred to the opportunity of joining an assurance scheme with these improvements. However, in some cases farmers failed to appreciate any economic benefits of capital works, as they claimed it did not offer any income in the form of annual payments (e.g. Large-scale coordinated initiative).

Initiatives also open up the possibility of new collaborations which can be economically advantageous, as described by one land manager:

“So suddenly I had a contact where I could say, oh do you want to come and do some grazing because I'd like to have some, you know, like to try that on a few fields, so yes, we are trying that this year. It is all informal... The reason I'm doing that is for business reasons, not for environmental reasons as such, you know, weed control and saving on fertilizer.” (Land manager 1, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

There have been positive financial benefits from being part of a CSFF farmer group in that the outside funding has been made available to land managers and they are connected to other opportunities and networks.

6.4 Public benefits from community engagement activities

The final set of outcomes discussed here are associated with a range of community engagement activities that were carried out within the case studies. These outcomes did not necessarily form part of the initiatives' core intended objectives but, where present, nevertheless emerged as valuable benefits arising from group activities. As we shall see, landscape-scale initiatives appear to be in a strong position to facilitate greater public engagement with farming and demonstrate environmental successes, as members are able to pool resources and assist each other with communications (often with the support of partner organisations),

drawing on the different skills, strengths and interests of individuals and widening potential opportunities for farmer participation.

6.4.1 Examples of public engagement activities

The case studies varied widely in terms of the amount of public activities undertaken. Six initiatives (including at least one of each initiative type) appeared to have done little, if anything, in this regard. There was, however, strong consensus among respondents that public engagement was important (as we discuss further below) and there were a number of examples across the other nine case studies of related activities - although some said that they would like to do more than they have been able to to-date.

In one CSFF group, where the farmers had previously had experience of public engagement activities through a different environmental project, members had been so keen to continue these that they agreed to personally fund their delivery:

“And so we said we’ve got no-one to facilitate that, the only way I can do that is if we pay someone to do that. And the only money that’s available is in your pockets, so put your hands in them! And they did! So we raised seven or eight thousand pounds to deliver the community programme.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

This group is set up as a charity so continues to ask for donations from the local community and carry out a number of activities such as farm walks, volunteer days and an annual Open Farm Sunday event, which one year attracted 2,500 people. Much of this success appears to be down to the enthusiasm and personalities of the farmers involved, some of whom have come up with their own ideas for community engagement.

Whilst the above group appeared particularly committed to public engagement, most of the other farmer groups – both CSFF and non-CSFF – we interviewed had also been active to some extent in delivering a range of community events or communications. These included: presentations to parish councils and other local groups; articles in parish newsletters; social media posts (Facebook, Twitter); websites; farm walks; school visits; stands at Open Farm Sundays; volunteer days; and on-farm signage.

The lack of public engagement activity in some initiatives was generally not due to a reluctance to do so but, rather, a lack of time, resource or impetus. Some respondents said that they would have liked to do more in this regard, for example:

“A little bit [of public engagement] but not to the extent that I would like to see... I would like the general public to see a lot of what we do and why we do it. Because ninety percent of the general public are so far removed from what we do. They only see certain parts of it. And they only think about certain parts of it. They often aren't the good parts.” (Land manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

This acknowledgement of the potential to improve public understanding of farming (particularly the positive side of the industry) through communicating and building relationships with the public was a theme that repeatedly emerged throughout discussions on this topic. Such opinions are detailed further below.

6.4.2 Benefits associated with public engagement

Land manager respondents who had been involved in public engagement activities generally spoke very highly about them and recounted a range of benefits arising from them. For example, one land manager explained how they had offered Covid-secure residential camps over the summer of 2020, which had enabled them to share their environmental work as well as provide wellbeing benefits. This formed part of what this respondent said they had enjoyed most about being involved in the initiative:

"I think [what I've enjoyed most is] the enthusiasm and the sharing of knowledge and the fact that we are improving it. And that I can say to the general public when they come here, this is what we're doing... we had 6 weeks of residential camps, and we changed our buildings round so that it was [Covid] safe, and the joy and happiness that we have had reported to us... I've had people come up and they wanted to hug me to say 'thank you for having us on board, thank you for giving us the joy of coming here. It is a beautiful place, and we really appreciate what you're doing'." (Land manager 3, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

The most common reason respondents gave for supporting public engagement (whether in practice or just in principle) was the need to address the disconnect between the public and farmers and to improve public understanding about farming's positive role in managing the environment – especially contra the negative aspects of farming that are often focused on in the media. For example:

"Yeah [I think there should be more public engagement], why not? I think it would be really interesting to know that there's a group of farmers that are trying to do things differently and be better and improve, because farming does seem to get a bad press quite often. So any positives, any positivity like that where we're saying to the public we're having a good old think and a chat about what we can do differently. Trying to be better and get that message out there." (Land manager 3, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

Engaging with members of the public can help instil a sense of pride among participating farmers, which can boost motivation, as the CSFF farmer group that had carried out extensive community engagement had found:

"And the feedback we get from people is just absolutely superb. We do owl prowl, because we have quite a lot of owls here and we've done all the work with them. And so involving the local community has been a very important part of the project. From my point of view, being more involved with the local community has very much opened up my eyes to the fact that as farmers, being passionate about conservation is very important to do." (Land manager 1, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

One land manager also pointed to an unexpected benefit arising from public engagement activities in the form of being able to identify and tap into local expertise for environmental monitoring purposes:

"I hadn't realised, I had got Mr. Hoverfly, Professor Hoverfly of the world, who has retired living two miles away, [which I found out] as a result of this talk. He came shuffling up and said, could I possibly look to see if there are any hoverflies and 'whoopee, yes please, do you have any friends who can look at something else?', because that is a big issue, it is measurement, knowing what is there." (Land manager 1, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group).

A stakeholder respondent also discussed an array of benefits associated with public engagement, including utilising local expertise, marketing opportunities and generally building relationships between farmers and their local communities:

"I think there are so many win-wins out there... [farmers] have seen real positives emerging from those kinds of conversations especially if they are well mediated [by the facilitator]... Also you can find unusual benefits, for instance in terms of locating a good ecologist...having a farmer connecting with the local community and identify some useful people. It could also help build up a local market for produce ... [and] if farmers are gathering together a bit better they might see an opportunity for marketing together their food at a more local and regional platform. And by connecting with the community they will have a warm shopping audience for their produce." (Stakeholder 8)

6.4.3 Issues and concerns around public engagement

Whilst the respondents with experience of public engagement were unanimously positive about the benefits and outcomes arising from it, not all farmers will necessarily be enthusiastic about the idea, particularly if it is new to them. Some respondents agreed that public engagement would be a good thing to do, but argued that it was not a priority and that focusing on the delivery of environmental outcomes must always remain the key objective of the initiative. For instance:

"[Public engagement] is something we are aware of, but it is not top of our pile to actually start writing about doing things until we have done them." (Facilitator, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

Some farmers may also perceive public engagement to be outside of their expertise and not necessarily their responsibility. This point is particularly pertinent given that the respondents in this research sample were, in general, already interested in and enthusiastic about the environment. Indeed, even in the case of one respondent who believed that public engagement was important and had actively engaged with schools and community groups, they felt that there was a limit to how much farmers can be expected to do this type of thing, as it is *"not really our job"* (Land manager 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Many initiatives also face practical limitations in engaging with the public. A lack of funding, time and resource can make it difficult for initiatives to deliver activities and often the extent of engagement carried out depends on the enthusiasm and social skills of key individuals within the group. As one respondent said, *"some people will always be better at it than others"* (Land manager 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group). Another pointed out that farmers already have competing pressures for their time and cannot be expected to deliver more in terms of public engagement without funding:

"In one of our E.L.Ms trials boards last night there were farmers saying about how they would like to spend more time engaging with the public. But that is actually their time and we have had quite a lot of feedback from farmers through Covid saying that everybody wants to stop and chat about the food and where the food has come from, and actually that is really time consuming for the farmer...So actually possibly in E.L.Ms could people be funded to have more time to do that public engagement?" (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Another land manager discussed how health and safety regulations and fears around 'political correctness' can also be a barrier to more extensive public engagement, particularly in relation to school visits:

"I would love to do more, and we did speak about that in our last directors' meeting... But, you know, with health and safety and all the other obstacles that seem to be put in people's way, in this PC world that we live in now, it's very difficult to get kids out of schools at all now. And who's going to fund it, and all that sort of thing?" (Land manager 2, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

There was also reference within the interviews to familiar concerns on the part of farmers around public access. There is a delicate balance to be struck in terms of building relationships between farmers and communities and respecting the farmer's position as land owner/manager, particularly in the context of some farmers feeling criticised and misunderstood by the general public. As one land manager put it:

"Farmers by nature can be, they can like their own company, and they can feel threatened. And I think that's what it normally is. They're frightened of people coming onto [their land]. I mean we are very vulnerable as a set of people. We are generally terrified of travellers and tourists and trespassers and hare coursers and you name it, we do feel a bit besieged. And I think some people are naturally frightened that if they open their gates to anything, they're going to get overrun." (Land manager 3, Case 4, CSFF farmer group).

