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**Natural Resources Wales**



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**Natur a Ni**  
**Nature and Us**

# **Nature and Us Citizens' Assembly Findings Report**

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**Prepared for: Natural Resources Wales**

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# Contents

<b>FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR OF THE NATURE AND US ADVISORY GROUP.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Vision statements.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 Nature and Us .....	9
1.2 Method and objectives.....	9
1.3 Analysis and reporting.....	13
1.4 Interpreting the data.....	13
1.5 Key findings .....	14
<b>2. PROTECTING AND RESTORING NATURE .....</b>	<b>16</b>
2.2 Key changes: Shared commitment to protect and restore nature.....	16
2.3 Key benefits: Saving wildlife and improving health .....	17
2.4 Immediate next steps: Strategy that sets out government and citizen roles.....	17
<b>3. POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING.....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.2 Key changes: Government led and more citizen involvement.....	19
3.3 Key benefits: Government strategy influenced by people.....	20
3.4 Immediate next steps: Funding, legislation and shared action.....	21
<b>4. INFORMATION AND ACTION .....</b>	<b>22</b>
4.2 Key changes: Increased knowledge and awareness.....	22
4.3 Key benefits: Informed and active citizens.....	23
4.4 Immediate next steps: Government led strategy .....	23



<b>5. HEALTH .....</b>	<b>25</b>
5.2 Key changes: Access to nature for all .....	25
5.3 Key benefits: Improved health .....	26
5.4 Immediate next steps: Focus on equal access and community initiatives.....	26
<b>6. SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE .....</b>	<b>28</b>
6.2 Key changes: Greener systems and infrastructure .....	29
6.3 Key benefits: Reduced emissions .....	29
6.4 Immediate next steps: Government action to support individual sustainable choices.....	30
<b>7. LAND MANAGEMENT .....</b>	<b>31</b>
7.2 Key changes: Sustainable farming and food production .....	31
7.3 Key benefits: Connection to land and more self-sufficiency.....	32
7.4 Immediate next steps: Set limits and support community action.....	32
<b>8.VISION STATEMENTS .....</b>	<b>33</b>



## Foreword by the Minister for Climate Change

I welcome this hugely valuable and timely report created and inspired through conversations with the people of Wales, capturing their vision for a future with nature and us.

Ecosystems are being degraded and biodiversity lost in Wales, as is the case across the globe. We all depend on the natural environment which underpins our wellbeing and economic prosperity – it provides us with clean air and water, regulates the climate and secures supplies of food.

I recognise that if we are to ensure future generations are able to enjoy our beautiful natural heritage we need to accelerate the actions we are already taking to halt the decline in biodiversity.

Last year I attended COP15 in Montreal where a new global framework for managing nature was agreed to bring about a transformation in society's relationship with nature, and to ensure that we achieve a shared vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050.

In Wales, we declared a joint nature and climate emergency recognising the need to tackle the crises together. I led a Biodiversity Deep Dive working with key experts and practitioners to develop recommendations and actions to support nature recovery. A Team Wales approach is key in driving forward a decade of action - across the whole of government and the whole of society.

The Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations called for the inclusion of actions to tackle the nature emergency into the overall climate change behaviour change programme. Our new *'Climate Action Wales – Public Engagement Strategy 2023-2026'* provides a springboard for a new Climate Public Engagement Programme aimed at helping make green choices easier, more affordable and more convenient, driven by the guiding principle of leaving no-one behind.

As part of our Team Wales, we need every citizen, community, group and business in Wales to embed the climate and nature emergencies in the way they think, work, eat, play and travel. It is time for Team Wales to take centre stage and show what we are capable of, that we are stronger together and united in our ambitions for nature.

Julie James MS

Minister for Climate Change



## Foreword by the Chair of the Nature and Us Advisory Group

All of us are touched by the nature and climate emergencies, yet often we're unsure about how best to make a meaningful contribution – especially to help the generations yet to come. Many of us are anxious about how the future is unfolding. I am delighted, therefore, to share this vision for Wales' natural environment in 2050.

The vision captures what a wide range of people across Wales wish for in a world where nature and people thrive together. Rather than the thoughts of experts, the vision reveals the changes that people in Wales would make to make this shared vision a reality. It dares us to imagine how Wales could look if we addressed our growing environmental challenge together.

'Nature and Us' differs from previous NRW work in involving as diverse a range of people as possible. We, the people of Wales, are diverse in our lifestyles, our aspirations and our opportunities. We wanted to stimulate a national conversation that represented this diversity as faithfully as possible by reaching citizens from all walks of life. Thousands of you completed our survey, took part in our webinars and spoke to us at events or discussions. A 'citizens' assembly' - representative of Welsh society – then agreed the vision presented in this report. In some ways, we have scratched the surface, but offer this collective view as impartially as possible.

Although none of us individually can claim this vision, I take pride that it represents a shared perspective that lifts our thoughts and our imagination from the immediate to the long-term. The result does not belong to Natural Resources Wales, but we offer it to everyone in Wales as a possible guide. NRW will play its part in these actions, and will respond formally to the challenges and ideas in the Autumn of 2023. We hope that you could do the same to keep this important conversation alive.

Professor Steve Ormerod

Cardiff University and Deputy Chair, Natural Resources Wales.



## Executive Summary

The Nature and Us Citizens' Assembly was commissioned by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to support the development of a vision for the future of the natural environment in Wales. Natural Resources Wales is a Welsh Government sponsored body which acts as the principal adviser to the Welsh Government around issues relating to the Welsh environment. Since 2021, they have been delivering the Nature and Us<sup>1</sup> programme, which seeks to involve and hear from people across Wales about their views, concerns and hopes for the future of the natural environment.

