

Initial recommendations of the Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures and Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas expert group for Wales

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Abbreviations

CBD:	Convention on Biological Diversity
GBF:	Global Biodiversity Framework
IUCN:	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
MCZ:	Marine Conservation Zones
MPA:	Marine Protection Area
NREA:	Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas
OECM:	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure
PENs:	Priority Ecological Networks
RENS:	Resilient Ecological Networks
SAC:	Special Area of Conservation
SMNR:	Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
SPA:	Special Protection Area
SSSI:	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WCPA:	IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas
WDPA:	World Database on Protected Areas

Executive summary

The recognition and development of 'Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures' (OECMs) is pivotal to the global intention under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for at least 30 per cent of land, freshwater and seas to be conserved and managed for biodiversity by 2030. OECMs are important in Wales's response to this commitment alongside the Wales-specific intention to develop 'Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas' (NREAs).

As part of the Welsh Government's Biodiversity Deep Dive, this report outlines progress towards this commitment while reflecting the expert group's views. Our work had five themes which:

1. appraised definitions of OECMs and NREAs, considering how they would be applied in Wales under international guidance but within our legislative context.
2. assessed how different areas in Wales could become OECMs or NREAs.
3. asked what else was needed to both meet the 30 by 30 target and ensure biodiversity decline is halted and reversed.
4. considered the scope for pilots.
5. discussed how OECMs and NREAs might be funded.

OECMs are defined internationally as geographical units other than existing protected areas that are governed and managed to achieve the positive, sustained and long-term conservation of *in-situ* biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions, ecosystem services and other values such as cultural, spiritual and socio-economic.

The expert group was cognisant of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Guidance¹ which outlines the criteria for recognising potential OECMs. Specifically, candidate areas could deliver nature as a 'primary', 'secondary' or 'ancillary' objective if i) they are not already protected areas; ii) have the essential characteristics as geographical units with sustained governance and effective management for *in-situ* biodiversity conservation; iii) have long-term durability through legal or formal agreements with landowners and iv) have a reporting focus on conservation targets rather than sustainable use. Potential OECMs might become candidate OECMs once consented by the governance authority i.e., a government institution, individual, Indigenous government or organisation, not-for-profit organisation, corporation, communal group, or other body or combination of bodies acknowledged as having authority and responsibility for decision-making about the objectives and management of an site.

¹ IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, (2019). Guidance on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. Available at: <https://iucn.org/resources/publication/guidance-other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures-oecms>

OECMs are not designations with legal protection, but rather are ‘recognised’ once they meet the criteria and demonstrate biodiversity outcomes. This implies a staged approach in which potential areas become candidates and eventually recognised OECMs.

OECMs can balance the opportunity to support wider nature recovery in Wales, for example through the emerging nature recovery targets against challenges that reflect i) the novelty of the concept; ii) uncertainty over how local groups, stakeholders and government bodies can identify OECMs; iii) the need to develop clear funding or policy mechanisms for OECMs to deliver biodiversity outcomes in the long term. OECMs have the opportunity to exemplify how local pressures on biodiversity can be reduced alongside positive management for nature without new legislation or protection

Mechanisms for identifying candidate OECMs could combine top-down strategy, bottom-up community initiatives or new recognition of the conservation value of existing areas. The [Nature Network Map](#) or previously identified [Resilient Ecological Networks](#) (RENs) might aid selection, while principles of ‘additionality’ could augment existing approaches to nature recovery. Whatever the process, it is important that OECMs become embedded in the Welsh response to GBF commitments that should deliver genuine biodiversity outcomes of high standards without becoming burdensome or undesirable.

The group examined several prospective areas, but early indications are that few would currently meet all the OECM guideline criteria. This implies the need for areas to progress towards OECM ‘standards’.

We need urgent action to put in place mechanisms and safeguards to address the challenges to OECMs, thereby enabling potential areas to meet all the required criteria by 2030. These include long-term security of governance, positive management measures, resourcing, incentives for landowners to encourage participation, and appropriate monitoring methods. In this respect, OECMs represent a common focus across the Deep Dive groups.

The group supported the recognition of marine OECMs but noted that 50% of the seas around Wales are already protected through statutory designation. Effective management for biodiversity conservation is, therefore, the primary focus for delivering on 30 by 30 in the marine environment.

NREAs – focussed explicitly on nature recovery – are an overarching means of focusing action in OECMs, in protected areas or in the wider landscape to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in support of the 30 by 30 target. They are potential exemplar, demonstration or pilot areas to deliver long-term nature recovery at scale while linking to people and places through partnership action across sectors. They could be enabled by seed-corn funding with a longer-term aim of self-sustaining support blending public, private and charitable funding in exemplary and innovative ways. NREAs are at the conceptual stage, however, and the expert group felt that whilst the idea is useful, care is

needed not to conflate this option with the more formal and internationally recognised background to OECMs.

We identified an urgent need for secure investment in nature recovery, but typical methods of short-term funding awarded competitively are not compatible with the long-term certainty, recognition and collaborative action required for OECMs to provide effective management, governance and monitoring. With additional or new public funding unlikely, the group noted that funding strategies used in other countries including tax incentives, levies, management partnerships, payments for ecosystem services, conservation trust funds and case-by-case funding. In Wales, current examples of private investment for nature include carbon credits associated with the peatland code (RSPB in partnership with Hafren Dyfrdwy Lake Vyrnwy) and woodland creation/restoration (Wildlife Trust and Aviva).

Financing nature recovery is likely to remain a challenging area, however, and requires strategic development to unlock public and private finance to deliver for nature at a far greater scale and pace. OECMs could provide some quality assurance as resource frameworks develop.

The group makes five key recommendations at this initial stage:

- **Recommendation 1:** The OECM criteria (as per CBD Decision 14/8²) and the IUCN OECM guidance¹ forms the fundamental basis of a Welsh framework for the recognition of OECMs.
- **Recommendation 2:** In recognising OECMs, protected areas that have biodiversity conservation as a primary objective would be excluded from consideration because a key criterion in the recognition of OECMs is “Criteria A: Area is not currently recognised as a protected area.”
- **Recommendation 3:** A flexible framework should be developed that identifies and recognises OECMs to complement and leverage existing biodiversity effort. We propose a combined model incorporating i) a top-down approach to ensure OECMs are used to support delivery of resources where they are needed to develop functional and structurally viable ecological networks and ii) a bottom-up approach to empower landowners and local communities to aid nature recovery.
- **Recommendation 4:** OECM recognition cannot be undertaken in isolation, but needs to be part of, and complement, a wider transformative approach to support 30 by 30 and nature recovery in Wales.
- **Recommendation 5:** A series of NREAs should be established across Wales to pilot, establish, and showcase innovative and effective ways of delivering landscape scale nature recovery.

² CBD, (2018). Decision Adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. CBD/COP/DEC/14/8. Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf>

The group proposes further work, focusing on six key workstreams: OECM recognition process and governance; monitoring and evaluation; resourcing; collaboration and engagement; implementation and NREAs.

Background

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) following a four-year consultation and negotiation process (www.cbd.int/gbf). It set out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050 as well as 4 goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030.

Target three (Fig 1), widely referred to as the 30 by 30 target, aims to ensure that at least 30% of land, freshwater and seas are effectively conserved and managed by 2030 as a key part of the overall mission to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. In Wales, the Senedd declared a nature emergency in 2021 to help drive positive action towards tackling the joint nature and climate crises.

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

Figure 1: Global Biodiversity Framework target three description

Biodiversity Deep Dive

The Minister for Climate Change publicly announced support for the 30 by 30 target and commenced a Biodiversity Deep Dive focussing on how Wales can implement the CBD target to effectively conserve and manage 30% of land and sea by 2030. The objective of

the Biodiversity Deep Dive is “to develop a set of collective actions we (in Wales) can take immediately to support meaningful delivery of the CBD 30 by 30 goal, recognising the capabilities we have in Wales and reflecting our duties and approach under the Wellbeing of Future Generations and Environment (Wales) Acts.”

A small core group of critical thinkers led by the Minister was formed by Welsh Government. The group were supported by expert subgroups on marine, designated landscapes, land management, and monitoring. The group focused on addressing the 30 by 30 target by looking at the following questions:

- How can the existing protected site network (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Ramsar sites) be effectively managed for nature?
- How do we enable National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to deliver landscape scale biodiversity and ecosystem enhancement across their areas?
- How do we ensure that our protected sites are well connected and integrated into the wider land and seascapes? Considering the role of the future Sustainable Farming Scheme and other opportunities in reversing the decline in biodiversity.
- What vehicles, such as Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas, could be used to expand the current designations to include areas which are of particular importance for biodiversity and its contribution to people?
- How do we ensure that our protected sites are well connected and integrated into the wider land and seascapes?
- How and who do we best engage and collaborate with to help us achieve our target and address the nature crisis?
- How do we deliver a programme of action over the next decade?

The recommendations of the Deep Dive were published on the 3 October 2022 (www.gov.wales/biodiversity-deep-dive-recommendations). This included:

Recommendation 2: “Create a framework to recognise Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) that deliver biodiversity outcomes.”

As set out in the Written Statement (www.gov.wales/written-statement-biodiversity-deep-dive) on the Biodiversity Deep Dive “In addition to improving the existing protected areas, we also recognise the importance of identifying additional areas that can deliver our nature recovery ambition and alternative solutions to managing these. On the management side we want to establish a series of Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas - existing or new landscape scale collaborations of public, private, voluntary and community actors that come together to manage and restore nature in protected areas and the wider landscape. In addition, we also want to explore the role of a new IUCN defined status of OECMs in recognising areas outside protected sites that can contribute to 30 by 30.”

The recommendations outlined the need to take immediate action to **‘Establish an expert working group to recommend processes and criteria for recognising, monitoring and**

reporting on existing and candidate OECMs and Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas in Wales.'