Such concerns are not necessarily insurmountable, particularly if approached in the right way. Two respondents who had similar trepidations explained how they welcomed public access on their land but avoided publicising some of the details about the wildlife on the farm in order to protect it and avoid receiving overwhelming numbers of visitors. For example:

“We actually have done our own signs saying some of the different things that are on the farms and [the facilitator] has be-spoked them to different farms. But yeah, we’ve got barn owls, within the last month we’ve had an osprey here! We had a great bustard come. And so actually, you have to be a little bit careful sometimes about what you say you’ve got somewhere, otherwise you end up with the world and his wife trying to access areas you really don’t want them! And actually it can be negative to these things.” (Land manager 2, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Another land manager admitted to having initially been reluctant about public engagement activities but nevertheless, once involved, had found it to be a positive experience:

“Things, for instance, like involving, in inverted commas, “the Great British Public”, which I must say I’ve always felt ‘oh god’, you know, I don’t really want to get too involved. But I would have to say that my mind has been very much opened on that. I’ve been dragged kicking and screaming out of the last century perhaps. And I now very much embrace things like going on forest walks, which we have on our farm here, and we perhaps get 20-30 people come. And we don’t charge people for this sort of thing. And the feedback we get from people is just absolutely superb.” (Land manager 1, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Farmers reluctant to engage with the public are, however, unlikely to be persuaded to do so if they feel that it is a requirement being imposed upon them. Having a facilitator who understands the farmers’ perspectives and concerns and who can find the right approach to enabling appropriate engagement is likely to be key. Certainly some facilitators of our case studies appear to have been successful in this regard and were able to share lessons from their experiences. One facilitator talked about how the group *“literally did start off very small and it was people they knew and families etc. [at open farm events]” (Case 4, CSFF farmer group)* and another also discussed how, although many farmers are nervous about public engagement, it is something that can be grown and developed over time as the group gains confidence, with substantial positive outcomes:

“I know that it’s something that a lot of farmers are quite nervous about, because they feel that the public don’t understand them... So it can be a difficult thing to get going and broach. But, as a group ages, I think it’s something that they become more comfortable with over time and they learn that actually these people do enjoy learning about our farms and what we do, and they’re not out to judge us, and get us and report our rare orchids so that people can dig them up. I think that mistrust slowly melts away when they begin to see the benefits of engaging with communities... We’ve had nothing but positives from community engagement, and I think it’s a really important part of this type of project.” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

One of the stakeholder respondents, who was also a land manager and who represented a national farmer-led network with an environmental focus, strongly supported the idea of public engagement within groups and initiatives. In response to a question about whether they thought public engagement should be integrated into a collaborative/group element of E.L.M, this respondent argued that it should, and that it was possible for initiatives to engage with the public in simple ways that did not coerce unwilling farmers to participate and that result in benefits for farm businesses as well as community relations:

“Yes, definitely [public engagement should be integrated into E.L.M-funded groups]. If you’ve got a cluster how can you support signage? How can you support information transfer? And that facilitator could write in the local village newsletters, town magazine or whatever, once a quarter, once a half year.

Just explain what's happening in their neighbourhood. And then you could also look at how you do public access. I know one or two farmers now who are improving the grass in the field and charging people as a car park, but they've linked up their farm to some local networks of walks. So he's getting a fiver a car but he's given public access. So he's put some signage up and there's some amazing things you can do. You can have a farm in the cluster that is the education experience. So that one is happy to have children around or public around, he can deliver that for that cluster.” (Stakeholder 10)

Public engagement may not be suitable for all farmers, or even all group initiatives, but our analysis has revealed evidence of substantial opportunities on offer for those who are willing and able to participate. Supporting such activities on a local basis, as well as communicating the positive outcomes from farmers' environmental efforts (particularly where they are publicly-funded) at a regional and/or national level, would therefore be beneficial. Providing central tools and resources, such as design templates, images and information about wildlife habitats and species, to help groups create their own bespoke communication materials might be one way of doing this. Where possible, funding for public engagement activities would of course also be welcomed.

6.5 Collaborative efficacy and additionality

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they felt their initiative, and/or collaboration in general, produced outcomes that were additional to what might be achieved anyway. Although respondents found it difficult to pinpoint or quantify the extent of additionality, in general most believed that their initiative had been effective at realising benefits for the environment that would not have occurred through uncoordinated, individual farm-level efforts. The principle of collaboration was thus broadly supported, although, as we discuss later, some respondents argued that joint working is not always necessary and that coordinated approaches can be just as effective in some instances, including where farmers are reluctant to work together.

6.5.1 Examples of additionality from landscape-scale management

Cost efficiencies

For some respondents, part of the support for collaboration arose from a recognition that working at scale can produce cost efficiencies; some which have already been discussed in section 5.7 above. For example, the facilitator of one of the large-scale coordinated initiatives was particularly keen to highlight the financial benefits associated with partnerships, particularly for the various stakeholder organisations involved in funding it:

“We have built this programme of multiple projects all delivering complimentary outcomes. And basically we have used the money strategically across that landscape to try and repair as much of the damage as we can... if you join a programme of twenty five other projects and you fund into it you get massive synergies in terms of delivery; you get really great efficiencies in terms of procurement and you get a safe pair of hands with a group and a team that have got experience in doing it... it is not lots of projects all competing for resources and competing for materials, it is all of those projects working together in an integrated way making the best of all the resources and funding opportunities.” (Facilitator, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

In a similar vein, the two stakeholders representing a commercial food company stressed that there are potential opportunities for cost efficiencies through using collaborative/coordinated partnership initiatives to leverage private sector funding. As a commercial organisation, the business these stakeholders represented was keen to support its suppliers in undertaking environmental management so that it could promote the sustainability credentials of its supply chain to consumers. Whilst getting involved in partnerships might raise difficulties if their *direct* competitors were also partners, in principle this business would be keen to work

together with others to maximise value for money, which might enable the government to leverage private sector money:

“I absolutely passionately believe that food businesses, more than anybody else, have got the resources and the impetus and the influence to drive change in a way that government NGOs just haven’t got the ability to do. If you can harness their resources, you can really start to make a difference. ... We all know that if we work collaboratively on some of these issues we could get much bigger bang for our buck and achieve a great deal more than working separately... But the bit I think that Defra miss [in the E.L.Ms agenda] is, how do you engage the food industry into that? So if the food industry - and it’s not giving grants to the food industry per se - but if [a company] are putting X thousands of pounds into a project, for instance, what can the government do to help or leverage that funding to actually make that project even more successful? So if there are funds available to carry out some research or whatever, then you know don’t stand alone, don’t aim that just at farmers. Use the existing structures that are already in place that food companies already putting in place and leverage that to really start to deliver something that’s much bigger.” (Stakeholder 9b)

As detailed in section 5.7, respondents involved in auction initiatives felt that these were also both a time- and cost-effective way of delivering environmental benefits. For example:

“I think, yeah, we could have [achieved water quality improvements anyway] through the farm reports, potentially, but you know, it probably would have taken longer and may have taken more budget if you see what I mean.” (Facilitator, Case 14, Auction)

Cost-efficiencies at the farm level can also be achieved through landscape-scale management. One stakeholder respondent (who is also a farmer) strongly supported the concept of collaboration and believed that it could both be more effective at delivering environmental objectives and have cost-savings for farmers through, for example, machinery sharing and delivering some types of management ‘en-masse’:

“So if you’re working together that’s more capital to enhance your flower enhanced margins. You can buy for the cluster, you can buy £1000 in instead of £15000. You’ll get better delivery, you know for a percentage of the cost.” (Stakeholder 10)

There can also be other efficiencies to be realised through collaborative or coordinated initiatives. An example of this was in the case of one of the community-led case studies, where the facilitator explained they had been approached to help deliver a different (E.L.M related) project:

“This whole farm appraisal thing is a whole new initiative at quite a high level and we have been selected to deliver the operational stuff on the ground with the farmers that we know. And therefore that can only have happened because somebody somewhere has decided that [this initiative] knows what it is doing, it has got loads of good contacts and they can get things done quickly with farmers they know. And so the fastest way to get the results from this particular programme is to get them involved.” (Facilitator, Case 1, Community-led initiative)

Landscape-scale groups and networks can thus act as a basis or ‘jumping off’ point for other activities, resulting in increased efficiencies and knock-on benefits.

Environmental scale and connectivity

One of the forms of additionality cited most frequently by respondents was an assertion that environmental land management generally has greater environmental benefit if carried out on a large-scale (though what

constitutes the ideal size of an area in this respect was vaguely construed and is likely to depend on the particular environmental objectives being sought). For example:

“I think it’s a much more kind of connected approach and I think therefore, you know, you get bigger gains because you’re working in a much bigger area. So what you’re trying to achieve is going to be much more likely to have an effect over a bigger area.” (Land manager 1, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Facilitating environmental management on a large scale and coordinating action across farms can also reassure land managers that the benefits of their actions are not going to be jeopardised by the actions of their neighbours. A belief in this aspect of benefit from collective management lay behind one land manager’s willingness to participate in group initiatives, despite thinking it would be easier (from their point of view) to do things individually:

“It’s more about hopefully getting more than just me. If lots of farmers engage in it, there’s no point from an environmental point of view, there’s no point me as one farmer doing everything perfect and every farmer around me doing a terrible job. ... From a selfish point of view, I would sooner we did it individually, but I do see that we can make bigger environmental improvements by getting groups of farmers working together.” (Land manager 1, Case 15, Auction)

Respondents were not able to provide tangible evidence about the environmental benefits of working at large spatial scales but there was a general sense that more could be achieved through this approach compared to individual action. Some facilitators contended that some of the value arises not just from being able to implement actions over a wider geographical area, but also from being able to maximise opportunities for delivering multiple benefits by taking a holistic approach and widening the objectives of what may have otherwise been an isolated intervention. The following respondents (each with experience of a different type of initiative) gave examples of where this had been made possible through group initiatives either by; working in partnership with other stakeholders (in this case to improve water quality in a catchment); being able to contextualise individual options within the wider landscape and site them appropriately; or having a starting point from which to build relationships with farmers and discuss other aspects of their land management:

“That [project] was different in the respect that [the objective wasn’t just a public good, it] was a farmer good in their terms as well, because they were losing nitrogen and [the water company] didn’t want it either, so it was a relatively simple sell... And we wrote the tender for that project, explained that you can’t be single-issue focussed because you will end up missing some other value within the landscape as well. So [the water company] luckily accepted that and have let us do lots of other stuff as well, which has hopefully solved not just the nitrogen problems but other problems as well. (Stakeholder 6)

“I mean from my perspective I think it’s to do with the location. It is to do with the fact that, you know, you can put an option out in the countryside on a farm, but if you locate it in a landscape context, you can put the same option out there but it can be delivering multiple benefits. So in a sense that that is the role, our role is for us to be able to do the additionality.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

“A lot of them had a farm visit from one of our advisors to discuss how they were going to implement the measures which often led to wider discussions about their land management which was another reason that we wanted to run this auction because it kind of, it’s a way to get on farm and start discussing other issues.” (Facilitator, Case 15, Auction)

Increasing AES engagement and galvanising action

Another element of additionality cited by respondents was that group initiatives can help to increase farmer engagement in agri-environment schemes and to galvanise action from farmers who may not have otherwise

had the time, resources or impetus to carry out the environmental management in question. As one land manager explained, collective action – and thus the scale benefits discussed above – can be made possible by having a facilitator to take on some of the administrative burden of applying for funding:

“Farmers only have 24 hours a day and farmers are trying to do the best they can on their farm and they’re not going to have time to, you know, keep ringing the Environment Agency or Defra to talk about the possibility of funding a hedge or whatever. And then if [our facilitator] can pull together groups of farmers, you know, like five or six farmers or more, then you can achieve so much more than individual farms.” (Land manager 3, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

In a similar example, one stakeholder talked about where a utilities company had been able to use their financial resource to bring farmers together and apply for agri-environment payments:

“Some of the facilitation groups we’ve had have had like a focus. So whether it’s like natural flood management or whether it’s biodiversity or something. These are the sort of activities we can do. And then we have the funds to actually galvanise people together to submit a combined stewardship bid rather than each farmer submitting their own, which might be slightly different.” (Stakeholder 5)

Where farmers have already come together there can also be considerable potential for group members to act as informal ambassadors who are able to draw more of their peers into either joining the group and/or participating in agri-environment schemes more generally. One land manager talked about how their group had been successful in encouraging such action from previously non-participating farmers:

“We’re communicating to others outside the group and trying to get them on-board and increase our member base, which we have managed to do. So we all look at our farms and we look at the local area and we look at who around us is neighbouring and not embarked in any scheme. We then make contact with them and discuss what we are doing as a group and discuss agri-environmental schemes. And then what we like to see is that they then embark on a journey for themselves and we have actually managed to achieve that. So I guess broadening the capacity of the group, which ultimately leads to more take-up of any agri-environmental scheme.” (Land manager 3, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

One of the stakeholders also discussed how they had engaged farmers that were traditionally ‘harder to reach’ by gradually and gently highlighting the business benefits of schemes to them as a farming peer, rather than the issue being imposed upon them. As this respondent said, *“each group, each person needs a different approach and the language has got to come from the bottom or equal of their level. It mustn’t come down and be dictated from above” (Stakeholder 10).*

This potential for landscape-scale initiatives to pull non-participating farmers into environmental schemes or landscape-scale activities is perhaps especially present in the case of farmer-led groups, but it is not confined to them. One stakeholder gave an example of how a farmer group they were coordinating was able to support and ‘push along’ a farmer who had previously been less environmentally engaged to do more on his farm:

“There’s one farmer who only joined us a couple of years ago, he came into the group a little bit left-field... He’s quite an intensive farmer, he has a lot of land which he farms up to the dykes, he doesn’t have landscape features as such, there’s no trees or hedges and that sort of stuff. He’s in a different place and he’s quite a traditional farmer in the way that he farms...But we’re just doing an insect project at the moment looking at using predators to control the nasty insects and stuff like that and he wanted to be involved in this project. And we suddenly discovered that in his dykes he’s got all these insects. And so we’re trying to push him along. Anyway, I’m waffling. He’s just an example of somebody who actually is in that middle group, but he joined the group because he wants to stretch his thinking and perhaps start doing things.” (Stakeholder 9b)

6.5.2 The role of coordination (as distinct from collaboration)

As detailed above, respondents believed that landscape-scale approaches to environmental management can have a valuable impact on environmental outcomes in a variety of ways. In the case of initiatives involving extensive collaboration between farmers (i.e. CSFF and non-CSFF farmer groups), some of this impact is associated with the social aspects of groups wherein farmers can improve the quality of their management through social learning and work to draw in non-participating peers. However, the initiatives that relied on facilitated coordination rather than collaboration *per se* (i.e. the auctions, large-scale coordinated and community-led case studies) were also able to identify additionality from their work and, importantly, these case studies involved some farmers who were more cautious about working with other farmers than some of the other respondents. The farming respondents from one of the large-scale coordinated case studies, for example, were wary of collaborating and did not think it was necessarily always the answer. For instance:

"I don't think it would be easy because as I say, I think every unit is totally different...I think they need to more look at individual farms, not try and get them together... I think things have got to be simpler. By putting it down that [collaborative] route you wouldn't be making agreements any simpler really would you? Because you are involving more people who aren't going to agree on any of it. And you are spending a lot of time, I don't think it would be worth it." (Land manager 3, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

It should also be recognised that the specifics of a local area can influence the relative success of collaboration. Some respondents noted that some examples of success within collaborative initiatives may have only been realised due to pre-existing contextual features, such as where land managers have been used to working together (e.g. in the case of commoners or tenant farmers within an estate):

"Well you have to [collaborate] when you have got common grazing anyway. I mean we all work together gathering stock and it's the only way you can actually clear the common, you have got to work together, so it is something that is sort of fairly unique to common land." (Land manager 1, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Interestingly, one farmer from a CSFF-farmer group – which are usually thought of as 'collaborative' – did not see it as such due to the presence of a non-farming facilitator who acted as an intermediary for the group, and this was crucial to this respondent's involvement and perception of its success:

"I would say it's easier to be part of a group that's got a project manager. So if something goes wrong, you're not going carping to your neighbouring farmers about something going wrong. You can go and have a moan to the project manager. And I think that's really important. I think to do things, to have joint venture schemes with neighbouring farmers, I would not want to do it. Now, that's probably come as a bit of a blow to you! You might say, that's what you're doing. Well, we're not really, because it's a very loose arrangement being arranged by a project manager, if you're with me... what I'm saying is I wouldn't like to do a collaborative farmer thing if it did not involve an outside person who is not a farmer". (Land manager 1, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Although in this report we have categorised CSFF farmer groups as collaborative due to the level of farmer-to-farmer interaction involved, this clearly does not match this particular respondent's perception of it, highlighting how 'collaboration' can mean different things to different people and is often vaguely defined. Language and communication is therefore important in addressing farmers' concerns about group initiatives.

Concerns around collaboration among respondents included a belief that it would be difficult to reach agreement, and that the group membership would need to be farmers with a similar outlook to themselves.

Such trepidations do not necessarily mean that land managers are always closed to the idea of collaboration, however, and one recognised that it could have multiple benefits:

“And I think groups, you know, you’ve kind of got to have people on your groups that you get on with or you’re thinking along the same lines, but I do think it’s the way to go. I think going forward, if DEFRA was funding things like that, I think everything would benefit, you know, the farming systems would benefit and the environment would benefit everything because it’s the way, I think, it’s the way to do it. (Land manager 2, Case 8)

Concerns about collaboration are not, therefore, always insurmountable, particularly if farmers’ fears can be satisfactorily allayed. Nevertheless, there will inevitably remain farmers who will not be willing to participate in collaborative initiatives and collaboration should not be seen as a panacea for achieving landscape-scale objectives in all cases. As one stakeholder argued, coordinated approaches can be just as, or in some instances more, effective:

“So the question is, is are you going to get more people to deliver by being in this thing. I think that has to be the question really. And the thing that will get more people delivering is not collaboration per se. I think that’s a bit of a misnomer. It’s decent prices, simple scheme and a good purpose. All of those other things will, you don’t have to be part of a nature scheme in order to deliver. I mean actually, is it cost efficient?... The advantage of people collaborating is they have similar systems between each other potentially, so they are compatible with each other. Does that necessarily need to always happen through collaboration? I don’t think so. You can have good advisors making each farm holding do similar stuff as long as you’ve got consistency between them.” (Stakeholder 7)

The analysis discussed in this section suggests that collaborative approaches to land management do indeed hold promise for delivering benefits (both environmental and social) at a depth and scale that would be difficult to achieve through individual approaches alone. This is especially the case where farmers are already environmentally-motivated and/or where there is a pre-existing group where farmers are used to working together. However, collaboration is not always necessary or appropriate. In some cases coordinated actions, supported by a facilitator but deliverable on an individual farm basis, may be more effective, particularly where farmers are reluctant to work together or where there is a single, localised environmental issue or objective that can be addressed through a set of clearly defined measures (e.g. water quality, tree planting). Enabling a mix of approaches that takes account of these contextual specificities – and that supports collaboration but is not limited to it - is therefore needed. As Stakeholder 7 put it, *“is [collaboration] important? Yes it is. Will it capture everyone? I very much doubt it. Should it be done? Yes” (Stakeholder 7).*

7. Section C: Summary of analysis by case study type

This section summarises the analysis from a case study perspective, collating the thematic findings and drawing out the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches taken within the five categories of initiatives. It is clear from the analysis that there is overlap between the coordinated/collaborative/top-down/bottom-up ‘types’ and that these can change over time, for example, shifting from being coordinated by an organisation to being farmer-led (or vice versa). They may also utilise different forms of funding and governance structures as they develop over time.

7.1 Large-scale coordinated initiatives

Large-scale coordinated approaches were perceived to be mostly orientated towards an organisation-led leadership style. Little or no direct collaboration is currently required between land managers within the initiatives we studied, although there are plans within one of the case studies to form a farmer-led project within the initiative (currently on hold due to Covid-19). In another case study the work is carried out on individual holdings on a contract basis by the partnership, and the land manager receives payment through their individual HLS agreement (which the work is written into).

Coordination was reported to be important in bringing together and organising the activities of group members and other stakeholders. It was seen as an important factor in effective planning, objective setting, securing resources, and providing expertise, skills and a wider perspective, particularly to give support and direction to farmer-led groups. However, ‘too much’ coordination and being too ‘top down’ can bring tensions within the group and potentially weaken some of the other processes identified as being important, such as developing member engagement, commitment and a sense of ownership.

Key strengths	Key weaknesses
Effective at delivering a single type of management across a large area.	Lack of social/group benefits in cases where farmers act independently from each other.
Cost-effective for stakeholders, as partnerships can achieve funding synergies to meet multiple and overlapping objectives.	Farmer engagement potentially ‘shallower’, and therefore less likely to shift attitudes, if (as in one of our case studies) there is no farmer involvement in objective setting and planning.
Potentially more opportunities for resourcing monitoring and evaluation through stakeholder partners.	Being too ‘top down’ can bring tensions within the group and potentially weaken engagement, commitment and a sense of ownership.
Important in effective planning, objective setting, securing resources, and providing expertise, skills and wider perspective particularly to give support and direction to farmer-led groups.	
Reduces paperwork for farmers as staff can do the office work.	