The first phase of this programme, carried out by Freshwater and OB3 Research in early 2022, generated a wealth of evidence on peoples' perceptions of the natural environment, its impact on their lives, and their hopes for the future. It highlighted the need for further engagement with people across Wales on this issue, for which the Nature and Us Citizens' Assembly was commissioned. A citizens' assembly brings together a representative sample of a population to consider evidence, learn, and deliberate together<sup>2</sup>, making it a useful tool to consider the evidence generated within the Nature and Us programme and feed into a vision for the future of the natural environment in Wales.

The Centre for Deliberative Research<sup>3</sup> at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), a registered charity and the largest independent and not-for-profit social research organisation in the UK, were commissioned to design and deliver this work. Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG)<sup>4</sup>, a social enterprise focused on the development of zero carbon, localised economies across north Wales, supported this process as Welsh language facilitators. The Sortition Foundation<sup>5</sup> carried out the recruitment for the Nature and Us Citizens' Assembly, who used demographic quotas as targets to achieve a representative sample of the Welsh population (see process report for full details).

To support this work, an advisory panel was convened by Natural Resources Wales to help create the core questions for the assembly, shape the evidence list, and guide session design. The NatCen team facilitated this 16 person panel through three, two-hour co-design workshops to achieve this. The final core assembly questions were:

- **What does the future look like when society and nature thrive together?**
  - What needs to be different from today?
  - What benefits would we see if this happened?
  - What steps do we in Wales need to take to reach a thriving future?

Overall, 52 participants were recruited to take part in the assemblies to ensure the target of 50 started the sessions. In total 45 completed the first workshop, 41 completed the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://freshwater.eventscase.com/EN/Natureandus>

<sup>2</sup> <https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods/citizens-assembly>

<sup>3</sup> <https://natcen.ac.uk/s/centre-deliberative-research>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.deg.wales>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org>



second and 40 completed all three workshops. Participants considered a range of evidence related to Wales and the natural environment in the first two sessions, which gave them information to identify priorities to inform a vision in the final workshop through a series of consensus building exercises.

Participants' priorities were captured during workshops and analysed by NatCen to produce six key themes that are detailed in this report which formed the basis of a series of vision statements. Common to these themes was the principle that participants wanted the government and citizens to both play a role in achieving a future where society and nature thrive together, and participants wanted leadership from the Welsh Government to help Welsh citizens understand what action was possible. Throughout the sessions participants were clear they wanted all levels of government to enable Welsh citizens to take positive action through the way it legislates, funds and communicates. This desired relationship is reflected in the six draft vision statements below.

These statements were shared with nineteen assembly members who took part in follow up online group discussions. In these discussions assembly members were given the statements via a survey prior to attending the discussions and then during the discussion asked the extent to which these statements captured the priorities agreed in the assembly. Where necessary, amendments were made to wording, and a summary report is available in appendix four that details these amendments. The statements below therefore reflect the final agreed vision.

## Vision statements

The image below shows the key elements of a vision for a more equal and sustainable Wales where society and nature thrive together.



**Figure 1.** Detail from visual note taking record of key elements of the vision. Illustration by Laura Sorvala.









# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Nature and Us

Nature and Us is an initiative established to build a shared vision for the future of the natural environment in Wales for 2050. The programme is facilitated and funded by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), a Welsh Government sponsored body which acts as the principal adviser to the Welsh Government around issues relating to the Welsh environment. At the core of this programme is a commitment to hearing from people across Wales to support the development of a vision which can be jointly taken forward by the people, organisations and Government in Wales.

In 2022, a national conversation on the future of the natural environment was launched as the first phase of the Nature and Us programme. It was facilitated by Natural Resources Wales and supported by the Welsh Government. This national conversation engaged over 3,000 citizens through a combination of surveys, focus groups, workshops and webinars. It highlighted the importance of the *future* of the natural environment for people across Wales, and generated a rich evidence base of their stories, insights and hopes for it.

To build upon these insights, the Nature and Us Advisory Group recommended convening a citizens' assembly as the next phase of the programme. This assembly should consider the evidence gathered so far, and work towards the creation of a vision for the future of the natural environment in Wales. The Centre for Deliberative Research (CDR) at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) was commissioned by Natural Resources Wales to design and facilitate this citizens' assembly. Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG)<sup>6</sup>, a social enterprise specialising in the development of zero carbon, localised economies across North Wales, supported this process as Welsh language facilitators. The Sortition Foundation<sup>7</sup> carried out the recruitment for the Nature and Us Citizens' Assembly to ensure a representative sample of people from across Wales.

## 1.2 Method and objectives

The challenge set by the Nature and Us Advisory Group was to identify the priorities shared by people across Wales for the future of the natural environment. They also emphasised the importance of ensuring that a diversity of views from across Welsh communities were heard in the process of deliberation. To achieve this, three specific objectives were set for the assembly:

- To consider the evidence on the climate and nature emergencies, and the public views that were captured to date through the Nature and Us programme.
- To agree a shared vision for the natural environment for Wales.
- To recommend actions that the public can take now, and how other organisations (including national and local government, NRW, public bodies and businesses) can support this action.

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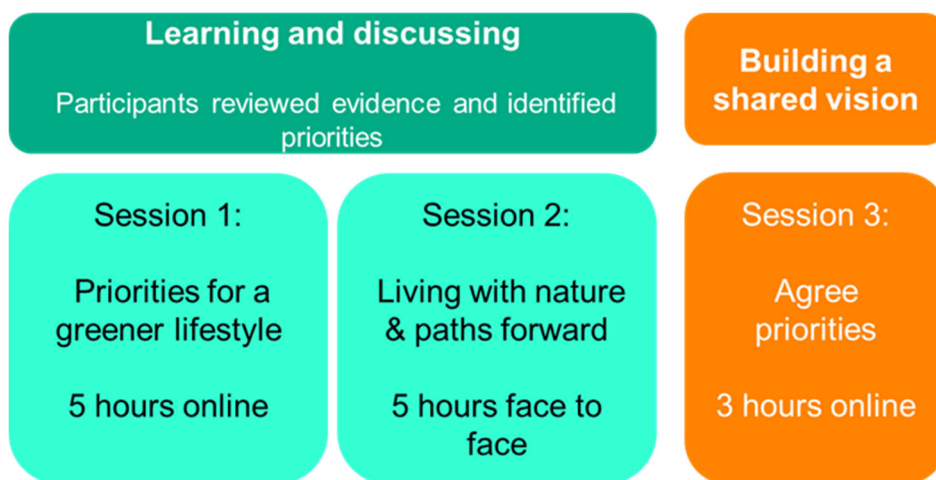
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.deg.wales>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org>