Establishing the expert group

In early 2023 work commenced on the establishment of the expert group with membership drawn from agencies, academia, environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO), consultancies, and National Parks along with the opportunity for expressions of interest to be submitted. Representation was chosen to cover key areas of technical expertise, policy, and delivery (Annex 1 lists the group membership). Professor Steve Ormerod, Cardiff University and core Biodiversity Deep Dive group member was appointed as chair. The terms of reference, including ways of working, was agreed by the group (Annex 2).

A provisional outline for the group was developed, focused on the recommendation to create a framework to recognise Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas (NREAs) and OECMs that deliver biodiversity outcomes.

The group were asked to:

- Recommend processes and criteria for recognising, monitoring, and reporting on existing and candidate OECMs and NREAs in Wales.
- Report recommendations on the identification of candidate sites and mechanisms to fund these within six months.

In doing so,

- Ensure recommendations are integrated with Welsh legislation, the wider range of thematic and spatial strategies and with emerging public and private sector finance opportunities.

Outputs

Whilst it was recognised the group would also identify specific outputs as work progressed the key requested outputs were as follows:

- A report (including reporting after 6 months) to Welsh Government and the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group.
- Recommendations on identification of candidate sites.
- Mechanisms to fund these candidate sites.

This report outlines the work undertaken by the group and their initial findings in the first 6 months of running, it should be viewed as an 'initial' report.

Outline programme

The first phase of the expert group took place as a series of monthly meetings over six months which concluded in December 2023. It is proposed that a second phase, as outlined in next steps, is now undertaken to develop a full suite of recommendations for the creation of a framework to recognise OECMs and NREAs in Wales.

The programme for the first phase identified the following key discussion themes, which evolved further as meetings progressed:

- Defining OECMs and NREAs: consider the key criteria for OECMs and how these would be applied in Wales (Theme 1).
- What currently exists in Wales and how could these be OECMs or NREAs (Theme 2).
- What else is needed to both meet the target but also to ensure biodiversity decline is halted and reversed (Theme 3).
- Developing the scope for pilots (Theme 4).
- What will be the cost of delivering our ambition and how will OECMs and NREAs be funded? (Theme 5).

The group works closely with the Deep Dive Designated Landscapes and the Monitoring and Evidence expert groups, which have been established to take forward other Deep Dive recommendations. The Deep Dive Designated Landscapes expert group is focused on taking forward and implementing the action plan developed in response to Recommendation 3: Unlock the potential of designated landscapes (National Parks and National landscapes [Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty]) to deliver more for nature and 30 by 30. The Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group is tasked with establishing a robust and appropriate monitoring and evidence framework for 30 by 30, including for OECMs.

Learning from other countries emerging approaches to OECMs has been sought throughout the first phase, through hearing directly from Defra and Nature Scot on their emerging approaches, undertaking literature research, sharing of best practice through a High Ambition Coalition webinar and 30 by 30 Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) led workshops with other UK countries.

Theme 1: Defining Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures and Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas

The first theme focused on the definition of OECMs, criteria and guidance for recognising OECMs, and the approach that could be taken in Wales. The group started considering the situations that could fit the OECM definition, forming the starting point for further consideration across all subsequent themes.

What are OECMs?

In 2018, a definition for OECMs was adopted by the 14th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biodiversity Diversity (CBD), as well as guiding principles, common characteristics, and criteria for identification. The resulting Decision 14/18 (www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf) defines an OECM as:

“A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services

and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economical, and other locally relevant values.”

OECMs can contribute to ecologically representative and well-connected conservation systems and will be integrated within wider landscapes and seascapes. Recognising and creating a network of OECMs in conjunction with protected sites in Wales could generate a range of positive conservation outcomes, such as:

- Conserving important ecosystems, habitats, and wildlife corridors.
- Supporting the recovery of threatened and endangered species.
- Maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services.
- Enhancing resilience against current and future threats.
- Retaining and connecting remnants of fragmented ecosystems within developed landscapes.

A core difference between protected areas and OECMs is that OECMs deliver effective *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity regardless of their primary management objective (the definition is outcome-based). In contrast, protected areas should have a *primary* conservation objective (the definition is intention-based). Unlike protected areas, OECMs have no formal recognition for designation within any laws in Wales. Therefore, OECMs can only be seen as a recognition status, and not a statutory designation. OECMs are also mutually exclusive to protected areas, and thus areas recognised and reported as protected areas cannot be reported as OECMs. OECMs that are assessed as meeting the necessary criteria can be reported by governments or other responsible bodies for inclusion in the World Database on OECMs (www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/oecms), a joint project between the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

What criteria could be used to recognise OECMs in Wales?

Criteria for the identification of OECMs have been produced as part of the technical advice in the CBD Decision 14/8. These are summarised below and can be found in full in Annex 3.

Criterion A: Area is not currently recognised as a protected area

- “Other than a protected area”

Criterion B: Area is governed and managed

- Geographically defined area
- Governed
- Managed

Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity

- Effective “positive outcomes” for biodiversity conservation
- Sustained long-term

- *In-situ* conservation of biological diversity*
- Biodiversity values

Criterion D: Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values

- Cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values

Figure 2: OECM criteria summary (CBD Decision 14/8 and IUCN OECM guidance)

The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Task Force on OECMs produced IUCN Guidelines for Recognising and Reporting OECMs, published in 2019 (www.iucn.org/news/protected-areas/201911/iucn-publishes-new-guidance-recognising-reporting-and-supporting-other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures; referred in this report as ‘IUCN OECM guidelines’) to assist Parties to the CBD in interpreting and operationalising OECMs. It provides a suggested framework for applying the OECM concept, including to national conservation strategies.

The IUCN OECM guidelines explain that OECMs may or may not have nature conservation as an objective. It provides guidance on the types of approaches that deliver effective conservation in OECMs. These are:

“Primary conservation” areas which meet the IUCN definition of a protected area, but which are not officially designated because the governance authority does not want them to be recognised or reported as such. Examples can include privately conserved areas or areas managed by local communities, which are not recognised as protected areas under national legislation, permanent set-aside areas and some natural areas managed by universities for biological research.

“Secondary conservation” areas with active conservation, where biodiversity outcomes are a secondary management objective. Examples can include areas primarily managed for water resource management which also deliver *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, urban parks managed primarily for public recreation which are large enough and sufficiently natural to also effectively deliver *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, and areas that contribute to conservation due to their role in connecting other protected areas and/or OECMs.

“Ancillary conservation” areas which deliver *in-situ* conservation as a by-product of management activities, even though biodiversity conservation is not a management objective. Examples can include military training areas that do not have a primary objective of biodiversity conservation, but which achieve the effective conservation of biodiversity in the long-term.

To support decision-making processes, the IUCN OECM guidelines provide a simple **four-step screening tool** to help determine if an area qualifies for OECM recognition.

- **Test 1. Ensure that an area is not already recognised and/or recorded as a protected area.** Area is neither already recognised nor proposed as a marine, freshwater or terrestrial protected area.
- **Test 2. Ensure that the area has the essential characteristics as defined for OECMs.** These are location (geographically defined space), sustained governance and management and effective *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity.
- **Test 3. Ensure that the conservation outcome will endure over the long-term.** This refers to the probability over the long term, through legal or other effective means such as formal agreements with landowners.
- **Test 4. Ensure that an *in-situ* area-based conservation target, as opposed to a sustainable use target, is the right focus for reporting.**

The IUCN OECM Guidelines defines when ‘A geographically defined space that has been identified as having OECM-like characteristics by applying the screening tool but where the governance authority has yet to consent it becoming a ‘candidate OECM’ it is known as a **“Potential OECM.”** Once it has been identified as a potential OECM and the governance authority has consented to it being assessed against the criteria, it becomes known as a **“Candidate OECM.”**

Applying the OECM criteria in a Welsh setting

The group began to consider the approach that could be taken in the recognition of OECMs in Wales. It recommends the trial use of the OECM criteria as defined in the CBD Decision 14/8, to identify potential OECMs in Wales. The criteria were reviewed and tested against Welsh case studies and applied alongside Welsh principles. This includes the five ways of working as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and use of the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) principles to maximise Welsh natural resource management priorities (www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/ and naturalresources.wales/media/678063/introducing-smnr-booklet-english-final.pdf).

In practice, the following key points were noted as being potentially important in the recognition of OECMs in Wales. These will be considered further as the approach to be taken in Wales develops.

- It will require free, prior, and informed consent of all relevant governing authorities.
- It must demonstrate important biodiversity values and effective conservation outcomes.
- It must identify and recognise where effective and long-term conservation is already taking place outside of protected areas, or where there is the greatest potential for this.
- Local decision making will be fundamental for OECMs to meet the criteria effectively, such as using local knowledge, empowering stakeholders, and ultimately achieving better outcomes for biodiversity and people.
- Adaptability and responsiveness associated with local decision making will require a case-by-case assessment using the OECM criteria.
- Effectively integrating OECMs into national policies and legislation would create a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to biodiversity conservation.

The group also started to note the opportunities, and potential benefits, of recognising OECMs in Wales, and noted these will require further development. OECMs could:

- Contribute to the delivery of the 30 by 30 target and accelerating nature recovery.
- Promote collaborative benefits for biodiversity outcomes.
- Tackle key pressures that have damaging effects on ecosystems and protected sites.
- Promote effective management.
- Provide a framework and recognition for the excellent work being undertaken for nature's recovery or stimulate this work where it is particularly needed to conserve or recover important biodiversity value.

What are NREAs?

In the Oral Statement on Nature, Biodiversity, and Local Places for Nature on 12 October 2021 the Minister for Climate Change said:

“I believe there are opportunities to apply the approach we have taken to exemplar housing sites to developing exemplar nature recovery sites, particularly across the National Natural Resources areas in Wales. These actions are not simply about maintaining and enhancing our landscapes rivers and seas but connecting communities more closely to them.”

Subsequently the Minister has reiterated the desire to create a network of nature recovery exemplar areas across different habitats in Wales to demonstrate the effective action that can be taken to halt biodiversity loss and aid nature's recovery. These areas could be seed funded by Welsh Government with the longer-term aim that they would become self-sustaining and supported by a mix of public, private, and charitable funding developed by a collaborative local partnership during the seed funding stage. The Minister also stated that these sites should support the target of designating 30% of our land and sea by 2030.