7.2 Auction-based initiatives

Auctions are organisation-led and do not require any collaboration between land managers, so social interaction between members was minimal (beyond what was occurring in the area anyway), although one case study did organise some social events (e.g. pub nights). In all cases the auction was complemented by dissemination events such as workshops and training. Although the premise of reverse auctions is competition, stakeholders argue that they can be adapted and evolve to reduce the competitive element (for example in one case uniform pricing was used after farmer feedback) and even nurture a sense of a shared objectives amongst farmers. Feedback from farmers in one case study led an effective uniform price auction being delivered. One platform is developing a collaborative approach in another initiative by working with cooperatives rather than individuals.

The role of the project officer who manages the auction process is important, particularly where the auction mechanism is evolving and requires user feedback. The local adviser plays a vital role in liaising with the project officer and supporting farmer bidding and engagement. Their local knowledge and networks with farmers in the catchment are an essential part of the process.

When accompanied by monitoring and feedback, auctions can provide farmers with evidence of effectiveness and potentially can shift mind-sets and allow learning. Farmers and project officers (stakeholders) are keen advocates for them; they are effective at regional scales but may not scale up, although equally need critical mass to work.

These auctions were described as very cost effective compared to Countryside Stewardship. The bidder learning behaviour associated with multiple auction rounds (described in the literature) was not observed, and rarely did farmers discuss or share their bids. They also have a wide reach due to the platform accessibility for all, and attract those land managers who would not apply for AES due to bureaucracy and time commitment. Having a clear metric (e.g. nitrate) makes measurement and feedback to farmers easier.

Key strengths	Key weaknesses
Cost-efficient way of delivering improved management and capital works	Lack of social/group benefits as farmers act independently from each other.
Attracts participants who do not join CS (e.g. larger, commercial) because of short term commitment and ease of application.	May not be suitable for more complex or ongoing management.
App-based systems of verifying management changes on farm are popular with farmers.	Penalises younger, less well established or struggling farmers who are unable to place competitive bids for capital works.
Can reach all farmers in a catchment.	Some participants disliked the time spent on the computer checking bids etc.
Process can be modified with feedback from users.	May be more suited to catchment scale. Difficulties envisaged if it was scaled up.

When accompanied by monitoring and feedback, auctions can provide farmers with evidence of effectiveness and potentially shift mind-sets.	
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7.3 Community-led initiatives

Neither of these case studies requires land managers to collaborate with each other, with most acting independently from each other. Rather, activities are coordinated by the initiative and often carried out by a contractor. While land managers sometimes supply labour and machinery, they are generally not involved in the technical aspects of the work.

The community-led approach is able to draw upon relevant skills and experience within the community, but there may be gaps in the collective skill-set required to manage and deliver the project or initiative. Community groups can bring a fresh approach and a new perspective to problem solving which can help to cut through administrative ‘red-tape’. Leadership by known, local individuals can help gain the trust of farmers, and the involvement of community members who have been affected by issues such as flooding can also bring an emotive element to discussions and boost motivation. However, community groups may have less well-developed networks with governmental bodies that control funding and administer budgets.

Key strengths	Key weaknesses
Community element helps gain trust of farmers and can increase motivation.	Lack of social/group benefits, as farmers act independently from each other.
Led by committed local individuals who are effective at driving activity for little or no cost.	Relies on commitment of local individuals so may be less likely to occur where there is not a clear objective/threat (e.g. flood risk).
Can bring a new perspective to problem solving and cut through administrative ‘red tape’.	Existing networks with Government/official bodies can be limited, so less likely to be aware of opportunities for funding and administrative support
Potential to draw upon skills and expertise from the community.	May have gaps in the skill set required to manage and deliver projects and initiatives.

7.4 CSFF farmer groups

The organisational model of these groups varies, with some identifying as ‘farmer-led’ while others acknowledge a more ‘organisation-led’ or ‘facilitator-led’ approach to the running of the group. There is a varying level of interaction between farmers in each group, and at least some degree of collaboration among some groups. Overall, facilitators reported engagement to be on a scale of somewhat engaged to very engaged. In one group a small non-CSFF farmer cluster had emerged with some of the same farmers, partly in response to the large size of the CSFF, and this allowed these farmers to compare experiences.

There exists an emphasis by some CSFF facilitators on the avoidance of designing a standard ‘template’ of governance model or ‘branding’ groups by any one organisation, the perception being that groups should be

allowed to develop their own structure, objectives, governance model, identity, methods of working, and membership criteria against their own experience, characteristics and needs.

CSFF groups range in terms of the level of environmental delivery on the ground. Of those who participate in an AES, advice is frequently sought from facilitators but due to the differing scheme timetables of member farmers, not all have been able to choose options in alignment with their neighbours. And because AES participation is not obligatory, option uptake cannot be relied upon for environmental delivery at a group level. Opinions range regarding whether fulfilling AES commitments is sufficient in trying to meet objectives, or whether there exists a need for a group to achieve more, and this is likely to tie in with aspects of engagement and motivation discussed in section 5.2.2 and 5.4.1. Some CSFF respondents perceive themselves as ‘more of a training group’ than a delivery group, where uptake of suggestions such as sowing herbal leys or improving slurry management is at the discretion of participating land managers. Very few members could describe the specific objectives of their group, although the majority would refer to several priority species amid discussions. Training events acting as potential ‘catalysts’ to environmental management included sowing herbal leys, slurry management, calibration of fertiliser spreading, measures to increase and improve habitat and biodiversity, dew pond installation, hedge-planting and management, and provision of bird food. Other activities of use to farmers are sometimes also provided, such as health and safety training.

Currently no data exists comparing environmental outcomes of CSFF groups compared to AES and non-AES-related interventions. However, respondents appear to value their groups highly for multiple reasons and are keen to see their continuation, with many believing that it allows them to be ‘well placed’ for any future schemes.

Key strengths	Key weaknesses
High level of social/group benefits, particularly in terms of social learning, knowledge exchange and assisting with potential issues of social isolation.	Capping of group size is quite high, and larger groups might result in a significant number of land managers who are not particularly engaged. Risks facilitator prioritising numbers of recruits over actual delivery.
Facilitation highly valued by farmers.	Sense in one group that CSFF is over-prescribed.
By operating closely with other farmers, attitudinal and behavioural changes towards wildlife are encouraged through friendly competition.	General lack of clarity appears to exist over groups’ objectives and priorities.
Networks and connections of facilitators frequently offer opportunities for groups to seek funding externally.	Lack of ability to provide one-to-one advice might prevent effective management of AES option uptake at a landscape-scale.
Potential to act as a portal through which farmers can access information, and farmers can be accessed easily by the facilitator or other relevant organisations.	Lack of flexibility in AES agreements has meant many land managers have had to wait to potentially ‘join up’ agreements while existing agreements have run their course.

7.5 Non-CSFF farmer groups

There is significant interaction, and at least some degree of collaboration, between farmers in each of these groups. Like the CSFF groups, the four initiatives in this category have had a high degree of farmer involvement in the establishment, planning and governance of the group's activities.

These groups have all experienced strong engagement from farmers. The small group size with fewer than 30 farming members in each initiative may account for the strong commitment and 'buy-in' reported. However, two groups reported a loss of momentum in recent years. In one case the facilitator moved on (as was always intended once the group was up and running) but the land managers have struggled to maintain momentum without someone coordinating and driving the group. In another group, now 10 years old, respondents reported having had difficulties in maintaining momentum due to changes in Natural England personnel (who were key to supporting delivery within the initiative) and waning commitment from other stakeholder organisations (again partly due to changes in personnel within these organisations).

Where there was strong engagement, there were significant social outcomes, including social learning and improved levels of environmental knowledge and understanding among members. The groups generally enhanced members' environmental management through a mixture of training opportunities, peer-to-peer learning (including visiting each other's farms), discussion groups/expert speakers and facilitating access to grant funding for specific environmental schemes (e.g. woodland grants). One initiative supported and enabled members to negotiate derogations from HLS agreements in order to tailor management, and test innovative approaches, according to specific site contexts.

Key strengths	Key weaknesses
Strong levels of engagement and commitment from farming members due to 'bottom-up' approach and involvement in objective-setting and planning.	Securing ongoing funding and commitment of stakeholder organisations over time can be a challenge.
In the case of clusters, very high engagement (one group reports 90-95% turnout at most events) may be stimulated by the fact that members pay to participate.	Reliance on key individuals who can commit time to the group, with related difficulties in transferring management responsibilities and legacy planning.
High level of social/group benefits, particularly in terms of social learning, knowledge exchange and assisting with potential issues of social isolation.	A lower level of coordination by a facilitator risks lower levels of delivery or longer lead times.
Greater flexibility than other types of initiatives	Potential for erosion of momentum with time.
Interest and willingness among members to get involved with environmental monitoring, with benefits for increased farmer skills and understanding, as well as recognition of farmer knowledge.	Close group working may deter some farmers who are either wary of collaboration or who do not get on with other members in the group.
There is often enthusiasm for undertaking public engagement activities, with benefits for community relationships and farmer pride and satisfaction.	Changes in supporting personnel (either facilitators or advisors working with the group) can disrupt relationships and momentum.

8. Section D: Wider considerations for E.L.M collaborative design

In this section, we explore some of the wider considerations for E.L.M that arose from discussions with respondents, based on their past and current experiences of AES and landscape-scale initiatives. We begin by considering potential lessons emerging from respondents' experiences of other farmer groups and networks (both environmentally and non-environmentally focused) and reflect on whether, and how, such groups and networks might be utilised for building E.L.M-related collaboration in the future. We then discuss respondents' opinions about three draft 'collaborative group scenarios' that were developed by Defra for this research and presented to respondents for their consideration in advance of their interview. Finally, we briefly detail some of the suggestions and concerns raised by respondents about the wider E.L.M scheme (i.e. relating to individual agreements). Although this was not the primary subject of this research, respondents' perception of the E.L.M scheme as a whole will inevitably influence their attitude towards any landscape-scale element that may be included under Component 2. Individual agreements were also highly relevant to delivery within some case studies, as these were used as a mechanism for financially incentivising work contributing to the landscape-scale objectives of the initiative.