To ensure a diversity of views were heard, a nationally representative group<sup>8</sup> of 52 citizens were recruited by the Sortition Foundation<sup>9</sup>, a not-for-profit organisation that specialises in recruiting people by lottery in a way that is broadly representative of a given population. In total 45 completed the first workshop, 41 completed the second and 40 completed all three workshops.

These citizens participated in 13 hours of deliberation across two and a half days, spread over three weekends, using a mixture of online and in-person workshops. Figure 2 outlines the different elements of deliberation and the anticipated outcomes of each session.



**Figure 2.** The assembly process

To support this work, the advisory panel convened by Natural Resources Wales helped create the core questions for the assembly, shape the evidence list, and guide session design. The NatCen team facilitated this 16 person panel through three, two-hour co-design workshops to achieve this. The final core assembly questions were:

- **What does the future look like when society and nature thrive together?**
  - What needs to be different from today?
  - What benefits would we see if this happened?
  - What steps do we in Wales need to take to reach a thriving future?

Across the three sessions a range of activities and exercises were used to support participants to provide views on these core questions. These are detailed in a separate process report<sup>10</sup> and summarised in the table below. Participant responses were captured

<sup>8</sup> see the Nature and Us Citizens' Assembly Process report for more details ([www.natureandus.wales](http://www.natureandus.wales))

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org>

<sup>10</sup> Available at [www.natureandus.wales](http://www.natureandus.wales)



on a Miro board<sup>11</sup>, and these data were analysed by the NatGen team (detailed in the analysis process section 1.3).

**Table 1.** Core assembly questions and activities

<b>Core question</b>	<b>Activities and exercises</b>
What does the future look like when society and nature thrive together?	Creative exercises such as storytelling and collaborative drawing
What needs to be different from today?	Structured discussion in response to speakers and evidence
What benefits would we see if this happened?	Structured discussion in response to evidence and character sketches to imagine benefits for different people in society
What steps do we in Wales need to take to reach a thriving future?	Consensus and prioritisation building activities

Across sessions one and two, participants heard evidence from a range of speakers to support them to articulate their priorities for the natural environment. Full details of information presented to participants is available in appendix three and a summary of all speakers is provided below.

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<sup>11</sup> [The Visual Collaboration Platform for Every Team | Miro](#)



## Workshop 1

**Table 2.** Workshop one evidence

Mode of Evidence	Evidence Source	Objective
Live presentation	Steve Ormerod, Cardiff University	To understand the importance of nature for our everyday lives and our connection to it
Live presentation	Marie Brousseau-Navarro, Acting Future Generations Commissioner for Wales	To understand the policy tools for the future
Pre-recorded presentation	Sharon Thompson, RSPB	To understand the current challenges facing Wales and the state of nature today.
Live presentation	Alex Ioannou, NRW	To understand the interactions between our lives and the three core systems of food, energy and transport.
Live presentation	Nerys Edmonds, Public Health Wales	To revisit the impacts of nature on day-to-day life through the lens of public health to generate an understanding of wider impacts and inequalities
Video	Nature and Us project Phase 1	To share with participants the views of other people across Wales and create a shared sense of purpose for Session 2

## Workshop 2

**Table 3.** Workshop two evidence

Mode of Evidence	Evidence Source	Objective
Graph	P 13, Global Biodiversity Outlook 5, 'Summary for Policymakers' (secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2020)	To emphasize the interconnected nature of the issue, and the variety of actions needed
<a href="#">Video</a>	Ellen MacArthur Foundation	To introduce the idea of positive future alternatives through the concept of circular economies
<a href="#">Video</a>	Food Sense Wales	To provide a case study of alternative solutions in Wales
<a href="#">Video</a>	Green Squirrel	To provide a case study of alternative solutions in Wales
<a href="#">Video</a>	Cwmpas	To provide a case study of alternative solutions in Wales
<a href="#">Video</a> (part 1) <a href="#">Video</a> (part 2)	Sustrans	To provide a case study of alternative solutions in Wales
<a href="#">Video</a>	Jason Lewis	To provide a case study of alternative solutions in Wales
Audio Clips	NRW	To begin preparing for the vision building focus of Session 3



### 1.3 Analysis and reporting

NatCen has produced two reports; this findings report that outlines the key themes that emerged from the assembly as well as the final vision statements that were shared with nineteen assembly participants for agreement, and a separate process report that outlines assembly objectives, method and delivery. This findings report draws on data captured during the assembly via Miro and facilitator notes, which included participant's priorities in relation to the four core questions.

Our approach to analysis was designed to identify common themes from the range of participant's discussions that could form the basis of a shared vision. To achieve this the NatCen team analysed the priorities that participants created on Miro through a three stage process:

1. Assign each priority to the four core questions in order to build a picture of what participants want to change, the benefits of that change and then the immediate next steps.
2. Apply an inductive coding approach to thematically analyse these data, whereby each response was assigned a 'code' that describes the main theme of the response. For example, 'health' or 'transport'.
3. Conduct a clustering exercise to consolidate the codes into overarching categories (of which there were 6). This enabled NatCen researchers to identify the cross-cutting themes that were present in responses to all of the core questions.