NREAs are an approach proposed to enable and recognise exemplar landscape scale action for nature recovery which can apply to both protected sites, OECMs and networks which combine both (see Fig 3). They could contribute to the delivery of 30 by 30 by providing exemplar demonstration areas or pilots where approaches to deliver long-term landscape scale nature recovery action and the links to people and place needed to sustain them could be explored and developed.

The thinking on this is still very much at the conceptual stage and whilst there are currently no formal NREAs operating across Wales, there are many existing landscape scale partnerships out there which are already exploring many of these issues and could be termed exemplar in their own right. The idea behind NREAs is to provide a more formal space and some funding to develop exemplar working, for a range of contexts across Wales.

The Biodiversity Deep Dive recognised the need to establish a series of NREAs, termed as **existing or new landscape scale collaborations of public, private, voluntary, and community actors that come together to manage and restore nature in protected areas and the wider landscape.**

The group discussed the concept of NREAs and considered what could constitute a NREA, the criteria for their selection, their principles, governance, and their potential role in delivering 30 by 30 (see Annex 5).

Framework

During the development of the Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations, a proposed option to create a blended mechanism for landscape scale delivery was developed (Fig 3). This was presented to the group and will be taken forward for consideration in the development of our approach in Wales throughout the themes. The role of Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs) is explored in detail in subsequent themes.

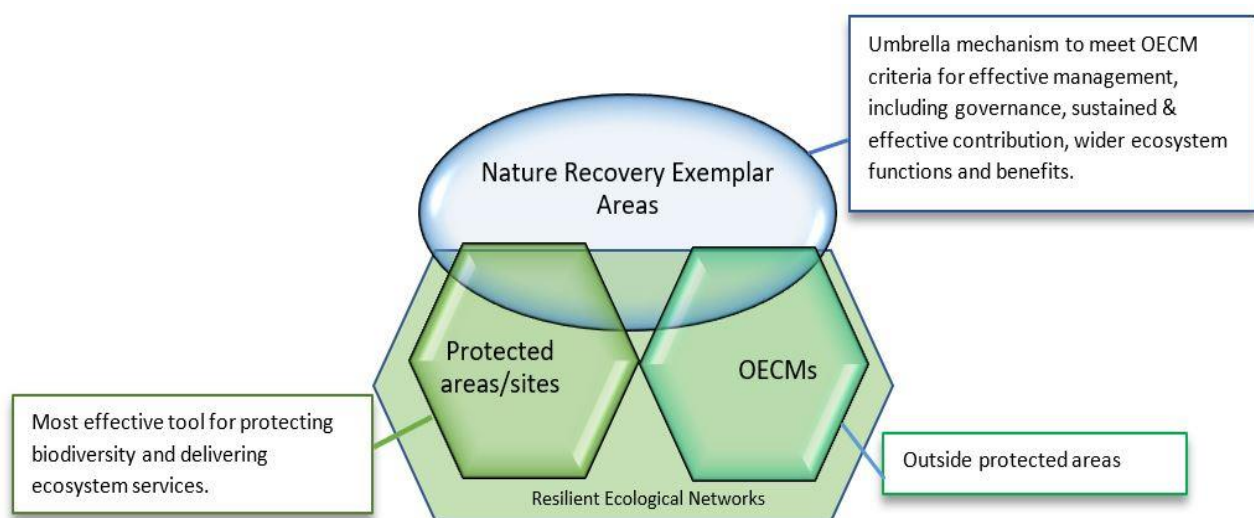


Figure 3: Infographic illustrating where OECMs and NREAs could sit alongside protected areas (sites) and Resilient Ecological Networks in Wales.

Identifying potential OECMs

The IUCN OECM guidelines provide an informative set of examples that could be considered as potential OECMs, and areas and management regimes unlikely to qualify as OECMs. These are summarised below, focusing on those most relevant to Wales. A suite of IUCN examples provided a good starting point for the consideration of potential OECMs, particularly identifying examples to test the application of the criteria in the next theme.

Examples of situations likely to qualify as potential OECMs:

- Areas on land and sea managed by local communities, to maintain natural or near-natural ecosystems, with low levels of sustainable use of natural resources, in ways that maintain the area's biodiversity.
- Privately conserved areas, managed with a specific conservation objective but which are not recognised as protected areas under national legislation.
- Military lands and waters that are managed for the purpose of defence, but also achieve the long-term conservation of natural ecosystems and important biodiversity.

- Coastal and marine areas protected for reasons other than conservation, but that nonetheless achieve the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity.
- Permanent or long-term fisheries closure areas designed to protect complete ecosystems for stock recruitment or to protect specialised ecosystems and their full complement of species.
- Freshwater and coastal wetlands restored for flood protection, but which protect important habitats, species, and ecosystem services.
- Watersheds or other areas managed primarily for water resource management that also result in the *in-situ* conservation of important biodiversity.
- Some permanently set-aside areas of managed forest, such as old-growth, primary, or other high biodiversity value forests, which are protected from both forestry and non-forestry threats.

Examples of areas and management regimes unlikely to qualify as potential OECMs:

- Small, semi-natural areas within an intensively managed landscape with limited biodiversity conservation value, such as domestic gardens, field margins, roadside verges, hedgerows, narrow shorelines, golf courses.
- Forests that are managed commercially for timber supply and are intended for logging.
- Fishery closures, and other fisheries management tools, including temporary set asides or gear restrictions with a single species, species group, or habitat focus, which may be subject to periodic exploitation and/or be defined for stock management purposes, and that do not deliver *in-situ* conservation of the associated ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Agricultural lands which are managed in a manner that limits the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, including intensively grazed pastures, temporary set asides and grant-maintained changes to agricultural practice.
- Conservation measures that apply to a single species or group of species, over a wide geographical range such as hunting regulations.

Theme 2: What do we already have in Wales and how could these be recognised as OECMs

In this theme, the group focused on developing further understanding of how OECMs could be developed in a Welsh context. The group tested the application of the OECM criteria (as defined in CBD Decision 14/8, and further explained in the IUCN OECM guidelines) against a selection of different case studies in Wales. Workshops were held to consider how the criteria can be applied, see what works well, identify key barriers to implementation and aspects for further consideration.

Testing application of the criteria on areas in Wales

The OECM criteria were distilled into five key questions that could be used to apply the criteria, as an initial way to explore, to potential OECMs in Wales as follows:

1. Is the area outside of a protected area?
2. Is it a geographically defined area?
3. Is it governed and managed and over the long term?
4. Is there effective *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity?
5. Are there associated ecosystem functions and services, and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values?

These were applied against the following area based case studies:

- Dyfi Biosphere (as an example of biosphere reserves).
- Gwent Living Levels.
- RSPB Conwy Reserve (as example of environmental NGO land).
- Llŷn Landscape Partnership – Tir a Môr Llŷn (as an example of stakeholder partnership).
- Welsh Government Woodland Estate (as public estate).

Along with the following thematic case studies:

- Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation / Local Wildlife Sites.
- Resilient Ecological Networks (RENS).
- Peatland habitat.
- Semi-natural habitats.

Conclusions from testing the criteria

Is the area outside of a protected area?

OECMs cannot cover protected sites, which in the Welsh context means Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), Ramsar sites and Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). While many of the case studies (particularly the landscape scale case studies) contain some parts designated as protected sites, there are areas outside of these that can be explored as potential OECMs. Rather than being a constraint, it was recognised that we might expect to find OECMs near protected sites as they could play an important role in improving connectivity and resilience of protected sites. They could provide a buffer zone (for example river buffers and foraging areas) around protected sites supporting opportunities to connect intervening land matrices and helping to expand habitat and species ranges. This contributes to Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendation 1: Transform the protected sites series so that it is better, bigger, and more effectively connected.

Development is needed to:

- Explore the diversity and scale of land use to understand the potential contribution for OECMs, such as how much environmental NGO land is not covered by a protected sites designation.
- Explore the role of REN core zones in helping identify OECMs critical for supporting the protected sites network.

Is it a geographically defined area?

OECMs must be geographically defined. The scale of areas was considered, and the potential for aggregating and clustering areas. The size of OECMs may vary, and while there

is no specific minimum size recommended by the IUCN OECM guidelines, the guidelines state that they should be of sufficient size to achieve the long-term *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. Sufficient size will be dependent on the ecological requirements of the species and habitats present. It was recognised that defining spatial boundaries could take place during the process of recognising OECMs. Scale will also be an important consideration when we consider resources in terms of applying the assessment framework and reporting on sites.

Development is needed to:

- Explore what can be classified as a geographically defined area, for example can sites be recognised as OECMs in clusters and aggregates, and if so, should we apply a minimum size threshold? There is a need to understand if OECMs can be in the form of clusters of connected smaller sites, within a wider geographical landscape area. Scale will need to be considered, along with concerns around isolation, for example should more isolated OECMs be larger in size. Sufficient size will be habitat and species dependent, and what constitutes an effective functional area.
- Can a number of potential candidate sites be submitted together as OECMs for example where they have the same governance authority such as part of a landscape partnership or where a single landowner owns several sites.

Is it governed and managed and over the long term?

OECMs must be governed and managed, and that must be over the long term. They must be under the authority of a specified entity, or an agreed upon combination of entities. They can be governed under the same range of governance types as protected areas, for example governments, private individuals, organisations, or companies, and/or local communities, and shared governance (i.e. various rights holders and stakeholders together). Governance of an area must be equitable, long-term and have capacity to mandate activities to achieve *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity and ensure there are clear roles and responsibilities of each organisation involved in any shared governance scenario. They must be managed in a way that achieves positive and sustained long-term biodiversity. Management tools should be used to document, implement, and prioritise nature conservation objectives/visions for the area. It should provide the ability to manage activities and prevent incompatible or damaging activities. Objectives should be adapted where they are recognised as needing improvement.