8.1 Lessons from other groups and networks

8.1.1 Experiences of farmer groups and networks without an environmental focus

In order to explore potential lessons from other farmer initiatives, respondents were asked whether they had been involved in other successful groups or networks that did not have an environmental focus. Levels of involvement in these types of groups varied, with a number of land managers not specifically participating in anything beyond the case studies targeted by this research. Others, however, mentioned a range of farmer groups or networks, including discussion/focus groups, buying groups, machinery rings and accounting/benchmarking sharing groups. These respondents were asked whether they thought there were any lessons from their experience in these other groups that might be transferred to environmental collaboration. Most responses to this question reiterated some of the keys to success that have already been identified throughout this report, for example:

- The importance of a facilitator/project manager: *"It's easier to be part of a group that's got a project manager"* (Land manager 1, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)
- Trust: *"Above all there has to be trust."* (Land manager 2, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)
- The ability to choose who to work with: *"Farmers wouldn't want to be thrown together"* (Land manager 1, Case 15, Auction)
- Strong leadership: *"You always need an energetic leader."* (Land manager 1, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)
- A clear purpose for bringing people together: *"You need to have a good reason for working together."* (Land manager 1, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)
- Being farmer-led or having strong farmer involvement in setting group priorities: *"I just think it needs to be led."* (Land manager 3, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

In addition to these comments, one respondent discussed how there might be opportunity for environmental groups to make more use of economic benchmarking between peers (but specifically in relation to their environmental management), particularly as environmental payments start to make up a larger proportion of some farms' incomes:

“People can get very shady about how much money they are not making and all that, that is one step beyond what the group might be comfortable with. But of course in other scenarios like benchmarking groups, that is the whole point of the group to share the economics of your farm business versus another farm business. I think ... that is something that ... should cross over into environmental groups, maybe more so when more of the farm is put down to environmental contracts for the government or private sector. So you know, at the moment realistically most of us have, you know, we are not talking about a huge area of our farm that is in a contract like that, and therefore it's still on the periphery of our earnings... But as soon that moves up, I think people are going to start looking at how can I be more efficient at doing margins, cutting hedges, creating these ponds [etc.]” (Land manager 3, Case 3, CSFF farmer group)

Another land manager, who had been involved in the Prince’s Countryside Fund Resilience Programme (where benchmarking between farms was used as a basis to discuss a number of issues including accounting, environmental schemes, farm succession and business planning), also thought that there may be potential to integrate financial benchmarking principles into environmentally-focused groups:

“There were merits with it that would work quite well in tandem with facilitation funds and that is possibly worth looking into, but it would need refining I think. It was a way of getting farmers to sit down and look at their books and think about a succession. And, without getting into the nitty gritty of benchmarking, but it was delivering some fairly sound advice to keep these farms looking in the longer term.” (Land manager 1, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

On a different theme, a lesson that one respondent thought could be learned from a buying group they were aware of was in relation to its organisation, specifically having members on the management committee who each developed specialist knowledge in different product areas and built relationships with suppliers relevant to their area, which benefited the group as a whole. The respondent suggested that this could be applied in the case of environmental initiatives by having an advisory board that focused on specific areas of environmental management. This would provide:

“A way of cutting through some of the risk of politics or agenda-setting [within the group] in that you would have a representative body that would basically shape the direction. They would take the Government guidance or Defra guidance on what it was trying to deliver in terms of key areas of management managing natural resource, and then that Board would shape them so that they were applicable to somewhere like [this area].” (Stakeholder 11)

These ideas are worth pursuing but care will need to be taken in directly transferring such lessons to a different context (i.e. environmental matters) in recognition that the priorities and approaches of the farmers involved may differ. Nevertheless, as we explore below, a number of respondents did think that non-environmental groups and networks could potentially be used as a basis for communicating and delivering environmental objectives.

8.1.2 Using existing groups and networks as a basis for environmental collaboration

Stakeholder respondents in particular were asked for their views on whether or not they felt that existing groups and networks – both with an environmental or other focus – could be used as a basis from which to build farmer collaboration around environmental land management (especially in E.L.M). Although there were some caveats about needing to take care in how this would be approached, there was general consensus among the stakeholders that it would be a positive thing to do. Some of the types of groups/networks mentioned by respondents as potentially providing a basis for building engagement in environmental activities included dairy groups, commons associations, procurement hubs and buying groups.

One stakeholder (who has experience of facilitating environmental management within a number of farmer groups) talked about how he already used buying groups as an efficient way of communicating with farmers, particularly in areas where he was less well-known, as invitations were more effective coming through a familiar and trusted channel:

“Buying groups, I think, are a really important resource to tap into... Whenever I’m working in a part of a landscape, if I know one of the farmers and I know they’ve got a buyer group, if I’ve got a meeting on maize management, for example, I will ring that farmer and say, ‘can you send a text to the buying group and tell them about it?’ Even though they probably would have had an invite, but getting him to do that will have more of an effect on the number of people who turn up probably than just the invites going out.” (Stakeholder 6)

Another stakeholder (talking about existing environmental groups and networks in particular) felt that using existing groups would be beneficial because in many cases there is already a willingness from farmers to make environmental improvements, but that these farmers don’t currently have the mechanism or opportunity to act on their enthusiasm:

“Run with what you’ve got going because it’s easier to deliver. There’s already stuff going on. Put some financial incentive to it. So could you get a top up payment if you’re part of a cluster? What’s the buy-in for the farmer? How do you get him to step over that first step to become part of something to then see the benefit? You could actually reduce payments later because they’re in and it’s working and the costs are saved. So yes, it’s work with what’s there. There’s lots of clusters through facilitators, through clusters, through [our] network, through other organisations. And lots of farmers are wanting to lead some of these things but they’re just being tied in knots, it’s a question of being able to do it. So yes, just put the offer out there and let them get on with it.” (Stakeholder 10)

This respondent also went on to discuss how, in their experience, non-environmental farmer groups were already starting to consider environmental issues due to demands being placed on them by supply chains, and thus such groups may become drawn in to environmental initiatives without needing to be specifically pushed into them:

“Personal experience, around here many of those groups are changing their focus and bringing in environmental or biodiversity stuff. Because they’ve recognised the marketplace has moved or moving very rapidly and they need to be part of it. My co-operative grain group, their buyers are now pushing down wanting to know are the farmers delivering for habitat or carbon sequestering and other things. So it’s coming. So we don’t need to do a lot about it. And if they are not going to want to, does it matter? Because that just means they’re not going to be part of it.” (Stakeholder 10)

There was also discussion from two stakeholders about the potential benefits of using spatially dispersed farmer networks and associations (both environmentally and non-environmentally focused) to communicate E.L.M-related opportunities and perhaps stimulate the formation of new collaborative initiatives. For example, one stakeholder argued that whilst geographically-defined groups can be very successful, there is a risk that some farmers will not engage with them simply because they do not get on with their neighbours. Spatially dispersed farmer networks may, however, be more attractive to such farmers as they allow them to work with other people who share a similar approach:

“It’s almost like an accident of geography in the respect that you may get somebody who is keen as mustard to do something but ... you may be in a group of farmers, you might be the one that everybody hates and you hate everybody else. But you might actually have quite a lot of people you actually quite like that are a little bit away from you, and you join their group and not be stuck with your group as in

like your neighbours ... Some nature funds tended to be quite localised, and I completely understand the rationale of that, that is absolutely fine, but it is whether you are only getting the usual suspects or the less intensive farmers... and they are missing a trick by not having the big guys, the intensive guys, because the intensive guys can actually make quite significant differences” (Stakeholder 6)

Another stakeholder (who had extensive experience of engaging with farmers on environmental issues) suggested useful communication channels might include engaged networks such as Agricolgy, the Nature Friendly Farmers (NFF) network, organic bodies and Innovative Farmers, as well as social media. However this respondent also stressed that it is important to extend beyond these ‘usual suspects’:

“[It’s also important] to make sure you are including the non-usual suspects in trading and I don’t know if those groups are particularly good at that. I have seen the growth of the Nature Friendly Farmers Network, which is great and a really good newcomer to the scene and recognizing what farmers are doing and promoting it, inputting all the changes that Defra are introducing. But there is a risk that that is the cream of the cream and the majority of farmers are completely left behind by that, and certainly by National Trust or RSPB or the Wildlife Trust.” (Stakeholder 8)

Other organisations that Stakeholder 8 suggested could be useful for communicating messages to, and potentially supporting collaboration among, traditionally harder-to-reach farmers included the Tenant Farmers Association (TFA), Prince’s Countryside Fund (PCF), NFU and CLA, as well as farm support organisations such as the Farming Community Network (FCN):

“[There are] a lot of farmers in crisis, mental health crisis and things like that and financial crisis. But making sure that they have the tools to help those farmers see a future by working in collaboration and by getting the support of their peers and by getting the financial support from Defra and by getting the training. And one of the things that I think Defra keeps failing to deliver any new news on in terms of training and advice for farmers on environmental management.”

As this section has highlighted, it clearly makes sense to use existing farmer groups and networks as a medium for communicating E.L.M related messages to farmers (particularly around environmental management at large spatial scales). The framing of these messages will, however, need to be tailored according to the particular network that is being contacted: Groups without an environmental focus such as buying groups, for example, may need to be engaged using very different language to existing environmental clusters (for instance). Maximising and emphasising flexibility in schemes wherever possible is also likely to be important in order to enable farmers with different types of focus to participate in a way that suits and benefits their particular farming system and approach.

8.2 Opinions on the collaborative group scenarios

Of the three collaborative group scenarios that were presented to respondents for their opinions (see Methodology and Appendix A for details), none were identified as a perfect approach. Scenario B was generally viewed more favourably than scenario A and C, but even this scenario was considered to have some weaknesses. Often interviewees preferred elements of a particular scenario, rather the overall scenario. Some respondents were unable to offer a preference, either because they were unable to choose, or did not like any of the scenarios presented.

Each scenario is considered in turn, identifying the respondent’s views on their relative strengths and weaknesses. Table A1 in Appendix B lists the preferred option for each interviewee and illustrates the range of preferences across the different case types.