Once these themes and the changes, benefits and next steps within each were identified the NatCen team drafted six vision statements to sum up the key findings within each theme. NatCen then re-contacted all assembly participants to see if they would like to participate in follow up online discussions to review and agree these statements. A total of nineteen assembly participants took part in these discussions, and a summary of key themes and amends to the vision statements is available in appendix four. Therefore the final vision statements in this report reflect the priorities identified by participants in the vision-building process they took part in across three assembly sessions.

### 1.4 Interpreting the data

This report draws upon qualitative data generated by a completed sample of 40 members of the public. This data was generated over 13 hours of deliberation; therefore we are confident that it reflects participants' considered views on the topic. Reporting is based upon data generated within the workshop (through an online whiteboard and facilitator notes) rather than analysing transcripts of everything people said. This approach placed emphasis on capturing participant's priorities; which allowed us to identify what mattered to them most in the time available, but the formats used to do this limit our ability to analyse their reasoning in-depth.

The 40 people who completed the assembly is a robust number for this method, and as reported in the sample section and process report, this sample did reflect the Welsh population in key demographics. As a public engagement and participation exercise, this



sample means that Welsh citizens who did not attend the session can have confidence that a cross-section of the Welsh population were involved in the creation of these vision statements. This is an important measure of success for participatory approaches such as citizens assemblies. As a research exercise, a sample of 40 is not large enough to report generalisable findings about attitudes held by the wider Welsh population.

## 1.5 Key findings

This findings report describes the six themes that NatCen identified through analysis of participants' priorities that constitute the basis of a future vision. Each chapter outlines a different theme and sets out key findings against the core questions to describe participants' priorities in terms of what needs to change, the key benefits of that change and immediate next steps towards reaching their chosen vision and priorities.

The first chapter highlights the importance of protecting the natural environment through a shared commitment between the public and government. This chapter outlines the leadership role participants wanted different levels of Government to take in enabling citizens to take action through the way different levels of Government legislates, funds and communicates. It also introduces the responsibility that participants think citizens have to act once different levels of government have led the way. Although the commitment is shared, the immediate next steps are more focused on Government action, which was a feature throughout the assembly: when participants were asked about next steps, they listed more Government actions than individual citizen actions.

Chapter three outlines priorities related to policy and decision-making, and shows that participants wanted more clarity and transparency around how nature policy is developed as well as assurances that it is evidence-based and not politicised. It also details participants' preference for citizens to be more involved in decision-making in the future.

Chapter four outlines the importance of access to information. It highlights participants' desire for different levels of Government to lead education and awareness campaigns that support citizens to be more informed about the natural environment and know how to take action.

Chapter five is focused on health and describes how participants wanted more widespread and equal access to nature in order to support people to live healthier lives.

Chapter six reports how participants would like reform of infrastructure to enable more people in Wales to make environmentally friendly transport and energy use decisions.

Chapter seven is focused on land management and details participants' views that different levels of government should support more sustainable farming, which would then enable Welsh citizens to feel more connected to their local land.

At the start of each chapter is a vision statement that aims to capture participants' priorities for a future where society and nature thrive together. These six statements are included in the Executive Summary and at the end of this report. They were shared with nineteen participants of the Nature and Us citizens' assembly for feedback via a survey and group







## 2. Protecting and Restoring nature

In the assembly sessions, participants heard from academics and civil society leaders, including the RSPB, on the current state of the natural environment and the importance of restoration and recovery. This included information about progress towards protecting nature and their plans for the future. After hearing this information, participants often emphasised the protection and restoration of nature as an overarching priority for the future. They understood the natural environment to cover all aspects of nature including wildlife, green and blue space, as well as managed and unmanaged land. Participants were not provided with detailed information on the current legislation around commitments to restore and protect the natural environment. Consequently, when reviewing participant priorities, NatCen identified roles and responsibilities in protecting and restoring nature as a standalone theme and developed the following draft vision statement:

***In 2050, when society and nature thrive together, people and Government have a shared commitment to protecting the natural environment.***

This chapter describes the key changes participants want to see through a shared commitment from the public and the Government to protect and restore nature. It was felt this would protect endangered species as well as improve the health and well-being of Welsh citizens. Next steps emphasised the need for an immediate strategy that provides tangible ways for the public to take action.

**Table 4.** Changes, benefits and next steps for the natural environment

What needs to change?	Key benefits	Immediate next steps
A shared commitment that sets out tangible ways people can protect the natural environment	Protect and restore animals, plants and their habitats.  Create more green space for citizens to enjoy	Strategy that sets out Government and citizen roles  Financial incentives to encourage nature friendly action

### 2.2 Key changes: Shared commitment to protect and restore nature

Throughout the assembly many expressed feeling overwhelmed at the scale of change they felt was needed to create their vision for thriving nature. This led to an emphasis on the need for a shared commitment to protect and restore nature from different levels of Government and the public. This commitment should include tangible ways to improve the marine environment, land management, endangered species, and air quality, with a focus on integrating nature into our everyday lives and surroundings. Some thought it should also be enshrined in legislation, although it is important to note that detailed information on the current legislation around commitments to protect the natural environment were not provided to participants.

Most examples of tangible actions focused on things that different levels of Government could do to protect and restore nature. As described in the section 2.4, participants tended



to focus on things the Government could do in the first instance to ensure the natural environment was restored, with the idea that it would be citizens' responsibility to protect and maintain. To protect the marine environment, actions included the removal of all plastics and sewage, supported by strong action from different levels of Government to prevent this type of waste in the future. Some identified the need for better land management (detailed further in chapter seven) that considers all aspects of nature; with tangible actions of planting more trees and the allocation of community allotments as examples given. Others identified the action of protecting nearly extinct species and activities that would encourage biodiversity, rather than what some perceived at the moment as more tokenistic policies to protect 'green space'.

