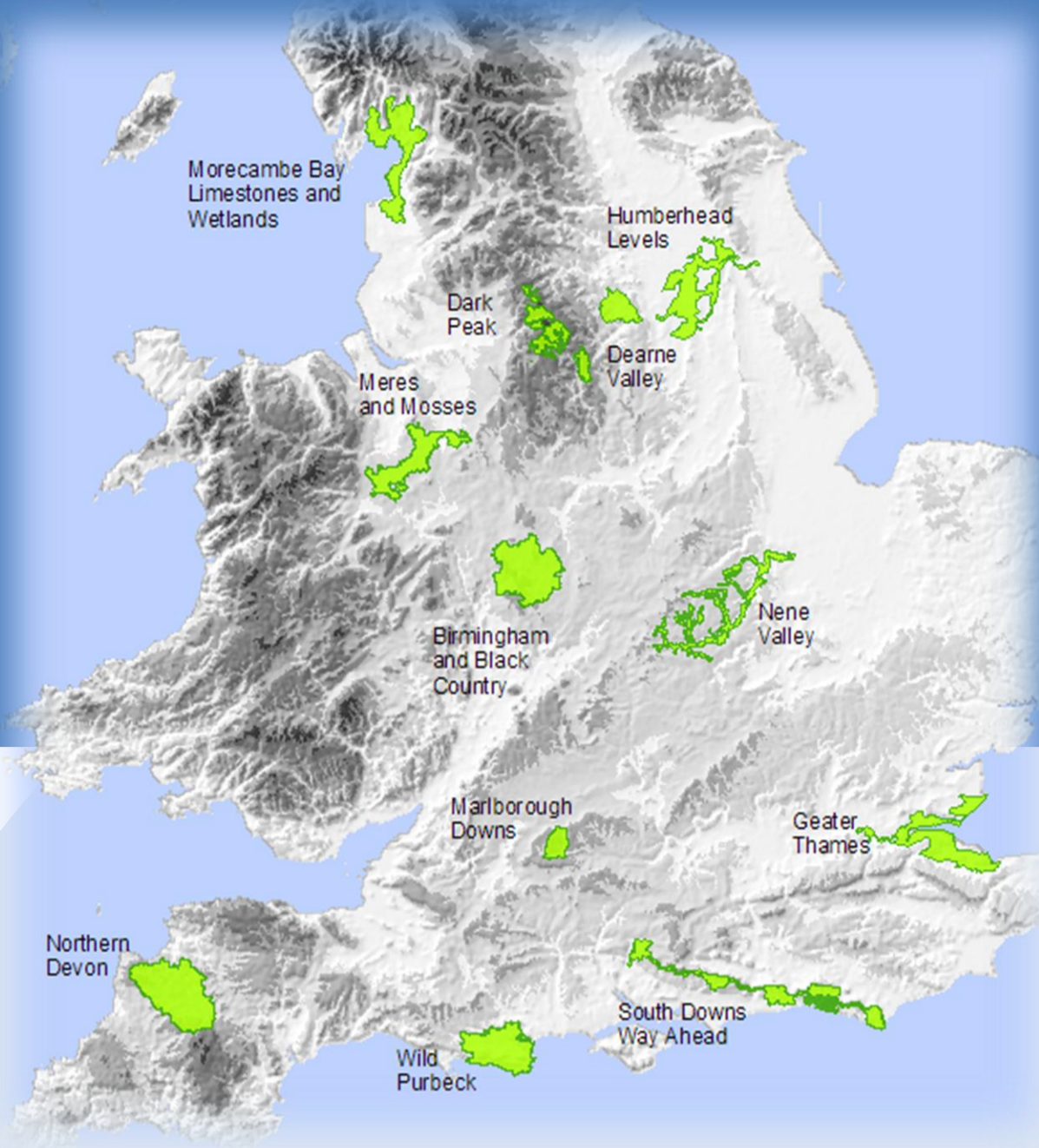


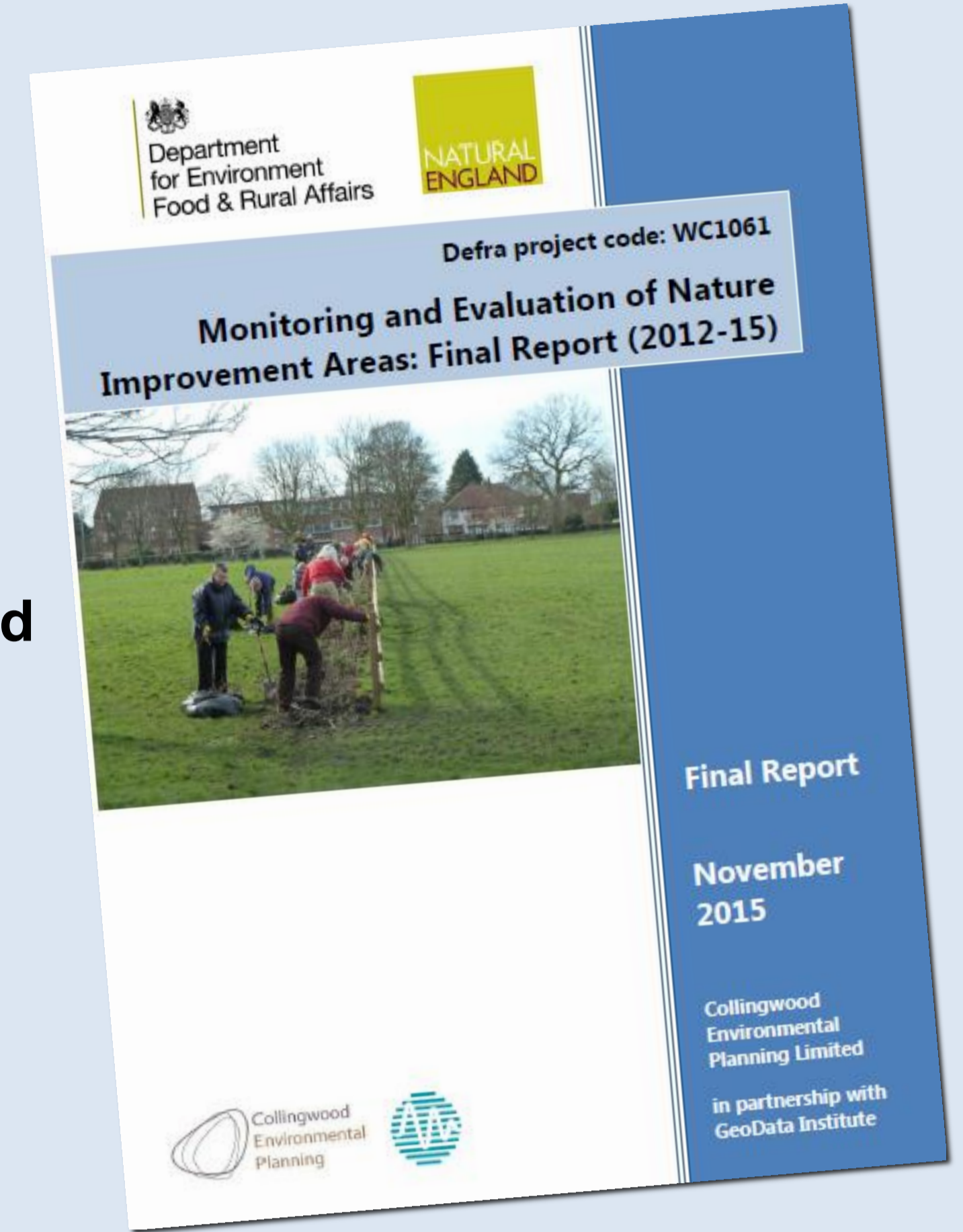
Nature Improvement Areas Achievements 2012 - 2015



The Nature Improvement Areas Final Monitoring and Evaluation report was published in January 2015

Key lessons from the evaluation of the NIAs include:

- ❖ shared visions and objectives for the NIA partnerships improved communication between organisations, encouraged joined-up working and more integrated implementation;
- ❖ partnership-led, landscape scale land management contributed to successful implementation. However, sufficient resources need to be dedicated to local coordination and management if partnerships are to function well;
- ❖ the flexibility inherent in the design of the initiative was an important success factor;
- ❖ partnerships bringing conservation organisations together with local businesses, land managers, research institutions and local authorities proved effective in delivering land management in the integrated way envisaged by the NIA initiative;
- ❖ visible government support and leadership and a clear policy message provided impetus for local project delivery and helped local projects in sourcing additional resources;
- ❖ the scale of funding available to NIAs was critical to their success; the initial government grant, for example, enabled partnerships to employ staff, leverage match-funding and initiate demonstration projects that have encouraged others to get involved; and,
- ❖ longer term activity (beyond the three years of grant funding in NIAs) will be required to deliver sustainable impact, with associated monitoring to understand if lasting changes have been realised.



Enhancing the economy

The NIA partnerships mobilised resources with an equivalent value of £26.2 million (including the financial value of volunteer time and services in-kind) in addition to the initial government grant funding. Of this total, £15.3 million was from non-public sources (e.g. private sector and non-governmental organisations).

Five NIAs have also reported explicitly seeking to deliver economic benefits locally. These NIA partnerships use two main approaches: supporting the production and exchange of natural products - particularly wood-fuel; and place based marketing (i.e. promoting the NIA area and the importance of the natural environment).