The case studies highlighted a range of governance structures, which will differ based on land ownership for example, private, public, common land. It may depend on the spatial pattern of the area and could be at a local or national scale. Potential constraints on the demonstration of long-term management were identified, for example freehold or leasehold status (including the length of lease terms and tenancies). It was recognised that OECMs could work well with place-based partnership working.

Development is needed to:

- Further explore how we define long term with respect to governance arrangements for OECMs. For example, when applying the criteria in Wales, we could consider a level of

confidence in the governance arrangements being long term. It is recognised that security in perpetuity would be the ideal but may be difficult to determine practically.

- Explore what can be considered as a 'management mechanism.'

Is there effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity?

OECMs should be effective at delivering positive outcomes for biodiversity conservation to deliver sustained long-term *in-situ* conservation. Short-term or temporary management strategies do not constitute an OECM. Management mechanisms should be used to document and implement nature conservation objectives/visions for the area. There must be a reasonable likelihood that the site supports important biodiversity values. These could be rare, threatened, or endangered species and habitats, under-represented ecosystems in protected area networks, high levels of ecological integrity or intactness, significant populations and extent of range-restricted species or ecosystems, important species aggregations such as feeding areas, and importance for ecological connectivity.

The case studies provided a range of examples of management frameworks, plans and objectives, and opportunities to deliver more biodiversity benefits. Threshold levels for biodiversity outcomes to meet the criteria should be considered. The potential for restoration and recovery areas was recognised but their role in OECMs in Wales will need further consideration.

Development is needed to:

- Define effective management and explore how we ensure effective management is in place and demonstrating biodiversity outcomes. This is an aspect being explored by the Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group in the assessing of management effectiveness.
- Explore the interactions between the target three 30 by 30 and target two restoration.
- Identify the opportunities for OECMs in land use policy and planning decision making and in using existing management regulatory approaches.

Are there associated ecosystem functions and services, and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values?

The management of biodiversity may be achieved as part of cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values and practices. Healthy and functioning ecosystems provide a range of services. The case studies illustrated a broad range of functional elements supported by historical, cultural and engagement aspects. Some illustrated strong engagement with people including cultural links, community input and citizen science opportunities. They also had added values such as flood prevention, carbon stores, research, and educational opportunities. The case studies posed questions around funding and resourcing, for example, would OECM recognition help the flow of resources and embedding of biodiversity objectives. The group picked up this conversation on funding and resourcing in the theme 5 meeting.

In conclusion, the testing of the criteria has identified several common themes on definitions, mechanisms, objectives, resourcing, appropriate policy, and stakeholder and public engagement.

Tools for identifying areas of focus

In testing the criteria, two thematic case studies, semi-natural habitat, and RENS were identified as especially important in identifying areas of focus, along with the Nature Networks map. Therefore, the following could be used to identify areas of focus:

Resilient Ecological Networks (RENS): networks of habitats in good ecological condition linking protected sites and other biodiversity hotspots across the wider landscape, providing maximum benefit for biodiversity and well-being. RENS are an existing tool which Wales' approach to OECMs could draw upon to help embed within policy, inform landscape collaborative partnerships, and accelerate nature recovery (see naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/land-management/practitioners-guide-to-resilient-ecological-networks).

Nature Networks Map: outlines key focus areas, with datasets and evidence on habitat connectivity that can be used to inform biodiversity action and build connectivity between protected sites. It has the potential to inform focus areas for recognising OECMs, such as in areas building connectivity. The Nature Networks Map includes habitat modelling, RENS and Priority Ecological Networks (PENS), the latter showing the best current connectivity between SSSIs and other biodiversity hotspots for a range of broad habitats. The next stage of development for the Nature Networks Map will bring information on existing actions, opportunities, and their potential, to set the strategic context for nature recovery in the future in multiple programmes. The Nature Network Maps are referred to in Planning Policy Wales 12 (www.datamap.gov.wales/layergroups/geonode:nrw_habitat_network and www.datamap.gov.wales/layergroups/geonode:nrw_priority_ecological_networks).

Semi-natural habitat: which is defined as areas with vegetation that is predominately composed of native plant species, but which are nonetheless influenced to some degree by human activities affecting structure, composition, nutrient status and so on. Approximately 31% of Wales is estimated to comprise semi-natural habitat. The majority of the area of existing protected sites are made up of semi-natural habitat and this habitat is likely to be the primary habitat in areas included as OECMs as this habitat type is a fundamental resource for biodiversity. The presence of semi-natural habitat should, therefore, be a key focus in considering potential areas for OECMs. Mapping of long-established habitats, such as ancient woodland or peatlands, may also be useful to direct focus.

Given the predominance of semi-natural habitats in the landscape designations, National Parks and National Landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), the group recognises the potential of recognising OECMs in these places, with strengths in terms of governance, ability to convene partnerships and secure funding, as well as concentrations of important biodiversity values.

Theme 3: What else do we need to both enable us to meet the target but also to help ensure we are halting and reversing biodiversity decline?

During this theme, the group focused on potential models for the identification and recognition of OECMs in Wales.

Potential models for the process of implementing our approach in Wales

Three potential models for OECM implementation were drawn up to critique and facilitate practical discussion to enable the group to design and test different approaches. The three models proposed for discussion were “top down,” “bottom up,” and “recognising existing,” with the understanding that the models could be cut and combined where the group felt the best outcomes can be achieved. To analyse the three models, the group focused on four key components of the process – identification, implementation, funding, and monitoring and reporting.

Model 1: Top down

- **Identifying potential OECMs** - using the Priority Ecological Networks (PENs) map, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales strategically identify key areas of potential OECM based on the criteria.
- **Implementation** - Work with the group of landowners / managers to set up a management group, carry out management plan and undertake a condition assessment report.
- **Funding** - collaborative layer of Sustainable Farming Scheme
- **Monitoring and reporting** - build monitoring requirements into the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

Model 2: Bottom up

- **Identifying potential OECMs** - land managers work in collaboration to self identify their land as potential OECMs using evidence such as condition reporting to demonstrate positive biodiversity actions already in place
- **Implementation** - land managers bid into a scheme such as the Nature Network Fund outline case for recognition as an OECM.
- **Funding** - bespoke funding stream or scheme such as Nature Networks Programme.
- **Monitoring and reporting** - built into funding stream bid with potential for self-reporting but also through scheme evaluation

Model 3: Recognising existing

- **Identifying potential OECMs** - those areas already known to be delivering for biodiversity such as from previous funded programmes or SINC's, and so on.
- **Implementation** - areas to build own case including management plans, previous evaluation of effectiveness, condition report, governance.
- **Funding** - achieving OECM status provides kudos to allow them to bid into funding pots. Recognition not designation.
- **Monitoring and reporting** - simple monitoring approach of effectiveness based on bio-physical: species, habitats and effective management.

Figure 4: Example scenarios on the identification, implementation, funding, monitoring and report for the three models.

SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis

To successfully recognise OECMs in Wales, it was essential that the group carefully considered the strengths and weaknesses of each model. The group undertook SWOT analysis, discussing each model in detail, identifying parts which work well and how we can build the basic models to create an overall approach. Several assumptions were made to enable this exercise: – criteria for identification would be based on the OECM criteria, a need for immediate action to respond to the nature emergency, no additional or new public funding is available now, and the need to use existing legislative mechanisms such as the Well-

being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to ensure a model can be operational within this Senedd term.

Summary of SWOT analysis

Top down: offers a strategic and flexible approach to identification, but it may require significant time to establish governance structures and risks overlooking local conservation opportunities. Its success largely depends on active community and landowner involvement. The model has funding concerns, particularly regarding the financial uncertainty and the complexity that may deter stakeholder participation. Monitoring efforts are well-structured but must contend with engagement and funding longevity challenges.

Bottom up: emphasises early stakeholder engagement and voluntary participation, aligning well with the OECM concept. It mobilises areas for ecological improvement, but a careful balance is needed with engagement and ensuring that important biodiversity areas are not missed due to lack of strategic direction. Implementation empowers local communities and partnerships, yet clear guidance and incentives are crucial. Key challenges include uneven representation and funding concerns, such as length of grants. Funding benefits from diverse sources and engaged stakeholders but faces duration and coordination issues. Competitive funds may hinder collaboration, and sustainable monitoring requires ongoing core funding.

Recognising existing: presents strengths in swift identification of priority areas, leveraging existing biodiversity efforts, and the potential for community engagement. However, it faces challenges related to strategic planning, funding mechanisms and length of grants, and monitoring incentives. Opportunities lie in integrating biodiversity goals into broader management, exploring alternative funding sources, and streamlining monitoring processes. Importantly, no specific threats have been identified, emphasising its potential for effective conservation implementation.

Conclusion

Each model has its merits and challenges, and the choice of which to adopt will depend on specific goals, resources, and local environment. It was recognised that the models provide opportunities for additionality (lending to top-down, and bottom-up models) as well as recognising existing areas potentially meeting the OECM criteria (recognising existing model). A holistic and collaborative approach that combines elements of all three models may provide the most effective strategy for conserving biodiversity in Wales through OECMs. Enabling the long-term implementation of OECMs is key. Therefore, a **combined model** which can adapt to local contexts and actively engage stakeholders is deemed to be most appropriate for use in recognising OECMs in Wales. The group will need to set out a clear process for how the combined model can be established and implemented.

Exploring situations to consider for OECMs

The group continued to explore situations where OECMs could be considered, building upon the earlier theme testing how the OECM criteria can be applied, and the range of situations outlined in the IUCN OECM guidelines.

Potential situations for exploration in Wales began to be identified by the group, some of which are listed below. At this stage these have not been assessed for OECM recognition, for example using the OECM screening tool. Some of those listed below may require changes to meet the criteria, some demonstrate delivering effective ancillary or secondary biodiversity conservation and some may provide potential mechanisms to direct and encourage OECM creation.