8.2.1 Scenario A: E.L.M Facilitation Fund – simple funding (similar to current CSFF)

Scenario A was favoured mostly by those respondents who were not currently in a CSFF or farmer cluster. The key strength associated with this scenario was the funding for a facilitator. However, a number of weaknesses were identified. Most comments related to the lack of funding to support E.L.M applications, which was considered important for achieving timely outcomes, as highlighted by the following quote:

“I think A isn’t too bad except for this ridiculous sentence that says will not include support, advice to apply to E.L.MS. And it is just like if E.L.MS is going to be the ambition for 2024 and you are setting up a group to try and help people transition to E.L.MS, well why on earth would you not include support and advice for people to get lined up and support for applying for E.L.MS” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

Several respondents also commented that the length of 3 years is not enough time to achieve the outcomes, particularly for a new group. While existing groups might be able to achieve something in 3-5 years, a new group with limited experience would take more time, particularly as it can take two years sometimes to just get groups established. This resonates with comments in section 5.6.1 concerning the length of time required to bring about change. Agreements of at least 10 years were proposed, as outcomes are more likely to be achieved over this timespan, as the following quote explain:

“I don’t think it is, that is the length, the tenure of the agreement. If you are a livestock farmer or even any sort of farmer, you are being told that E.L.MS is a way of delivering a public benefit and you may have to do things differently to deliver, then you need the security of knowing that that is going to take several years to achieve the change and then several years to embed and then several years to see whether it has been successful. And so farmers think in the terms of 8 to 10 years. And they don’t like anything shorter, because they can’t see how you can demonstrate it. So, I think there is an issue over length of agreement.” (Facilitator, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Some respondents also questioned the statement in Scenario A that funding would not be dependent on delivering outcomes:

“Yeah, I think the first one on the list, however, I can’t, it’s just, not going to actually deliver I say, as far as I can see. It’s just like chatting about stuff and not actually, I like getting stuff done, you know what I mean, and I think we are, where we are right now, we need to get all this stuff, but we don’t have any time anymore.” (Land manager 3, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

A facilitator was also concerned about the additional bureaucracy of both this scenario and scenario B, arguing that it would involve more time, reporting back, and paperwork.

8.2.2 Scenario B: E.L.M Collaboration Fund – bespoke funding

Scenario B was particularly favoured by those respondents that were already part of a CSFF or farm cluster. This scenario was seen as the next step in obtaining bespoke funding for outcomes that they wished to achieve as a group. A number of facilitators in particular, liked that under Scenario B projects could be tailored to the local area, as the following quote illustrates:

“Scenario B seems from my eyes one that looks good, you know, you get the initial set up and we understand what people’s priorities are, but it seems like it’s going to really foster quite a lot of innovation, you know, for people to access these funds. Scenario B where people work together, but they come up with their own plan across holdings, I think that makes the most sense in my eyes.” (Facilitator, Case 1, CSFF farmer group)

One of the land managers also approved of developing a large scale plan for an area:

“I think that the ability to be able to deliver a global plan for your physical area is very important and that probably requires the funding that is available in A or B, but maybe more dedicated under B, which is why I say it, I think that’s quite important.” (Land manager 2, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

Although one stakeholder was concerned that the flexibility available under Scenario B to produce a bespoke project may compromise the quality of the collaboration:

“I think the scenario B is... there’s just too much room for... the controls wouldn’t be tight enough and you would find that there would be a huge variation in the quality of the collaboration.” (Stakeholder 4)

Concerns were expressed by a number of respondents about a potential unwillingness of some land managers to work together as a group and to reach a consensus on a plan. Particular concerns were raised about the requirement for shared liability for a group agreement under Scenario B. There was fear of sharing the risk of penalties if a group member did not deliver the required outcomes. The issue of shared liability was also problematic due to the legal complexities of some farm holdings:

“Groups of farmers apply for funds collectively has been proven never to be attractive to farmers because of the way that their businesses are set up, it becomes hugely complex in legal arrangements and trusts and people and god knows what else.” (Facilitator, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

“I also don’t like the idea of the multiple owners doing one application because I think that causes problems for, you know, if somebody does drop out or doesn’t pull their weight, that causes problems for everyone else. So I think that could be an issue and I know when we first talked about the Facilitation Fund and there was some belief that it was going to be everybody doing the same application, there was quite sort of, you know, reluctance among the farmers to be involved in anything like that.” (Facilitator, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

However, there was the suggestion from some land managers that shared liability might work with a very small group of farmers, comprising, for example, 2 or 3 farmers, or groups that were already well known to each other:

“I think that some people would potentially be concerned, but I think in my case if we were talking about our cluster, if that was the correct size for scenario B which I can see that that sort of would be roughly about right, you know, we are all very similar, we are tenants. We are all in the similar shoes really.” (Land manager 3, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

There was also a suggestion that Scenario B might work better on a small landscape scale, rather than over a large area covering multiple habitat types:

“I think potentially you could be trying to do it on too large a scale, it would be lovely, yeah some quite specialist corridors that run certain species for the length and breadth of the country, but I think trying to do package on too large a scale would be tricky. If you have got a blanket policy across a cluster of twenty thousand acres, twenty thousand acres is a big bit of land. Some people might be in water meadows and they might need to have a different focus as opposed to the guys up on the high ground who are going to benefit the lapwing.” (Land manager 2, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

A similar point was made by one of the stakeholders who was concerned that a bespoke landscape-scale project might focus on a particular aspect of the environment and neglect other aspects of the multi-functional landscape:

“So it is the multi-functional nature of that and I was wondering whether that might get lost? What I don’t like about that on a personal level is the fact that it, it can almost – blinker the approach, so they are not looking at the wider options that could maybe sit alongside these things, e.g. If you were to go, ‘well let’s focus on natural flooding management’, that would be great but depending on who was doing the natural flood management, if they just went for natural flood management and they went around and installed loads of leaky dams and things like that, whilst that would be positive it wouldn’t necessarily, then you look at some of the wider habitat creation things you may actually have been able to do in that natural flood management as well.” (Stakeholder 6)

One suggestion was that funding should be available for the land managers during the initial 12-month period, to keep them engaged but also to ensure they have funding to replace both their BPS and agri-environmental schemes, as some farmers, hill farmers for example, are going to be particularly vulnerable. A facilitator also suggested that there may be an issue in ensuring that everyone is ready to enter into the project at the same time, as existing AES agreements will finish at different times:

“So I am thinking scenario B very much requires everybody to be ready to enter into the proposals at the same time, because you know, as I said already that one of the issues for us is that everybody was coming out of their entry level stewardship or whatever, countryside stewardship at different times so it made it very difficult to plan.” (Facilitator, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

There were contrasting views amongst two facilitators about the time needed to plan the collaborative project, one thought that 12 months was the minimum amount of time needed to plan, another felt the time period should be shorter, to allow more time to actually implement the project within the 5 year timescale. Some facilitators felt that Scenario B required flexibility within the agreement in case some land managers did not want to engage with the group project after the initial 12 months, or to allow members to join or leave the group if their circumstances changed during the implementation stage, for example, bereavements or farm sales are not uncommon in longer term projects:

“But what I would say in addition would be that at the end of 12 months you could decide whether you felt that there was the appetite for a group project, or whether you just wanted to carry on as a more loose and lovely association, partnership, whatever, just doing more of the advice and guidance stuff.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

8.2.3 Scenario C: Bonus payments to individual land managers

Scenario C was considered by some respondents as suitable for those groups that were already established, especially if the payment was generous and the level of bureaucracy involved in evidencing collaboration was minimal:

“I mean for our group that kind of thing might work because it’s an existing group anyway and because they’ve been a group for so many years and they can kind of, they do talk to each other and there are a few people already involved who could help bring things together. But whether that’s the case for other groups and whether it would work more widely I think for the most part they quite like having help to do applications and paperwork and putting projects together” (Facilitator, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

A land manager from the same initiative agreed suggesting that their initiative was “a great example of Scenario C” and that this scenario would allow them to pool their money, recruit a facilitator and then you

have that ability to recoup some of that money through a bonus at the end, *“because you are effectively paying for the scheme off your own back.”*

Others liked Scenario C as it offered an opportunity to act on an individual basis, giving the land managers some agency over their actions and an ability to tailor actions to the individual farm, it would also incentivise individual farmers to join a landscape scale project:

“So you have got to be able to tailor it to each land parcel at the same time. So I think it has got to be some, Scenario C I think that is still going to be key, to tailor it.” (Land manager 3, Case 2, CSFF farmer group)

For new groups, a recurring theme that emerged when discussing Scenario C was the need for some form of funded facilitation in order to bring land managers together and achieve outcomes, a service which was absent from this scenario. This needs to be dedicated role with a strong, driven individual as evidenced in past projects:

“I think I have a least favourite, I think Scenario C wouldn’t quite work for us based on the experience we’ve had. I just don’t think, I think you need some funding or some way of getting a facilitator or a collaborator dedicated to making things happen, keeping up the pace.” (Land manager 1, Case 13, Non-CSFF farmer group)

Another key concern raised by land managers, facilitators and the stakeholders about Scenario C was the requirement for the land manager to pay the upfront costs for preparing the collaborative project, as it was seen to be too risky, and farmers would be sceptical about being reimbursed:

“Scenario C says about no direct funding for the individuals may have to take the up-front cost. I can’t really see that happening if there is no guarantee of the scheme at the end of it. I don’t think anyone is going to take that risk if you see what I mean.” (Land manager 2, Case 5, Non-CSFF farmer group)

“You’re asking them, to fund training events, advice, the creation of a landscape management plan, and then you’re only going to give them the bonus afterwards? They’d be very nervous that it might not happen, it might not come through.” (Stakeholder 3)

Another concern expressed was about evidencing collaborative working. There was uncertainty about how this might be achieved and concerns about additional bureaucracy. For some this requirement was interpreted as demonstrating results on the grounds, with payments based on achieving results:

“Individuals could claim for a financial bonus if they demonstrate they have worked in a group’ how on earth do you demonstrate you have worked in a group? I mean for me that is bureaucracy gone mad!” (Land manager 2, Case 3, Non-CSFF farmer group)

One facilitator suggested that if the evidence, or the qualifying information was not too onerous, then that might work, as this quote suggests:

“So if they could get some sort of payment for evidencing their conservation work at a landscape scale, I think that would be a really good thing. If it was a healthy generous payment for doing this stuff, if the evidence, or the qualifying information wasn’t too onerous... perhaps if it was something like a map and photographs of the work that I could do, that I could submit with a simple accompanying statement, or sign in sheets for a training session, then that would be great, thank you very much!” (Facilitator, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

However, when it comes to demonstrating some outcomes like improved soil health, this would be more complicated due to uncertain metrics and absence of baseline data.