*"Land management that considers nature, wildlife etc."*

Participants recognised the need for shared commitments to ensure a sustainable future for nature is suitable for all people, rather than leading to a more nature friendly lifestyle being exclusive to some due to circumstances such as being financially well off. A thriving future for the natural environment must be one that all people feel they can be a part of, which will mean better support for nature as well as a more inclusive society as we work to make this a reality.

*"Less inequality or at least not more inequality"*

## **2.3 Key benefits: Saving wildlife and improving health**

The protection of the natural environment was seen to benefit both wildlife through preserving species and their habitats, and humans through contributing to the health benefits further discussed in chapter four.

Participants saw initiatives such as increasing green space, the rewilding of brown field sites and protection of other natural environments as enabling the revival and flourishing of plant and animal species which have been in decline. This was seen to go hand-in-hand with other benefits which an increase in green space would have for Wales, such as a decrease in carbon emissions, clean waterways and the improved health of the population.

*"More green space means more wildlife!"*

*"Nature (biodiversity, atmosphere, etc) and us (physical and mental health and economy)"*

## **2.4 Immediate next steps: Strategy that sets out government and citizen roles**

Although participants recognised that protecting and restoring the natural environment requires a shared commitment between Government and citizens, when asked about immediate next steps people focused on Government action. In particular, participants wanted the Government to publish a '20 year plan of integrated activities' that would present 'desired outcomes and evaluate proposed ideas for effectiveness in achieving them'. At the same time, there was a clear emphasis on acting now: 'Treat it with urgency -





### 3. Policy and Decision-Making

During the assembly sessions, participants were introduced to the work of Natural Resources Wales and other public bodies but were not provided with a detailed description of how natural environment policy is developed. They also heard from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales’ Office on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 that mandates public bodies to consider the future generations who will live in Wales and so were familiar with the type of intervention possible in this policy area.

As discussions progressed many wanted to know more about how decisions are made, as well as how targets are set and monitored, for achieving something like a future where society and nature thrive together. Many also continually emphasised the need to involve people in these decisions. After analysing these questions and requests for information NatCen identified a theme of policy and decision-making as a key priority for participants, and drafted the following vision statement:

***In 2050, when society and nature thrive together, clear leadership from the Welsh Government helps the public to be more involved in decisions about nature.***

This chapter details the role that participants want the Welsh Government to take in leading the policy agenda and clearly explaining to people how they can be involved. This brings benefits of ensuring policy is evidence based rather than political, as well as making people feel they can influence the outcomes. In terms of next steps the key role identified for government is in funding initiatives and creating more assembly processes to involve the public.

**Table 5.** Changes, benefits and next steps for policy and decision making

<b>What needs to change?</b>	<b>Key benefits</b>	<b>Immediate next steps</b>
Welsh Government leads a non-politicised policy agenda based on evidence	Long-term strategy and decisions are evidence based	More cross-party initiatives
Greater role for the public in decision-making to hold the government to account	People feel more informed about how they can influence and hold government to account	More public involvement and deliberative engagement processes

#### 3.2 Key changes: Government led and more citizen involvement

Although participants were not given detailed information about the Welsh Government’s powers, they want it to lead greener changes for all of Wales through funding schemes, clear communication and - where necessary - introducing legislation.



*“Llwyodraeth Cymru, Westminster (a gobeithio EU!) gyda strategaeth sydd yn galluogi pobol i fyw bywyd heb effaith negyddol ar yr amgylchedd” (The Welsh Government, Westminster (and hopefully EU!) with a strategy that enables people to live life without a negative impact on the environment)*

*“Deregulation is a modern curse. We need regulation...”*

Many acknowledged that they were unaware of current government policies and decision-making processes. As a result, a key change highlighted by participants was increased clarity around both existing policies in Wales, and the decision-making process for new policies.

Some participants perceived current environmental policy to be politicised, where politicians may make decisions in narrow interests of their party rather than the interests of the environment and Welsh citizens. These participants emphasised the need for government leadership that is supported by all parties and therefore could establish a longer term strategy for nature that is not at risk of change when the leading party changes. When this statement was reviewed by assembly members in the follow up discussions, participants emphasised that environment policy should also not be overly influenced by other vested interests such as business or lobbying.

While there was a clear message for different levels of Government to take the lead, participants indicated a strong desire to be involved and have a voice in shaping a greener future for Wales. For instance, one participant recognised the importance of ‘*people taking ownership of their communities, pushing and advocating for these changes.*’ Participants felt this would increase accountability as well as enable the public to feel they have a role, beyond lifestyle changes, in securing the future for the natural environment.

### **3.3 Key benefits: Government strategy influenced by people**

A key benefit associated with a non-politicised government strategy was that policy would be more focused on the environment (rather than the interest of politicians or business) as well as being evidence-based. In a future Wales where nature and society are thriving, participants imagined that policy objectives should be designed on the basis of independent scientific evidence and participatory democratic exercises, wherein for the latter citizens are presented with evidence before coming together to formulate recommendations. Moreover, participants viewed the approach as an effective way of establishing what could work within communities – the changes that citizens would be receptive to and would therefore maintain through a culture of environmentally-minded, proactive behaviour.

*“Politicians pursue active discourse, rather than politicised arguments. More agreement cross party leads to a more prosperous future.”*

*“[It’s a] great benefit for people generally to come together for a common purpose. Social fabric has changed.”*

A participatory element to decision-making was seen by participants as enabling a more radical policy approach which prioritises the environment over other factors such as the



economy. They thought that if people are more involved in policy making then it is more likely that policy interventions will be directed at big businesses changing its behaviour (e.g. land management and new developments) rather than directed at citizen behaviour change.

*“[It’s] idealistic [to be] reliant on companies choosing to do this...”*

### **3.4 Immediate next steps: Funding, legislation and shared action**

A role for citizens and communities in decision-making was evident in next steps as some stated that ‘assemblies like ours’ were important. Participants backed further use of participatory processes, but cautioned that these would need to deliver results. ‘Show that you care what people think’ and ensure that competing ideas ‘e.g. farming vs other land use for nature’ are reconciled and ‘government policy reflects the vision’. Then ‘embed and promote the mission statement with the population’, for instance, ‘creating local area groups to continue work and message’.