- **Sites identified and designated for nature, but are not deemed a protected site** such as non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation Interest/Local Wildlife Sites
- **Land owned and/or managed for nature by environmental NGOs** such as nature reserves outside of protected sites where long-term protection and effective biodiversity conservation are being demonstrably achieved.
- **Land owned and/or managed by the public estate** such as forestry estate, crown estate, country parks, Section 6 bodies and public services board land, green infrastructure plans, local authority owned farms, and local authority spaces.
- **Land owned and/or managed for the purpose of defence with long-term conservation** such as Ministry of Defence land.
- **Land owned and/or managed by** such as renewable energy infrastructure projects, local communities, large landscape conservation projects.
- **Land owned and/or managed by private individuals, local communities or managed as common land.**
- **Areas managed with (or potential for) conservation measures or other objectives where long-term conservation is achieved, may be privately owned** such as high nature value farmland under long term sustainable farming schemes, industrial estates for conservation purposes, land managed by universities for biological research, parks, amenity spaces or estates managed primarily for public recreation or tourism (for example) which achieve *in-situ* conservation.
- **Land that is providing a connection between protected sites i.e. Buffer and connectivity zones** such as foraging areas, “one field back,” corridors.
- **Areas managed for specific habitats, species, or geomorphology interest** such as forest land (for example UK Forest Estate, Ancient semi-natural woodland, National Forest, Woodland Trust); Geology (for example UNESCO Geopark, Regionally Important Geodiversity).
- **Areas managed as colliery spoils and brownfield sites.**
- **Land delivering more effective ancillary or secondary biodiversity conservation** such as flood protection wetlands, water resource management areas, peatland restored and managed for carbon sequestration, catchment, and nature-based solutions.

Theme 4: Developing the scope for pilots

In this theme, the group explored the scope for undertaking pilots, how they could be identified and the support that they may need. This was alongside building thinking on ensuring equitable governance, developing a Welsh approach to Nature Networks, and the use of mapping and data to effectively target action and hearing from Wildlife Trusts Wales on ambitions for 30 by 30 and the importance of taking a Team Wales approach.

Collating views to support the development of pilots

Developing a Welsh approach to Nature Networks

Natural Resources Wales presented the group with the latest developments on the Nature Networks framework, including the Nature Networks map, PENS, and RENS. It was noted that RENS are referenced in policy - from the Natural Resources Policy and the Nature Recovery Action Plan through to local development plans and Area Statements.

Area Statements and RENS are available tools that could be valuable for OECMs and NREAs, particularly through the delivery elements providing a framework (for example, the REN practitioner guide), existing or new partnerships, and mapping areas of focus. Equally in turn OECMs could support RENS. The Nature Networks map, particularly phase two, will outline key focal areas that could help prioritise and potentially direct OECM activity. Delivering under the nature networks framework could help prioritise and focus the development of OECMs. In doing so, the IUCN's 12 principles of ecosystem approach and SMNR principles should be considered, along with taking a joined up approach to other landscape mapping activity. The Nature Networks approach links existing Welsh legal and policy support which provides a degree of safeguarding to support long term governance and management assurances to achieve conservation outcomes alongside meeting the needs of legitimate stakeholders.

Wildlife Trusts and OECMs

The Wildlife Trust Wales outlined ambitions for 30 by 30 including OECMs and the importance of the Team Wales approach. Examples of landscape scale projects delivering for nature were shared. The group acknowledged the need for a fundamental shift for more land being managed for the primary purpose of nature conservation, and the potential difficulties to overcome in aspects such as long-term (for example, tenancy lengths) and effective management. The Team Wales approach is critical to what we all want to achieve in Wales, bringing together the resources, communities, delivery and ensuring the evidence base. It was recognised that Team Wales' requires further understanding on what it could be to empower communities for the long term. The Nature Market Principles notes seven supply-side project development principles: Science-based Nature Recovery, Environmental and Social Safeguarding, Additionality, Permanence and Financial Prudence, Seek Co-Benefits, Verifiability, and Transparency (www.wildlifetrusts.org/partnerships/working-businesses/nature-markets-principles).

Equitable governance

The definition of target three defines that protected areas and OECMs should be equitably governed, and the IUCN OECM guidelines states that the governance of OECMs should be equitably governed and reflect human rights principles. The group were joined by a behavioural science specialist at Natural Resources Wales to help develop thinking around this topic. The group heard the thinking of the other expert groups on this topic, and examples such as Local Nature Partnerships' role in connecting with and mobilising communities to engage with their environments. The definition of equitable governance used by the GBF was recognised (see Table 1). It was noted that equitable governance crosses over with several other GBF targets, including target 22 ensure participation in decision-making and access to justice and information related to biodiversity for all and target 23 ensure gender equality and a gender-responsive approach for biodiversity action.

Equity: recognition	1. Recognition and respect for the rights of all relevant actors
	2. Recognition and respect for all relevant actors and their knowledge
Equity: procedure	3. Full and effective participation of all relevant actors in decision making
	4. Transparency, information sharing and accountability for actions and inactions
	5. Access to justice, including effective dispute resolution processes
	6. Fair and effective law enforcement
Equity: distribution	7. Effective mitigation of negative impacts on relevant actors
	8. Benefits equitably shared among relevant actors
Other	9. Achievement of conservation and other objectives
	10. Effective coordination and collaboration between actors, sectors, and levels

Table 1: Equitable governance principles for protected and conserved areas, as defined by the GBF (www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-08/20386iied.pdf).

The Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group has explored equitable governance as part of target three. Equitable governance in the context of monitoring and evidence refers to the fair and just use of data, surveillance, and evidentiary support in the decision-making processes within organisations, governments, and communities. The group recommends that a general principle be stated regarding equitable governance that demonstrates its commitment to embed it fully in the work of target three as it moves forward.

This group discussed the importance of representation in partnerships, sharing of the benefits of the partnership, the relationship between communities and the local natural environment, and how Indigenous may translate into Wales with local communities and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 on cohesive communities. The journey to fully integrating equitable governance within target three and OECMs is both a challenge and an opportunity. By prioritising equity, inclusivity, and justice in conservation strategies and the evidence needed to monitor, drive and support change, Wales can continue to build RENs that respect cultural heritage, culture diversity, and biodiversity. The narrative and communication aspects of OECMs will be important, and use, with adaptation, of the Gwent

Green Grid Partnership's integrated health impact assessment toolkit should be explored (www.monlife.co.uk/outdoor/green-infrastructure/gwent-green-grid-partnership/ggg-strategies-and-studies/).

Developing the scope for OECM pilots

During this initial scoping, the group considered how pilots could be identified through the model approach, what support they may need to be a pilot, and initial communication and engagement suggestions.

In the previous theme, three potential models for implementing our approach in Wales were explored – bottom up, top down and recognising existing. SWOT analysis concluded that a combined model approach should be used enabling both strategic direction and encouraging a bottom-up approach with local communities. In considering all approaches for identifying pilots, benefits were seen in taking a combined approach with strategically directed bottom-up approach.

Pilots should provide a place to explore and test the process and eligibility. Multiple pilots may be required to cover a diverse range of habitats, on land and sea, and varied governance structures and in doing so maximise learning opportunities. Lessons for “nature” could encompass exploring outcomes for biodiversity, how to monitor and report on those outcomes, how technical and local knowledge is important, and the cost of these activities. Lessons for “people” might include what governance arrangements work well, how are land ownership issues managed, and which mechanisms work best in different circumstances for engaging with local people.

Pilots could also be places, for example, to look at reducing negative impacts, provide opportunities to look at behaviour change, be a focus for achieving effective management, and exemplifying good practice. Likely support required, in general terms, for OECMs pilots is likely to include resourcing, capacity building, advice and technical guidance, along with support on management and governance structures. The monitoring and evaluation of pilots will need to be explored and will involve working with the Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group on joined up approaches to piloting tools.

Communication and engagement in this pilot process will form an important element in future development. The need for clear and succinct messaging and language on OECMs, their objectives and what we want to achieve for them in Wales is recognised. It is proposed that this is taken forward as a workstream under next steps.

Crucial factors for the group to consider while refining the scope for pilots encompass ensuring precise definitions, conducting additional analysis and demonstrating evidence for pilot selection, determining appropriate governance arrangements, ensuring biodiversity outcomes, and establishing mechanism for monitoring and evaluation. The group agreed the next step should entail a subgroup tasked with evaluating the list of situations (such as areas, projects, and partnerships) in Wales to determine if they may qualify as OECMs

against the OECM criteria. In doing so, Wales would need to recognise the potential barriers to meeting the criteria, such as governance, outcomes, and the range of learning opportunities in the view to identifying strong candidates for pilots as well as further identifying the support that may be required for them, and focus areas where the bottom-up approach is needed most. See section labelled 'OECM workshop discussions'.

Theme 5: What will be the cost of delivering our ambition and how will OECMs be funded?

In this theme, the group focused discussions on the affordability, funding, and resourcing of OECMs, with the aim of developing shared ideas on what options could look like, the opportunities that could be available, and the next steps for the group to explore. Members were asked to consider and share examples of existing project costs and funding mechanisms.

The group also reflected on the current thinking developed in earlier themes, with the IUCN OECM guidance published in 2019 and CBD Decision 14/8 OECM criteria being considered as a foundation for recognising OECMs in Wales. Subsequently, the IUCN has published a site-level tool for identifying OECMs. It provides a site assessment tool, split into three key steps – screening, consent, and full assessment (Fig 5).