Potential equity issues with Scenario C were also raised. There was a suggestion that this type of arrangement would benefit the larger, wealthier land managers who were able to bear the upfront costs of employing a facilitator and disadvantage small farmers:

“Yeah I mean I suppose the downside of that is whether they, you know, people not necessarily wanting to pay for the advice where they would help set it up and potentially the bigger, better organised places getting the funding and the ones that need more assistance not getting the funding, you know, I think that could be an issue.” (Facilitator, Case 14, Auction initiative)

8.2.4 Mix of scenarios

A number of respondents suggested combining elements of the different scenarios. A popular suggestion was to combine either scenarios A or B with scenario C. For example, using the facilitation fund model to offer training and specialist advice, and then offering a bonus payment to incentivise working together. Alternatively, provide funding for a facilitator to help plan a bespoke collaborative project but with a bonus payment for collaborative working:

“I think I would probably want to combine some bits of A and C in so much that you know, you get the group together, you give them the training. The specialist advice. You don’t actually support the application but you know, at the moment there is no incentive to work together other than it’s a, a good desirable thing to do to [so] take scenario C and stick in there, you know, a bonus if you like, if I can call it a bonus for doing the right thing, you know...and if people sign up and they don’t deliver it, well you know, those that have delivered haven’t been penalised for other people’s failures, so I think elements of A and C would be where I would go.” (Facilitator, Case 9, CSFF farmer group)

“I wondered from my point of view, as if you had more of a [scenario B], but with the opportunity for sort of a way to promote a bonus payment for collaborative working, the key thing [is] the way you can get the training and advice which I think is fundamental for this step change in people’s mind-set, you need to educate and engage with people before you have the action on the ground. But I think if there is an incentive to have action on the ground, but within that collaborative approach, I think that would be fantastic.” (Facilitator, Case 6, large scale coordinated initiative)

One suggestion was to have all options available for land managers to choose from which will enable them to have agency over the approach adopted:

“I think yeah, choose which works for you. Because also if you do that, you enable people to have agency. Probably what is better is to make sure you’re able to express those clearly and maybe look at it in terms of value propositions. What does each one try and do? ...The first one [scenario A], I mean that would work really well potentially for a producer group.” (Stakeholder 7)

8.2.5 Other collaborative approaches

A number of other approaches to delivering collaborative working were suggested by respondents. One suggestion was for the government to commission facilitators directly to sign up land managers to a group, rather than paying a group for a facilitator. In this way the onus would be on the facilitator to form a group and to meet the government’s targets:

“If they funded me for a decent period of time or even just said ‘these are our targets, these are what we would like you to do; we will pay you a percentage or we will pay you a project management fee of the total amount of capital works that you can get farmers signed up to’. Then that way I am getting paid on what I can deliver so rather than me just getting paid for nothing and for not having to deliver anything I am only going to get paid if I get so many farmers signed up to so much capital works.” (Facilitator, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

An opposing view was put forward by another facilitator, who suggested that due to his experiences of facilitating a CSFF group, the funding should go to the group, not the facilitator, in order to create some permanency and a sense of group identity and ownership:

“I think give the money to the group, do not give it to the facilitator. The group needs to set up some kind of cohesive, accountable body, and that can be something really simple...But then if you change, facilitators can come and go. What’s important is that group. The group’s got legs, members can change, you know, in 10 years you might have a completely different set of people but the group’s still there as an entity. It still has the same legacy, you’re not starting from scratch every time. It has longevity, it has history, it has reputation, it has an identity of its own, and it’s not just a collection of farmers, so my very strong feeling is that the group should be funded as a group rather than the facilitator being funded. And it also means that whatever that funding then purchases belongs to the group, either ideologically, or conceptually, or actually in real terms. Whereas it took my farmers, I still don’t think they get it, they see the facilitation fund as my money. As far as they’re concerned, they don’t have any money. Whereas if I’d given it to them, if the money had gone to them, and then they’d paid me out of it, then it’s just a whole different ball game.” (Facilitator, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

The same respondent identified a specific approach to distributing the funds, which would involve giving the group £10,000 for general activities, workshops, one-to-many advice and then a £500 voucher for each farmer for one-to-one advice to use as they chose, such as purchasing individual advice, or trading it with neighbours, or pooling it as a group.

8.3 Wider E.L.M design: Suggestions and concerns

Although the research interviews focused collaborative or coordinated approaches to environmental land management, inevitably respondents also raised points relating specifically to individual AES agreements (past, present and future) throughout the interviews. These are summarised below.

When asked, the majority of land managers interviewed stated that they were likely to participate in E.L.M in the future. The financial payments received from E.L.M was a strong motivation for participating. It was generally recognised that E.L.M was likely to become an important source of income as the Basic Payment Scheme is phased out, as the following quote illustrates:

“Because I don’t think we’ll have any choice if we want to have any sort of funding... any sort of government funding we will have to take part in some form of environmental system.” (Land manager 1, Case 7, CSFF farmer group)

Interestingly, one land manager suggested he would participate in E.L.M unless he was able to achieve more favourable income for undertaking environmental work, such as carbon sequestration, from private companies. Although another had concerns about private sector involvement in delivering environmental activities which might lead to activities that were not beneficial to the environment.

A number of land managers planned to enter E.L.M to continue the environmental work they were undertaking in current AES. Environmental management was considered an important part of their farming system which they wished to continue. The following comment typifies land managers' reasoning:

"We have achieved some fantastic successes in terms of habitat creation and securing species diversity and greater numbers of species. I don't know whether you've been to this bit of the world, but it really is profound what has happened, and I think we want to continue with that. It would feel a very awful legacy, if that didn't continue." (Land manager 2, Case 4, CSFF farmer group)

There were concerns about the bureaucracy of the scheme and some are waiting to see if the scheme is burdensome and complicated. It was suggested that payments should not solely be based on income foregone, but rather the value to society of the environmental benefits delivered. Some of the land managers would be particularly attracted to E.L.M if it included some capital items:

"It depends what it turns out like and what I'm sort of needing to do at the time, you know. We're still looking at splitting fields up and putting more, you know, planting new hedges and we've still got quite a few old hedges that need laid or double-fenced and all that sort of stuff. Now, if we could get payments for that, yes, I would be interested." (Land manager 2, Case 8, Community-led initiative)

Those who said they were unlikely or unsure that they would participate in E.L.M felt that they did not have enough information about the scheme to make a judgement. Also, those who had heard about the scheme from others were concerned that it would be overly complicated and burdensome.

Several suggestions were made about the future design of E.L.M. For example, some respondents favoured an approach that offered payments by results. It was felt that such an approach would be fairer than paying for management practices, which might not deliver results:

"I want to be paid a base payment for my prescriptions, and then I want to be paid additionally for the outcome of those prescriptions. So, I want you to come and have a look at my pollinator plot and tell me... I want you to mark it and tell me that it's the best, so you're going to give me another £20 an acre for it. OK?" (Land manager 1, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

"I think one of the big things that we have got to get, as I say, is being paid for what we do and for what we achieve. It is not and should not be on an income foregone basis. And if we don't achieve it, then maybe we shouldn't be paid for it." (Land manager 3, Case 11, Non-CSFF farmer group)

A final suggestion for E.L.M design was the incorporation of some form of public engagement as part of the collaborative scheme as the following quote explains:

"Public engagement would be something that would be a very good thing to do as part of a scheme. And in collaboration with other people. Because you could possibly, if twenty farmers could possibly, or ten farms or twenty could possibly afford to employ somebody. With social media these days you can get the message out there fairly quick. And it would be quite nice for people just to see what we are doing to help the environment." (Land manager 2, Case 12, Large-scale coordinated initiative)

9. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on in-depth interviews with land managers, facilitators, coordinators and a range of other stakeholders, this research has revealed rich insights into the operation and effectiveness of a range of different approaches to delivering environmental management at scale i.e. beyond the individual holding approach that characterised legacy AES.

From our analysis it is clear that there is no single 'blueprint' for delivery at larger spatial scales. Different approaches suit different environmental issues and local circumstances and attract land managers with different dispositions. For example, those less keen on collaboration might be happy with a coordinated or auction approach. Therefore E.L.M needs to offer the flexibility for different approaches to be supported according to local requirements.

It is clear from this research that farmer collaboration is not strictly necessary to deliver environmental outcomes at larger spatial scales. Coordinated and auction-based approaches deliver environmental management at scale with little or no farmer-to-farmer interaction, and can therefore be more appealing than collaborative approaches for some land managers. Collaborative approaches however, are associated with a range of benefits and outcomes over and above the delivery of specific environmental management practices. These include social and personal benefits including reducing social isolation, providing safe and supportive spaces for discussing agri-environmental management and lots of mutual learning, gaining of knowledge and capacity building through groups, speakers/discussions, visits, and advice. Both collaborative and coordinated approaches could, therefore, have a role to play in achieving environmental benefits at large spatial scales, with each potentially serving slightly different purposes. For instance, collaborative farmer groups (either led by farmers themselves or third parties) may act to harness interested farmers' enthusiasm and enhance the depth and quality of their environmental management, whereas coordinated approaches (whether led by arms-length bodies, private stakeholders, partnerships or communities) may be effective at securing broad participation from land managers, ensuring that specific actions are taken across a target area.

There is a lot of evidence from our research that effective facilitation is essential for successful collaboration. The attributes of an effective facilitator were seen to be trust, knowledge, excellent organisational skills and passion. If collaborative approaches are to become more common, there will be a need for more effective facilitators, employed at the appropriate time (i.e. pre-application), and for facilitators to be able to learn from each other.

It is also clear that environmental monitoring should not just be seen as an expensive add-on but as an essential part of effective delivery. This should include feedback to farmers to create positive feedback loops, reinforcing positive environmental behaviours and learning in addition to identifying where additional steps need to be taken. The emphasis on public money for public goods means that farmers are increasingly aware of the need to be seen to be delivering public goods and this requires evidence. Clearly this raises challenges in the context of limited budget and a desire to maximise spend on delivery.

Time and timescale were frequent topics of discussion in our interviews and pose challenges both to the land managers delivering environmental management on the ground and those charged with designing, funding and delivering policy, as timescales for achieving environmental gain may be out of sync with usual policy and funding cycles. In this context it is important to recognise the passage of time required for beneficial environmental change. The amount of time will vary according to the specific environmental attribute being addressed and the starting point (i.e. how much degradation has occurred) but a timescale of decades may be more appropriate than five year agreements. In addition, a true commitment to collaborative group work requires sufficient lead-in time. This might be a challenge in terms of public spending, as it may appear that nothing much is happening during the group establishment and building stage. It is also important to build in flexible time schedules to allow for the adaptation of farming systems (which in the livestock sector in

particular is not quick) and the delivery of management. Our final reflection on the theme of time is the importance of timely payments to farmers and land managers for the vital environmental services they are providing. Past issues in this area have eroded trust in the system and it is important that this trust is rebuilt in order to secure land managers' future participation in agri-environment schemes and related initiatives.