The de-politicisation of nature policy was also evident in the conversations around immediate next steps. Participants wanted to see ‘an end to lobbying and financing of politics’ and for their representatives to look beyond party politics, ensuring continuity, ‘not different parties’ policies but policies for the country that continue irrespective of which political party is in government so that we can gather our knowledge and get results’.





## 4. Information and Action

Throughout the assembly, many participants remarked that they were unfamiliar with a lot of the evidence shared. As a result, when reviewing participant priorities, better access to information and resources was a recurring theme. After analysing responses related to this theme, NatCen drafted the following vision statement:

***In 2050, when society and nature thrive together, sharing knowledge helps people understand how nature impacts their lives, and the actions they can take to help protect and restore the natural environment.***

This chapter describes how participants identified increased public knowledge of the natural environment and awareness of how to act as key areas for change. To achieve this, they want the Government to lead an awareness and engagement strategy that supports all people in Wales to become committed and involved. These changes would lead to a more engaged and informed public.

**Table 6.** Changes, benefits and next steps for information and action

What needs to change?	Key benefits	Immediate next steps
Increased public knowledge of the natural environment	A more informed and engaged public	Government-led engagement and education strategy
Increased awareness of how to take action to improve the natural environment	More citizens taking action	Resources focused on practical action

### 4.2 Key changes: Increased knowledge and awareness

To move towards a future where the public understand the role of nature in their lives, participants emphasised the need for increased knowledge of the natural environment and awareness of how to act to protect it. Many saw different levels of Government funding initiatives to educate and raise awareness amongst the public as the key way to achieve this.

Providing the Welsh public with the information to understand the current harms to the environment, and knowledge of what has to change on both structural and individual levels to mitigate these, arose as a key priority for participants across the assemblies. Alongside this, the majority of participants noted a need to learn more about how society and nature are interlinked. Having environmental matters as a core component of education for both children in schools and adults through societal initiatives was viewed as the best way to deliver widespread recognition of contemporary environmental issues.





*“Education - what we can do and what we should be doing, but also skills, learning from each other. Being able to pass down information from generation to generation - educating each other.”*

The majority also agreed that citizens need a greater awareness of existing opportunities and initiatives. These participants felt that better awareness of existing opportunities or actions can be achieved by actively seeking answers to the questions they have about nature issues and regarding existing initiatives or opportunities.

*“[We] need to be aware of what we have and what is available around us.”*

To create better understanding, knowledge and awareness, participants agreed that there needs to be more investment in both public and school-based education. Participants were not provided with detailed information about the current level of funding for education and awareness initiatives but referenced things such as resources about the future of the natural environment, its current state, and ways to engage, as well as investment to build capacity within the education sector, civil society and Government to mobilise new resources.

*“Pawb o bob oed yn gwybod mwy am yr amgylchedd ac yn defnyddio'r wybodaeth hyn i lywio penderfyniadau bach a mawr yn eu bywydau”*

*“Everyone of all ages knows more about the environment and uses this information to guide small and large decisions in their lives.”*

### **4.3 Key benefits: Informed and active citizens**

Establishing a population that is informed and able to act was viewed by participants as a key benefit that stems from changes in knowledge. Many saw this as a necessary pre-requisite for achieving the future vision. Taking action was understood as a broad spectrum from volunteering to making more environmentally conscious decisions. It was clear that education and public awareness campaigns cannot achieve this alone, and needs to be supported by the changes highlighted in policy and decision making (chapter three) and the natural environment (chapter two) to fully enable informed and active citizens.

*“Education: people’s choice, reduce ‘throw-away’ society, circular economy, reduce demand, reduce supply, reduce consumption, reduce waste.”*

### **4.4 Immediate next steps: Government led strategy**

When identifying next steps participants wanted the Welsh Government to take the lead in developing an engagement and education strategy that can increase knowledge and awareness across the population.

*‘Developing a multi-level education strategy, from 4 years to 80 years old, multi-faceted and dynamic - how can Welsh Government reach out on regular basis to*





## 5. Health

Health and well-being were identified throughout the assembly as a central way that people’s lives are intertwined with the natural environment. For many, it was the first point of association they had between their own lives and nature, whether when thinking about mental health and access to green spaces or clean air for their children. During storytelling circles which took place along the beach of Swansea Bay and at a regional park in Wrexham, this touchpoint became clear. During the assembly, participants heard evidence from Public Health Wales that emphasised the relationship between well-being and the natural environment, as well as how structural inequalities mean some people in society face more barriers than others in accessing these benefits. This information resonated with participants and after analysing responses, NatCen identified the theme of health and drafted the following vision statement:

***In 2050, when society and nature thrive together, widespread access to nature helps people across Wales live happy and healthy lives.***

This chapter outlines the emphasis that participants placed on improving access to nature as well as preserving and restoring the natural environment. To achieve this they identified reducing pollution and supporting community-led initiatives as immediate next steps. The key benefits of these changes were identified as improved mental and physical health of the Welsh population.

**Table 7.** Changes, benefits and next steps for health

What needs to change?	Key benefits	Immediate next steps
Improved access to nature for all	Improved mental and physical health	Support community-led initiatives
Reduce pollution	Improved mental and physical health	Initiatives to reduce traffic and move away from fossil fuels

### 5.2 Key changes: Access to nature for all

Providing greater opportunities to access to the environment was identified as a key change that would support Welsh people to enjoy nature in their day to day lives.

*“Available greenspace and outdoor space for everyone [supports] mental health”*

Addressing the impact of inequalities, which was introduced as a challenge by the public health speaker, emerged as a key reason to improve access to nature for all. Participants acknowledged that some people in society experience more barriers to enjoying nature due to factors such as income and where they live. Many participants wanted Government policies to reduce these barriers, but were not explicit on what policies may achieve this. Transport reform was an additional change that would support access to nature that was picked up on by a few participants and is reported in chapter five.