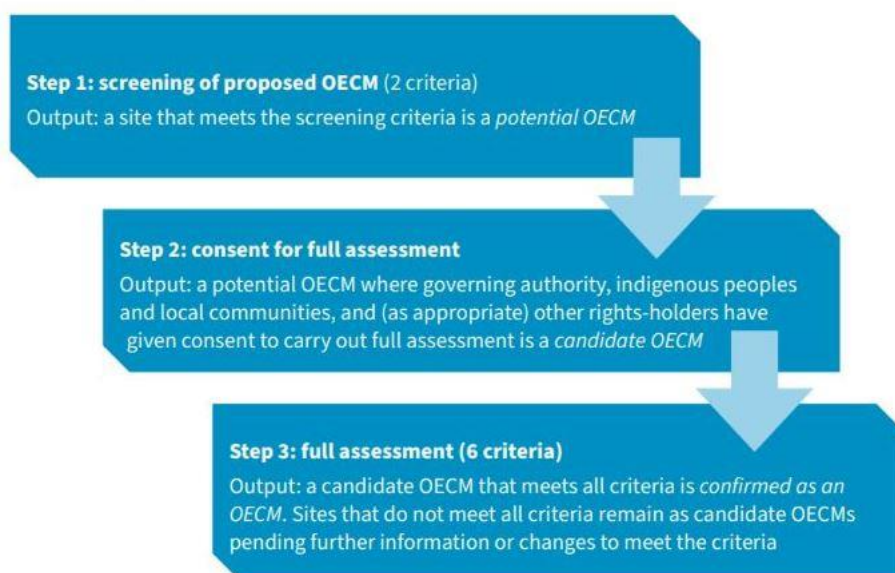


Figure 5: Illustration of the OECM site-level tool assessment process (Source: portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PATRS-006-En.pdf).

The group further considered the Nature Networks approach that can be used to accelerate nature's recovery, through an area-based partnership approach to deliver RENs. Outside of early adopters such as environmental NGOs and Public Bodies, the co-productive, landscape partnerships approach needed to develop RENs provides a base upon which to

identify, safeguard and achieve community buy in for OECM recognition on sites and areas that meet the criteria. In addition, Local Planning Authorities produce Green Infrastructure Plans (assessments and strategies) similarly could provide an element of prioritisation and safeguarding for OECMs.

In the spirit of the aim to be transformational and to stimulate discussion around uncertainty, the group considered how the DECCA (Diversity, Extent, Condition, Connectivity and Aspects of ecosystem resilience) framework could be applied to identifying OECMs. Can a Welsh approach be accepting of higher levels of uncertainty on biodiversity values (DECCA) in areas where governance and management are of high certainty, and vice versa are we comfortable with lower levels of certainty in governance and management where we know the site has high biodiversity value. This would be a way of incorporating an element of nature recovery into OECM recognition even if using the stages of criteria such as potential, candidate to recognised OECMs. It should be noted that IUCN guidance under sites unlikely to be considered an OECM include “A site where restoration or reintroduction are planned or ongoing, but where conservation outcomes have not yet been delivered.”

OECM funding examples from overseas countries

The group heard of research undertaken on funding strategies for OECMs in overseas countries. Information was predominately sourced from an IUCN 2023 report on the Status of OECMs in Asia (www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/status-of-oecms-in-asia-report-high-quality_compressed.pdf). Examples of funding strategies include applying models from protected areas to OECMs; strategic use of taxes, levies, and tax incentives; collaborative management partnerships (between OECM authorities and partners to collaboratively manage an area); Payments for Ecosystem Services; Conservation Trust Funds (private institutions providing sustainable financing) and case by case financing. Synergies were identified with some of these approaches already taking place in Wales, for example collaborative management partnerships.

Roundtable discussions with case study examples

Roundtable discussions followed, beginning with group members and additional invitees presenting case studies and relevant information for developing financing strategies for OECMs.

Case studies presented to the group included:

- **RSPB Lake Vyrnwy** is an example of landscape scale ecological restoration which is currently focused on peatlands. The water company Hafren Dyfrwyd owns the 10,000 hectare site much of which is within the protected Berwyn uplands. RSPB directly manages about 50% of the site as well as providing a wider advisory and monitoring function. In partnership with Hafren Dyfrwyd, RSPB is currently delivering 1500 hectares of peatland restoration at the site. The restoration aims for “gold standard” outcomes which tackle the nature and climate emergencies while providing ecosystem services and a fair deal for landowners and managers. The Peatland Code (www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/peatland-code-0) is used to underpin the restoration because it secures long-term commitment to these outcomes and generates accredited and

tradeable carbon credits. These credits are a source of funding for the restoration and potentially income for the landowner through private investment. Private investment against carbon works as part of a blend of finance from various options – up front grants are still essentially because of the scale and timing of investment versus generation of carbon benefits.

- **Nature Networks Fund**, a key delivery of the Welsh Government wider Nature Networks Programme provides funding to improve the condition and resilience for Wales' network of land and marine sites. It has a focus on project development and capacity building, with the aim of supporting protected sites, and actions which the local community can benefit from. It supports areas that improve connectivity between protected sites.
- **Green Finance report**, presented by Welsh Government. The **Green Finance** Institute has estimated the additional cost needed in Wales over the next 10 years to deliver nature recovery ambitions in line with the GBF. Welsh Government has commissioned an Innovative Finance group to look at opportunities for and barriers to green investment. Their report, commissioned and delivered by Finance Earth, identified ecosystem service markets as being carbon, farm-based ecosystem services, natural flood management, water quality, biodiversity, and recreation. Most of these would need to rely on some form of credit-based system. Carbon is currently the most mature market but barriers to take up still remain, together with concerns over whether the projects align sufficiently with Welsh Government priorities. The British Standards Institute is developing a set of standards for green finance, which will set standards and recognise best practice for the new ecosystem-based business models in Wales and the UK. A report has been commissioned and delivered by Finance Earth with next steps to include a policy position on ethical standards and pilot schemes.
- **Marine funding**, presented by the Marine Conservation Society. The Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership (www.gov.wales/wales-coasts-and-seas-partnership-casp-cymru-0) is an established group focused on achieving resilient marine ecosystems through three themes: ocean literacy, blue investment, and building capacity. Areas of work (such as marine planning, fisheries management, grants and funding, marine energy) have been identified to accelerate and enable action for our environment, economy, social, and cultural well-being. The governance system includes a steering group, which sets out a strategy, reviews impact and outcomes of the fund and secures new investors, which is supported by an advisory panel and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action acts as fund managers. A developers group provides investment, aligning the vision of developers with that of the fund, reports back and promotes the impact of the fund with industry. The Blue Investment sub-group is focused on exploring sustainable marine funding mechanisms, aiming to create a 25 year fund working alongside existing funding streams.
- **Wildlife Trusts' work** presented an overview of the work the Wildlife Trusts are doing with **corporate partners**, such as the £38m Aviva project looking at restoration of temperate rainforests across the UK, some of which has already been used to purchase land in north Wales. The overall thinking behind the Aviva donation was to enable them to help achieve its net zero target by 2040, with 800,000 tons of CO₂ being drawn down over the next 100 years. The Wildlife Trusts are also developing relationships with retailers and felt the supply chain market has a role to play in the implementation of collaborative options within the Sustainable Farming Scheme. In addition, the Trusts have built up a £40m fund with philanthropists across the UK which can be used for zero

interest loans for nature restoration. In addition, £6m over 3 years has been secured from the Ecological Restoration Fund for the UK, some for specific projects in Wales in the Wye and Severn catchments and on developing marine capacity.

The following key points were noted in the group's considerations of potential funding strategies and opportunities for OECMs. This theme will need further consideration, and is an identified workstream in the next steps for the group.

- A greater link is needed between the development of OECMs and activities under the Biodiversity Deep Dive Recommendation 6 unlock public and private finance to deliver for nature at far greater scale and pace.
- WG could play a role providing security in minimising risk to corporate and others to attract investing in nature recovery in Wales.
- With a robust assessment framework OECMs could provide an assurance of quality for investment.
- Capacity building needs, including the ability of organisations and contractors being available to deliver was noted.
- The group commented on the need for high integrity nature markets which are effectively managed with a role for Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales. There is an opportunity to use OECM recognition to provide quality assurance of nature markets.
- It was highlighted as a risk that there is a significant mismatch between available resources and what needs to be delivered for natures' recovery.
- It is noted that developing these relationships can be time and resource intensive and the role of the Innovative Finance group was highlighted, and that discussions were needed at Welsh Government level about a Team Wales approach as there are significant opportunities in this area.
- Private finance could support the development of OECMs; however, the criteria must not disadvantage land managers where they can draw down significant levels of private finance without it.
- OECMs need to be desirable to governing bodies and complement Welsh approach to nature protection and recovery. Whilst Wales can experiment with uncertainty in decision making, as with protected sites, the value of OECMs is that they are an indication of quality. They offer organisations seeking to contribute to nature recovery a level of certainty in the outcomes, and a reduced risk in investing and sponsoring activities.
- Case studies (live examples where possible) could be developed where financing is operating exposing both the opportunities but also the risks, constraints, and ongoing questions around long term funding.
- Gaps in discussion were raised, including Section 106 agreements and Heritage Lottery funding. Horizon funding and the UK Community Renewal Fund were worth investigating as possibilities. It was noted that with EU LIFE funding was now unavailable.
- It was noted that the manner in which all the different strands are brought together, not just around the governance of individual OECMs, but the governance of the whole delivery (of nature recovery) and the coordination is extremely important. How the status of an area as an OECM can attract funding needs further consideration.

OECM workshop discussions

Subsequently, a subgroup of members met over three, 2 hour workshops to discuss over 100 situations including existing habitat classifications, non-statutory designations, projects, and partnerships in Wales to understand their alignment against the IUCN criteria. The aim was to narrow the focus by recognising areas for further exploration before initiation of pilot schemes.

Whilst all situations were considered to meet some of the criteria, there was a lot of unknowns around sustained governance and management, free from environment harm and current delivery of effective conservation of biodiversity and confidence in long-term conservation outcomes. Most situations were considered unable to demonstrate long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity values. This is as a result of uncertainty over the long term aspects such as of the management body (selling of land, changing objectives), short term funding and threats such as land use change. However, sites with local designation such as local nature reserves, national nature reserves, and sites of importance for nature conservation/local wildlife sites or those located in a resilient ecological network had a degree of safeguarding associated with planning system.

Discussion often concluded with suggested analysis on a site case by case basis, and the recognition that for some sites that designation as a protected area might be more suitable. Some sites, project and partnership areas include protected sites within their extent, so the need to look at the non-designated areas would be required.

Key thoughts from the group to take forward in further understanding process and governance under the proposed next step workstreams included, OECMs should be of a minimum size, but this could be place specific and will be dependant on the habitat and a need to align with monitoring requirements. Expectations of equitable governance may be different for governance bodies depending on if they are public bodies, landscape partnerships or private owners.