Agri-environmental policy has come a long way since its inception in the 1980s. This is perhaps most noticeable in terms of the changing attitudes of many farmers who, based on the evidence from this research, are increasingly willing to deliver a wide range of public goods and are frequently willing to collaborate to do so. Of course, we have been speaking to those who are already interested in environmental management so further work is required to test out the appetite for collaborative and coordinated approaches in the wider farming population. There is evidence (from our research) that non-environmental farmer groups may be interested in environmental delivery and this is an area that deserves further attention.

Finally, farmers often learn best from other farmers. They have an inherent understanding of each other and speak the same language. It is important therefore to consider how the experiences of farmers in collaborative and coordinated initiatives can be used to encourage farmers to think about taking part in these forms of agri-environmental management.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations derive from this research. Most relate specifically to the design of E.L.M at larger spatial scales but we also include recommendations on the importance of adopting the principle of flexibility in design and delivery; communications, and monitoring and skills development (which are also relevant to the design of the wider E.L.M programme) because these themes emerged strongly from our research and take on particular pertinence in a collaborative or coordinated group context.

Recommendations for ELM Design

- Support both coordinated and collaborative initiatives within E.L.M, as each are appropriate in different circumstances.
- Prioritise funding an effective facilitator with appropriate skills and experience as this is key to success.
- Expand the use of online auctions for delivering specific management objectives, as these are cost-effective, require less farmer commitment and can reach a wide audience, including those who do not normally engage with AES.
- Utilise support (both financial and in-kind) for initiatives from stakeholder organisations by enabling and encouraging the creation of partnerships where appropriate (e.g. in the development and delivery of coordinated initiatives).
- Encourage land manager involvement in the setting of group objectives and delivery plans, regardless of whether collaborative/coordinated delivery models are led by stakeholder organisations or farmers themselves.
- Keep landscape-scale options/initiatives as simple as possible and streamline application processes.
- Provide financial incentives for participating in collaborative/coordinated management wherever possible, particularly where the aim is to involve a high proportion of farmers in a specific area and/or land managers with little prior experience of environmental schemes and initiatives. It is also important to integrate non-financial incentives into the design of initiatives, for example training, one-to-one advice and free environmental monitoring/feedback at the farm level.

- Avoid group agreements with shared liability, except possibly in the case of small and well-established groups where trust between members has developed, or common land where commoners are used to working together.

Recommendations for a flexible approach to design and delivery

- Maximise flexibility wherever possible, particularly in terms of how land managers will deliver objectives. The development of formal structures and planning frameworks within collaborative/coordinated initiatives remain useful for providing focus and keeping work on track, however, and should be encouraged.
- Allow flexibility over agreement length (including both short and long term commitments) depending on the type of management and environmental objective that is being sought and/or provide opportunities for follow-on funding. Long-term agreements should build in contingencies to account for major shifts within the farm business (e.g. changes in ownership).

Recommendations for communications

- Ensure communication around opportunities for landscape-scale working uses appropriate language that is clear and concise. In particular, the level of joint-working required from farmers should be clear.
- When communicating with land managers, recognise that they will be motivated to engage in initiatives by a range of different factors including environmental interest, financial incentives, improving farming practices, regulatory changes and social and reputational benefits.
- Provide funding and resources (e.g. ideas, design and information templates, sources of advice/support, case studies) to assist groups with voluntary public engagement activities, as this can result in significant social benefits both for farmers and local communities.
- Use existing farmer groups and networks (both environmentally and non-environmentally focused) as a conduit for communicating opportunities related to ELM and landscape-scale initiatives.

Recommendations for monitoring and skills development

- Support and encourage initiatives to develop clear targets, baseline data and monitoring systems to quantify and capture environmental (and other) outcomes, and ensure results are fed back to farmers. Interim environmental indicators can also help to motivate farmers where long time-spans prevent clear outcome measurements.
- Build environmental monitoring into the framework of a collaborative E.L.M component by providing appropriate funding and resources (e.g. templates, guidelines, ideas), including for monitoring delivered by farmers and local community or conservation groups.
- Enable flexibility by allowing groups to determine the type of monitoring most suited to their specific context.

Recommendations for further research

Further research should be undertaken to establish the environmental, economic and social additionally associated with collaborative and coordinated approaches.

Additional research is required to establish the likely willingness and capacity to participate in collaborative and/or coordinated initiatives amongst the wider farming community (i.e. beyond the existing participants who took part in this research).

The extent to which farmers' involvement in setting objectives and monitoring environmental and social outcomes is not fully understood and requires further research.

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Appendix A: Draft collaborative group scenarios

NB: Respondents were presented with these draft scenarios and asked to reflect on them. These scenarios were emphasised as 'not government policy' and only possible approaches, none of which may be included in any future scheme.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND MANAGEMENT SCHEME

Possible approaches to encouraging landscape scale management under E.L.M

Assumptions common to scenarios A & B (using groups):

- All land managers and key parties are eligible to join collaborative groups, regardless of whether in agri-env agreement or not (= existing CSFF)
- Groups will be funded for a minimum of 3 years (= existing CSFF)
- Basic funding rates will be dependent on group size (= existing CSFF)
- Facilitators can be from ALB, commercial or third sector, as agreed by each group

Scenario A: E.L.M Facilitation Fund – simple funding (similar to current CSFF)

Self-organising groups or groups led by a commercial or third sector party can apply for a 3-5 year agreement to deliver E.L.M spatial priorities. Funding to support facilitation and training costs, as well as specialist advice on implementation plans. Will not include support for advice to apply to E.L.M. Facilitation funding is not dependent on delivering outcomes.

Scenario B: E.L.M Collaboration Fund – bespoke funding

As above but with two funding steps. The first payment would fund initial 12 months of facilitation and planning costs to set group objectives. The group would then develop costings for delivering their objectives and apply for funds to support advice and training (collaboration funding not dependent on outcomes). The group could also apply for funds for delivery of actions across multiple ownership boundaries *instead of* applying through individual agreements to deliver these actions, but this would require groups to enter a group agreement with shared liability for delivery.

Scenario C: Bonus payments to individual land managers

No direct funding for facilitation/collaboration; land managers organise themselves as appropriate for their area and bear upfront costs. Individuals could submit a claim for a financial bonus (in addition to their normal E.L.M payments) if they demonstrate that they have worked in a group to deliver E.L.M priorities in their area. Qualifying collaborative activities might include training events, one-to-many advice, the creation of a landscape scale management plan or coordinated delivery of actions.

Appendix B: Respondents' preferred collaborative group scenario

Table A1 Preferred scenario options

Cases	Type of initiative	Preferred option
Case 1 Facilitator	Community led	No choice made
Case 1 Land Manager 1	Community led	No choice made
Case 1 Land Manager 2	Community led	A
Case 2 Facilitator	CSFF farmer group	A
Case 2 Land Manager 1	CSFF farmer group	B
Case 2 Land Manager 2	CSFF farmer group	B
Case 2 Land Manager 3	CSFF farmer group	A B & C
Case 3 Facilitator	Non-CSFF farmer group	A
Case 3 Facilitator 2	Non-CSFF farmer group	B and C
Case 3 Land Manager 1	Non-CSFF farmer group	No choice made
Case 3 Land Manager 2	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 3 Land Manager 3	Non-CSFF farmer group	C
Case 4 Facilitator	CSFF farmer group	B
Case 4 Farmer 1	CSFF farmer group	B
Case 4 Farmer 2	CSFF farmer group	B & C
Case 4 Farmer 3	CSFF farmer group	B
Case 4 Farmer 4	CSFF farmer group	No choice made
Case 5 Facilitator	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 5 Land Manager 1	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 5 Land Manager 2	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 6 Facilitator	Large scale coordinated	B & C
Case 6 Land Manager 1	Large-scale coordinated	A
Case 6 Land Manager 2	Large-scale coordinated	No choice made
Case 6 Land Manager 3	Large-scale coordinated	No choice made
Case 7 Facilitator	CSFF farmer group	A & B
Case 7 Farmer 1	CSFF farmer group	A
Case 7 Farmer 2	CSFF farmer group	B & C
Case 7 Farmer 3	CSFF farmer group	C
Case 8 Facilitator	Community led	B
Case 8 Land Manager 1	Community led	C
Case 8 Land Manager 2	Community led	B
Case 8 Land Manager 3	Community led	B
Case 9 Facilitator	CSFF farmer group	A&C
Case 9 Farmer 1	CSFF farmer group	A&C
Case 9 Farmer 2	CSFF farmer group	A&B
Case 10 Facilitator	Auction	No choice made
Case 10 Land Manager 1	Auction	B
Case 10 Land manager 2	Auction	A or B
Case 10 Land Manager 3	Auction	A
Case 11 Facilitator	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 11 Farmer 1	Non-CSFF farmer group	No choice made
Case 11 Farmer 2	Non-CSFF farmer group	C
Case 11 Farmer 3	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 12 Facilitator	Large-scale coordinated	No choice made

Case 12 Land Manager 1	Large-scale coordinated	A
Case 12 Land Manager 2	Large-scale coordinated	No choice made
Case 12 Land manager 3	Large-scale coordinated	No choice made
Case 13 Facilitator	Non-CSFF farmer group	No choice made
Case 13 Land Manager 1	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 13 Land manager 2	Non-CSFF farmer group	No choice made
Case 13 Land manager 3	Non-CSFF farmer group	B
Case 14 Facilitator	Auction	B
Case 14 Land Manager 1	Auction	C
Case 14 Land Manager 2	Auction	C
Case 14 Land Manager 3	Auction	C
Case 15 Facilitator	Auction	A & B
Case 15 Land Manager 1	Auction	No choice made
Stakeholder 1		C
Stakeholder 2		No choice made
Stakeholder 3		B
Stakeholder 4		A & C
Stakeholder 5		A & B
Stakeholder 6, pilot facilitator		A
Stakeholder 7		B
Stakeholder 8		B
Stakeholder 9a and b		A or B
Stakeholder 10		B
Stakeholder 11		B