To reduce pollution participants highlighted restricting traffic within residential areas, or even community initiatives like assemblies for tackling the climate crisis as possible next steps. The reduction of reliance on fossil fuels was also mentioned and is covered in more detail in next chapter.



## 6. Systems and Infrastructure

During the assembly participants heard from a number of speakers who referenced the impact of ‘systems’ on nature. Here the term ‘systems’ was used to describe the infrastructure that shapes how we live our lives – for example transport systems. Through short videos, participants were introduced to how current systems interact with nature as well as how alternative systems, including circular economies, might establish a different relationship with nature. After analysing responses to this content NatCen identified the theme of systems and infrastructure, and drafted the following vision statement:

***In 2050, when society and nature thrive together, Greener transport and energy options enable more people to make environmentally friendly choices in their day to day lives***

This chapter describes the priorities that people identified to change in the current system through public transport, renewable energy and waste management. These changes were understood to bring benefits of better air quality as well as supporting people to live greener lives. The next steps identified to achieve this include government investment and individual behaviour change.

**Table 8.** Changes, benefits and next steps for systems and infrastructure

What needs to change?	Key benefits	Immediate next steps
Improved public transport	Better air quality/ less emissions	Welsh Government investment in greener transport
Shift away from fossil fuels to renewable energy	More energy efficient homes and businesses	Integrate renewable technology into new developments and infrastructure
More nature friendly waste management	Ability to live greener lifestyles is open to all	Increasing policies that support the reuse and repair of resources and a circular economy



## 6.2 Key changes: Greener systems and infrastructure

Participants identified transport, energy supply and waste management as three key areas where the infrastructure of Wales can be made greener to support citizens to make more environmentally friendly choices.

Participants highlighted the need for an affordable, accessible fit-for-purpose public transport system which would reduce emissions through fewer personal vehicles and improve access to nature. In the assembly sessions, this included hop-on/hop-off bus routes which allowed cycles to be carried on board, services which effectively connect rural areas to larger towns and each other, and affordable, integrated transport service networks. These infrastructure changes were viewed as crucial to enabling behaviour change.

*“If less cars, there needs to be cheaper, more convenient public transport.”*

Participants agreed that in addition to public transport it was also important to promote greener private transport through safer routes for cycling and improving electric vehicles so that they no longer use lithium batteries.

*“Green usable public transport: including re-fuelling and recharging distributed locally invest in green transport solutions”*

When discussing energy, participants agreed that affordable renewable energy is a priority. This would provide an alternative to fossil fuel use that will protect the environment.

Some participants commented on waste management systems and the need for more environmentally friendly forms of waste management to be consistent and available across all areas. They referenced the accessibility to recycling waste management services. This would then allow the separation and collection of waste for recycling country-wide; rather than being available to some and not all.

*“How do we recycle waste garden material if no composting facility available? vast (recycling?) system in place”*

## 6.3 Key benefits: Reduced emissions

Changes to transport and energy were seen to benefit nature by reducing emissions, and therefore reducing the impacts of climate change on nature. There was an equalities aspect to this for some participants who recognised that improved public transport and more energy efficient homes may help reduce the impact of inequalities by helping those on lower incomes.

The benefits of having fewer cars on the road were viewed as numerous, from a reduction in harmful emissions to establishing safer and quieter roads which are safer for cyclists and pedestrians. Some viewed this as a way to reclaim road space for nature and thereby increase green space, while others believed that increasing the safety of the roads in residential areas would provide space for communities to come together.





*“Affordable public transport that reaches far and wide allowing workers to commute without the use of a car”*

Some participants described how another benefit of a greener future would be that future housing and business developments are built to be energy efficient. Participants endorsed the installation of solar panels, heat pumps and modern insulation to reduce the loss of heat through inefficient building designs. With housing developments in particular increasing all the time, this was viewed as an effective method of stemming the use of fossil fuels.

*“Energy efficient sustainable housing across the board.”*

## **6.4 Immediate next steps: Government action to support individual sustainable choices**

Immediate next steps identified by participants reflected a combination of government and individual action.

Participants acknowledged that personal behaviour change is needed. Specific suggestions of what individuals would need to do related to *‘recycling as much as possible’*, *‘upgrading and insulating my home’*, or *‘being more mindful of what I am buying and where it has come from’*.

Participants widely agreed, however, that a bigger system change was needed to support individuals to make more sustainable choices. They called for *‘affordable solutions so everyone can take action’* and to *‘make it easy for people to do the right thing, people are lazy’*, and saw the Welsh Government as having a key role in enabling these choices.

Suggestions for crucial next steps for the Government varied. They included incremental change such as *‘investing in marketing to encourage people to reduce, reuse and recycle, because existing initiatives often have poor uptake’*, and *‘reinstating the Feed-in-Tariff’*, but also bolder choices such as *‘legislation on having solar panels on buildings’*, *‘building high quality social housing projects with a focus on renewable energy and efficiency’* or a *‘Welsh Government ban on the use of single plastics on food products’*.

Some participants were keen to also ensure that technology could play its role in enabling more sustainable lifestyles going forward. An immediate step would be to *‘use existing technologies now’*. Beyond that, there was a focus on renewables, linked to calls for *‘Welsh Government to support and invest in the development of renewables, e.g. subsidising the cost until they become profitable and financially sustainable’*.