The group further considered the combined model approach to identify sites. A top down approach could identify sites, such as eNGO land and Local Nature Reserves, which have a higher likelihood of meeting all the criteria and working with landscape partnerships where governance drive for long term nature recovery is already established. In addition, the bottom-up approach, by communicating the OECM standard to landowners, public bodies, local nature partnerships for example to enable sites to be put forward.

The OECM site-based assessment tool 2.0 (https://www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/oecm_assessment_tool_2.0_04may2022.pdf) (see Fig 5) provides an opportunity to combine both approaches, Step 1 allows the identification of potential OECMs that are not a protected area and likely to support biodiversity value. Mapped priority and semi-natural habitat, existing designations such as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation and other Local wildlife sites, Local and National Nature Reserves, eNGO land, could be identified as potential OECMs through a mapping exercise (top down).

To progress to step 2 full assessment requires consent from the governing authority. A top down approach can use evidence such as the Nature Networks Map and RENS to spatially target engagement, incentives to individuals and landscape partnerships to develop OECMs. In addition any areas that meet step one can put themselves forward for full assessment.

The full assessment stage involves liaison with landowners and partnerships which is likely to require a network of support with local expertise and resources throughout Wales to understand the challenges to *in situ* conservation, managing threats, equitable management and long term governance and outcomes. Step 3 site recognition will require official governance assurance, which should be determined in next steps.

OECMs in the marine environment

OSPAR and OECMs

The OSPAR (Oslo and Paris Convention) Marine Protection Area (MPA) network is a network of marine protected areas in the north-east Atlantic (www.ospar.org/work-areas/bdc/marine-protected-areas). The UK is a signatory to OSPAR and an active member, through JNCC, of the north-east Atlantic MPA network. Each year OSPAR send out a data call asking if members wish to submit or update their OSPAR MPAs and every two years, they request an assessment of the management effectiveness of all OSPAR sites. In Wales, all our marine SACs and SPAs with marine features are part of the OSPAR network. In 2018, OSPAR requested members submit two extra items: Other Area Based Measures (OABMs) and OECMs. These additional areas contribute to the overall scale of the MPA network in the OSPAR maritime area, as well as the ecological coherence of the network and enable a more holistic view of the measures addressing biodiversity conservation across the north-east Atlantic.

Initially OSPAR aimed to reach Aichi Target 11 “By 2020 at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water and 10% of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures and integrated into the wider landscape and seascape”. Having achieved this target, the focus has turned to a new target “By 2030 the network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective conservation measures (OECMs) cover at least 30% of the OSPAR maritime area and to ensure it is representative, ecologically coherent and effectively managed to achieve its conservation objectives.”

Guidance on OECMs for submission to OSPAR was to follow the draft IUCN OECM guidance. This included the draft screening tool, providing the following criterion to evaluate areas against:

- **Criterion 1.** Ensure that the area is not already recognised and/or recorded as a protected area.
- **Criterion 2.** Ensure that Aichi target 11, as opposed to other Aichi targets, is the right focus (i.e., that the area is providing *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity).

- **Criterion 3.** Ensure that the area has the essential conservation characteristics of an OECM.
- **Criterion 4.** Ensure that the conservation outcome will be sustained in the long term.

OECMs in the marine environment in Wales

In total, eight fisheries closed areas in Offshore and Welsh waters were assessed against the draft IUCN criterion following the data call in 2018. Of those, two (*modiolus* closed bed in north Wales, and Irish Sea Cod Box) were identified as OECMs and submitted to OSPAR. These have been adopted by OSPAR and were used in their 2021 report on the status of the north-east Atlantic network. These have not been reported to the World Database on OECMs.

At sea, Welsh Government has agreed that the ***modiolus* closed bed in north Wales** should be considered an OECM as part of the OSPAR network. It is managed under a fisheries order which bans fishing within the area using bottom-towed fishing gear, the identified main pressure on this habitat.

The **Irish Sea Cod Box** has also been recognised as an OECM, having been evaluated for OECM recognition by JNCC. This fisheries closure straddles secretary of State waters, Welsh waters, Scottish waters, and the Northern Ireland inshore region it is a seasonal closure to protect cod and has been adopted by OSPAR. It includes long-term seasonal closures (14 February to 30 April each year) for the protection of cod.

Although these sites have been adopted by OSPAR they have not been considered or assessed by the updated IUCN guidance. If these sites are to be considered for the 30 by 30 target, they will need to go through the same OECM screening and consideration as other sites. The latest guidance by the IUCN for instance is not supportive of closed areas for single fisheries species so the Irish Sea Cod Box may not be suitable under the new guidance.

What is next in the marine environment?

Each year a request for OECMs is included in the data call from OSPAR. As yet, no further OECMs have been identified or submitted in the marine environment in Wales.

The proportion of seas protected through designation is far greater than on land, with over 50% coverage. Ensuring that these are under effective conservation management is the primary focus for delivering 30 by 30 in the marine environment. The group also supports the recognition of further OECMs in the marine environment where these are assessed as meeting the OECM criteria.

OECM and NREA Recommendations

The group have worked at pace to explore, identify and recommend key aspects for creating a framework to recognise OECMs and NREAs in Wales that deliver biodiversity outcomes. In this initial report we outline our recommendations to the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group

from the first, six months, phase of the group. We recognise that work must continue at pace to develop a fully comprehensive framework for implementation, as detailed in the next steps.

- **Recommendation 1: The OECM criteria (as per CBD Decision 14/8) and the IUCN OECM guidance forms the fundamental basis of a Welsh framework for the recognition of OECMs.**

The CBD Decision 14/8 sets out scientific and technical advice for OECMs, with guiding principles on common characteristics and criteria for identification. Using this criterion, the IUCN OECM guidelines provide further explanation, tools, and approaches for the identification, recognition, monitoring, and reporting of OECMs.

The group considered and tested the application of the criteria against case studies, using the tools and guidance provided by the IUCN. It found that these were satisfactory for use in Wales as the basis for identifying OECMs in Wales. It is the opinion of the group that the process for achieving recognised OECM status aligns with the principles of SMNR (Environment (Wales) Act 2016) and ways of working (Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015). Further consideration should be given to developing and applying a “Welsh flavour” such as the application of DECCA and alignment with other existing policy.

- **Recommendation 2: In recognising OECMs, protected areas that have biodiversity conservation as a primary objective would be excluded from consideration because a key criterion in the recognition of OECMs is “Criteria A: Area is not currently recognised as a protected area.”**

For the purposes of 30 by 30 in Wales, **we recommend that 'protected areas' are those designated primarily for nature conservation objectives and which have sufficient legal or other mechanisms to provide for effective protection and management.** In Wales such protected area designations are SSSIs, SPAs, SACs, Ramsar sites and Marine Conservation Zones. This is in accord with the Review of Statements of Compliance for UK protected areas and OECMs published by the Protected Areas Working Group of the IUCN National Committee UK, in turn intended as guidance on which types of sites currently fully comply with the 30 by 30 internationally agreed requirements and standards. **We recommend that OECMs therefore cannot be reported in such protected areas, although where relevant measures overlap with designated and non-designated land or sea, the non-designated portion could be assessed for suitability for OECM status.** OECMs are anticipated to complement protected areas by providing sustained, positive conservation outcomes, even though those areas may be managed primarily for other reasons.

It is accepted in Wales that National Parks and National Landscapes are not primarily designated for biodiversity conservation and do not have strict biodiversity protection outside the strictly protected sites within them. Nor are they effectively managed for biodiversity across all of their area and thus could not count in their entirety towards the 30 by 30 target in the way that the “Protected Areas” identified above do. In addition, as globally recognised Category V Protected Areas, National Parks and National Landscapes

are not listed in the IUCN's UK Protected Areas Working Group guidance as the types of areas which fully comply with the requirements for a protected area for the purposes of 30 by 30. The ambition and role for National Parks and National Landscapes in delivering 30 by 30 is, however, significant, as these landscapes contain large areas of priority habitat while their governing bodies are well-placed to convene partnerships and secure funding for delivering biodiversity outcomes. This is reflected in the wider Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations relating to designated landscapes.

We therefore suggest that UK-wide agreement would be beneficial in considering how targeted priority areas within National Parks and National Landscapes will be formally recognised and reported as contributions towards the 30 x 30 target. The Welsh Government will need to work with other UK governments and JNCC to seek appropriate consistency in reporting of protected areas and OECMs for the purposes of 30 by 30. In parallel with these discussions, we recognise the need for continued work under the Biodiversity Deep Dive to identify and test areas within the designated landscapes, out with the site designations listed above, that have the potential to contribute to 30 by 30.

- **Recommendation 3: A flexible framework should be developed that identifies and recognises OECMs to complement and leverage existing biodiversity effort. We propose a combined model incorporating i) a top down approach to ensure OECMs are used to support delivery of resources where they are needed to develop functional and structurally viable ecological networks and ii) a bottom up approach to empower landowners and local communities to aid nature recovery.**

The group explored scenarios for the identification, implementation, funding and monitoring based on three proposed models “top down”, “bottom up”, “recognising existing”. SWOT analysis of the models showed that not one model fits the structure of OECMs for them to be recognised and delivered in Wales. A combined model approach to identifying potential OECMs and supporting them through to OECM recognition is needed. The combined model approach enables both strategic direction while adapting to local contexts and actively engaging with stakeholders.

- **Recommendation 4: OECM recognition cannot be undertaken in isolation, but needs to be part of, and complement, a wider transformative approach to support 30 by 30 and nature recovery in Wales.**

There are significant interdependencies with the wider suite of Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations such as “to unlock public and private finance to deliver for nature at far greater scale and pace” and the revision to our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Wales (currently the Nature Recovery Action Plan).