Creating more, bigger, better and less fragmented places for wildlife

Substantial contributions to Biodiversity 2020 outcomes were achieved. The initiative accelerated and broadened the scope of biodiversity activities in NIAs. NIA partnerships maintained or improved 13,664ha of existing priority habitat (equivalent to about a quarter of the size of the New Forest National Park); and have restored or created 4,625ha of new priority habitat.

The NIAs also restored, created or managed 225km of linear and boundary habitats, such as rivers and hedgerows. Activities to restore or create habitats have delivered multiple benefits, such as: improved habitat connectivity; development of recreational corridors; creation of open spaces; and the enhancement of ecosystem services.



Working with local communities, land managers and businesses

Volunteers contributed over 47,000 days of their time to activities in all the NIAs over the three grant funded years, and volunteering increased in each of the three years, with the amount of volunteering in the third year twice as much as in the first. In total, 87% of volunteering time was on activities considered likely to lead to health and wellbeing benefits for the people involved (e.g. working in groups or doing physical work)

All the NIA partnerships have engaged with their local communities through activities such as: engaging local people as volunteers; reaching out to schools and community groups to provide education and hands-on learning opportunities; and encouraging community involvement in decision making



Places of inspiration and innovation

All the NIA partnerships are engaged in activities that are either contributing to research or are innovative

Four of the NIA partnerships include universities among their partners and 11 of the 12 initial NIA partnerships have reported on research related to the objectives of the NIA partnership being undertaken in collaboration with universities or research institutes

Innovation and research activities are also related to practical habitat restoration or creation and land-management techniques

Three NIAs worked with Sciencewise and Dialogue by Design to enhance public dialogue, involving local communities in discussions and decision making