## 7. Land Management

During the assembly participants heard evidence from Natural Resources Wales that outlined how land is owned and managed in Wales, including the distribution of subsidies to support sustainable farming practices. They also heard case studies that highlighted potential future options for more sustainable land management. When imagining a thriving future, participants returned to these ideas of sustainable land management. Through analysis of comments related to these ideas, NatCen identified land management as a theme and drafted the following vision statement:

***In 2050, when society and nature thrive together, sustainable land management helps communities buy local food and feel connected to the Welsh land.***

This chapter outlines that participants want land management to be fairer and more sustainable. This would deliver benefits of more affordable local food and communities feeling connected to their land. Immediate next steps identified in relation to this theme focused around the government setting targets on how land is used to promote sustainable farming approaches.

**Table 9.** Changes, benefits and next steps for land management

What needs to change?	Key benefits	Immediate next steps
Fairer, more sustainable farming	Sustainable and self-sufficient food supply	Welsh Government set targets on sustainable land use practices
Reduced price of locally produced goods	Connection to local land and cheaper food	Implement new farming techniques and encourage changes in food consumption

### 7.2 Key changes: Sustainable farming and food production

After learning about existing farming practice and possible new approaches such as community supported agriculture, participants supported a shift to fairer land use. This was understood to be both financially fair to farmers and fair to the environment through being sustainable.

Many supported more sustainable farming practices through developing the alternative farming methods shared in case studies that harness innovation in technology and science (e.g. hydroponics). Some participants agreed that farmers should receive financial incentivisation, so they feel supported to make greener changes to farming. For example, one participant noted the trend in the cost of farmland as it has been sold for carbon off-sets – an initiative which may have carbon benefits for other sectors, but has a negative impact on the capacity for sustainable and locally-focused farming in Wales.

A few participants agreed that innovation and changes to achieve sustainable farming would be enabled by the agriculture industry doing more to train and create jobs for young people in Wales to enter the industry.



*“Farming [should be] a trade that people can get into without having been born into farming...”*

To support fair and sustainable farming many felt that local people need to be able to afford local produce. These products should be available locally in schools and workplaces as well as being affordable so that people of all ages in varied financial situations can take the greener options.

*“Why are home grown/sustainably grown foods more expensive than shipping in from another country?”*

### **7.3 Key benefits: Connection to land and more self-sufficiency**

Land use changes and more affordable local products were seen to benefit the local population by making them feel more connected to the land as well as supporting more self-sufficiency in the Welsh economy. Being more aware of the environmental challenges created by current human activity, and how to manage land sustainably, was seen to support cohesive communities by making people feel connected to each other and to the land.

*“Positive land use – sustainable and great for communities.”*

Participants were also able to envision food self-sufficiency at scale as a benefit. Through eating seasonal, local diets and employing green agricultural technologies on Welsh farms, participants viewed a future where Wales – or if not Wales then the UK as a whole – could source more of its food from homegrown agricultural produce. Moreover, green agricultural technologies were seen as central to protecting other parts of the natural environment through, for example, reducing pesticide pollution.

### **7.4 Immediate next steps: Set limits and support community action**

Immediate next steps related to land use reflected a balance of *‘Welsh Government setting further limitations on what can/ cannot be done to the land/ transport/ farming/ sustainability on a large scale’* and *‘the community pressuring their representatives to invest in better land management, forestry, food production and social housing’*.

Examples of specific actions for the Welsh Government included, *‘nationalise privately owned large tracts of land, increase the biodiversity and wild areas. But have smaller more technologically advanced and intense farms growing plants sustainably.’* More generally, *‘finding ways to integrate farming and biodiversity within forestry management e.g. plants to attract pollinators’* was a concern that some participants wanted to see prioritised.

Participants did not provide specific examples of areas where the community should pressurise representatives, but reiterated the need to invest in sustainable land management and advanced farming techniques. This may then support people to change their food consumption behaviour.

*“We need to regenerate the growing of local produce to reduce pollution”*



## 8. Vision statements

The Nature and Us Citizens' Assembly brought together 40 people from across Wales to identify priorities for a vision for the future of the natural environment in 2050. This findings report has outlined the six themes that NatCen identified through analysis of these participants' priorities, providing insights into what participants wanted to change, what they saw as the benefit of this change and immediate next steps for each theme.

At the heart of each of these themes was the idea that assembly participants wanted different levels of government to take a leading role by enabling Welsh citizens to take more action to protect nature. This relationship has been reflected in the six vision statements below that were shared with assembly members for agreement.

The image below shows a vision for a more equal and sustainable Wales where society and nature thrive together.



Figure 3. Detail from visual note taking record of key elements of the vision. Illustration by Laura Sorvala



## **In 2050, when society and nature thrive together...**

### **1. People and Government have a shared commitment to protecting the natural environment.**

*To make this happen the government needs to communicate their plan to protect and restore the natural environment. This will explain how people and government can help protect endangered animals and plants and restore where they live.*

### **2. Clear leadership from the Welsh Government helps the public to be more involved in decisions about nature.**

*To make this happen, all levels of government need to involve people and make decisions based on clear information and evidence rather than party political and other vested interests. This will give the public more power and make sure government takes the best approach to nature.*

### **3. Sharing knowledge helps people understand how nature impacts their lives, and the actions they can take to help protect and restore the natural environment.**

*To make this happen, clear and accessible information will highlight the different ways citizens can act. This will help citizens know what steps they can take to help nature and society thrive.*

### **4. Widespread access to nature helps people across Wales live happy and healthy lives.**

*To make this happen, Welsh society needs more equal access to nature and to make its environment less polluted so that everyone is able to benefit from nature. This will improve the mental and physical health of people in Wales.*

### **5. Greener transport and energy options enable more people to make environmentally friendly choices in their day to day lives.**

*To make this happen, the Welsh Government needs to invest in public transport, renewable energy technologies and waste management as well as reducing the impact of inequalities between people and their communities. This will give more equal access to greener lifestyle choices to people across Wales.*

### **6. Sustainable land management helps communities buy local food and feel connected to the Welsh land.**

*To make this happen, all levels of government need to help make farming more sustainable and local food affordable. This will help people buy more local, sustainable food and restore nature.*