The group emphasises the importance of taking a Team Wales approach towards nature's recovery in Wales, in which OECMs will play an important part. There are challenges in achieving the scale needed to ensure 30% of land, waters, and seas are effectively conserved and managed by 2030. Area-based partnerships (such as Local Nature Partnerships) were identified as important contributors to achieving 30 by 30, in particularly by demonstrating equitable governance and transparency of process. Further

communication that provides a strategic steer and guidance, such as on OECM processes and criteria, to aid local level approaches to 30 by 30 is essential.

The use of mapping and data should effectively target action and investment in nature; integrating our goals for nature with funding streams, policy and statutory duties that will incentivise the restoration and creating of habitats; and collaboration, supporting partnerships to use these tools to deliver for nature.

This includes an essential requirement to ensure that recommendations are integrated with Welsh legislation, the wider range of thematic and spatial strategies, and with emerging public and private sector finance opportunities. The RENs approach is integrated into existing Welsh legislation and policy frameworks and therefore has potential to help support long term conservation outcomes by ensuring statutory and non-statutory designated sites and habitats are properly protected and managed in the spatial planning process (see Planning Policy Wales 12).

Developing the relationship of OECM recognition with existing and future management mechanisms and funding is essential. One such example, is the relationship that OECMs could have with the Sustainable Farming Scheme, involving working with landowners to manage their natural habitats and farm in a way that maintains or improves biodiversity values. Meeting the target will rely on many landowners managing their land in ways that enable it to meet the OECM criteria and so putting in place the right support, advice, and incentives will be crucial to success. Aligning long term funding to areas of land that meets or is likely to achieve OECM status should be a key objective of the collaborative element of the scheme.

The UK agreed to achieving the vision of the GBF, of a world living in harmony with nature where “by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people”. There are 22 other targets to achieve by 2030, and the 30 by 30 target which includes OECMs, will assist in aligning Welsh Government policies to contribute to many of these targets and ultimately helping to make the 2050 vision a reality.

To meet the target of 30 by 30 for terrestrial land, through protected areas and OECMs, requires significant change and investment to ensure the right levers, mechanisms, safeguards, and resources are put in place.

- **Recommendation 5: A series of NREAs should be established across Wales to pilot, establish, and showcase innovative and effective ways of delivering landscape scale nature recovery.**

They should be selected through a competitive process where stakeholders respond to a set of criteria such as those explored in the NREA section of this report (See Theme 1 and Annex 5). The criteria must include their contribution to 30 by 30, their potential innovative or exemplary nature, and importantly their ideas and potential to create future funding streams for their long-term existence. These areas could be seed funded by Welsh Government with the longer-term aim that they would become self-sustaining and supported

by a mix of public, private, and charitable funding developed by a collaborative local partnership during the seed funding stage.

Monitoring and evidence

The Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group was tasked to develop and adapt monitoring and evidence frameworks to measure progress towards the 30 by 30 target and guide prioritisation of action and continue the work needed to establish robust and appropriate monitoring and evidence frameworks for 30 by 30 and wider nature recovery targets, building on those that are already in place.

This group has held discussions on the monitoring of OECMs which has fed into the working of the Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group. Readers should refer to the report “Initial recommendations of the Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group for Wales” for recommendations on monitoring and evidence of OECMs from their first phase.

Next steps

Over the course of mid to late 2023 the group has explored the definitions, processes, and criteria for recognising, monitoring, and reporting on OECMs and NREAs in Wales. It makes a number of initial recommendations in this report.

Given the complexity of these two new concepts for Wales, and the short timeframe, it was not possible to complete a full suite of recommendations for OECMs and NREAs which would enable the implementation of a fully functioning framework. The group proposes to continue, building on the work undertaken, by focusing on several workstreams outlined below. The group will consider if wider representation is required to undertake the workstreams and will continue to work closely with the other Deep Dive expert groups. A final report, with a full suite of recommendations, will be produced.

Proposed workstreams

OECM recognition process and governance

Building upon our first phase, the process to recognise OECMs in Wales will be clearly defined and include a governance structure with identified roles and responsibilities. It will draw upon the IUCN guidance, in particular the site level tool for identifying OECMs published in late 2023. For example, this should include specifying the governing bodies to assess, monitor, and submit sites to the World Database on OECMs, and ensuring a validation process and quality assurance is in place.

Monitoring and evaluation

Working with the Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group to ensure monitoring and evaluation of OECMs can be defined and set.

Resourcing

Determine a resourcing framework is essential, this should be undertaken collaboratively with others, such as those taking forward Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations on

finance, and the opportunities for the financing of management mechanisms such as Sustainable Farming Scheme. A strategic approach to funding natures' recovery of which OECMs are an important part would be beneficial. Aspects such as how funding natural capital could be aligned with the delivery of ecosystem services and biodiversity outcomes to deliver OECMs should be considered. For example, strategies such as Outcomes-Based Funding could reward public authorities that achieve specific social and environmental goals alongside their core objectives such as contributing where possible to 30 by 30 and other social and environmental goals. This is a key part of system change and reflects recommendation 4 above that OECMs are part of a wider transformative approach.

Collaboration and engagement

In the immediate term, raising awareness and providing communications on OECMs framed in an accessible way is needed. Production of guidance materials and opportunities to maximise learning should be explored. This should support organisations and local nature partnerships as they develop local approaches to 30 by 30. Existing mechanisms will be utilised where possible, such as the Wales Biodiversity Partnership, and inputting to the future refresh of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Wales (currently the Nature Recovery Action Plan).

Public bodies were identified as having a key leadership role, in line with their section 6 duties, and ability to meet the OECM criteria and contribute towards 30 by 30 on land assets. Exploring governance to deliver transformative change for nature recovery across all public authorities will be important, including supporting Public Service Boards to deliver nature commitments.

Implementation

Development of pilots, including taking forward existing and new examples into the full assessment process and embarking on a process of recognising OECMs through the combined model.

In this workstream, the group will need to consider a number of challenges and evidence gaps, including, but not limited to:

- How to support different land governance arrangements to demonstrate long term management of biodiversity.
- The need to further develop Welsh guidance to inform how to assess sustained and effective contributions to *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. Aligning with Welsh policy, mechanisms and initiatives such as Nature Networks Map and RENs to accelerate Nature recovery.
- Defining further aspects of the criteria to enable effective assessment, such as biodiversity value, long term.
- Further outstanding questions on the application of the OECM criteria and guidelines in a Welsh context, as noted in theme 2, for example around determining minimum size.
- Enabling assessment of public bodies holdings (for example) and reporting of barriers and opportunities for contributing to the 30 by 30 target.

NREAs

Building on the thinking set out in this report, further work will be needed to refine the criteria for NREAs in iteration with the OECM work and wider nature recovery strategy. To ensure that the establishment of NREAs across Wales add real value to nature recovery and learning to the delivery of the 30 by 30 target. Following this, a detailed specification for NREAs will need to be developed and agreed while funding and procurement processes are investigated with the view to launching a programme as soon as practically possible.

Meeting arrangements

Previously the group met monthly. As we move forward into phase two, the group proposes to meet every 3 to 4 months, with intersessional work established to take forward the identified workstreams. The group recognises that several workstreams have synergies with the Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group and the Deep Dive Designated Landscapes expert group. A joint meeting will be held in April to take this forward.

Liaison with other UK countries will continue to take place, sharing best practice and approaches.

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Glossary of terms

Nature Recovery Exemplar Area (NREA)

Existing or new landscape scale collaborations of public, private, voluntary, and community actors that come together to manage and restore nature in protected areas and the wider landscape.

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (OECM)

A geographically defined area other than a protected area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.

Potential OECM

A geographically defined space that has been identified as having OECM-like characteristics by applying the screening tool but where the governance authority has yet to consent to it becoming a “candidate OECM.”

Candidate OECM

A geographically defined space that has been identified as a “potential OECM” and the governance authority has consented to it being assessed against the CBD criteria.

Protected area

For the purposes of 30 by 30 protected areas are deemed to include SSSIs, SPAs, SACs, MCZs, Ramsar sites, and National Nature Reserves. This broadly aligns with the IUCN Protected Area Categories IV – Habitat/Species Management Areas, although a few are of Category I – Strict Nature Reserve (Dudley, 2008). As many protected area designations overlay one another most area-based considerations are focussed on the underpinning SSSI designations (in the terrestrial, coastal and freshwater environment) as a unit of focus.

Appendices

Annex 1: Group membership

Name	Organisation	Role
Dr Steve Ormerod*	Cardiff University	Chair
Michaela Scrivin	Wales Biodiversity Partnership	Secretariat
Pippa Wood	ARUP	Member
Craig Llewellyn	Atkins and CIEEM representative	Member
Paul Sinnadurai*	Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority	Member
Nigel Hollett	Country Land and Business Association	Member
Phillippa Pearson*	Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water	Member

Jonathan Cawley	Eryri National Park Authority	Member
Howard Davies*	Independent, Chair of the Deep Dive Designated Landscapes expert group	Member
Anna Robinson	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)	Member
Gareth Cunningham	Marine Conservation Society	Member
Collette Bosley	Monmouthshire County Council	Member
Jim Latham	Natural Resources Wales	Member
Geoff Hobbs	Natural Resources Wales	Member
Maggie Hatton-Ellis	Natural Resources Wales	Member
Holly York	Natural Resources Wales	Member
Ceri Davies*	Natural Resources Wales, Chair of the Deep Dive Monitoring and Evidence expert group	Member
Dan Ward	North Star Transition	Member
Ant Rogers	Pembrokeshire Local Nature Partnership	Member
Meriel Harrison	RSPB Cymru	Member
Victoria Jenkins	Swansea University	Member
Simon Evans	Usk and Wye Foundation	Member
Karen Stothard	Welsh Government	Member
Steve Spode	Welsh Government	Member
Joshua Little	Welsh Government (PhD placement)	Member
Rachel Sharp/Tim Birch	Wildlife Trusts Wales/Wales Environment Link (WEL) representative	Member

*Members of the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group

Annex 2: Terms of reference

Status

The Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures and Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas expert working group reports to the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group.

Purpose

Focused on Recommendation 2 of the Biodiversity Deep Dive ‘**Create a framework to recognise Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures that deliver biodiversity outcomes**’ the principle purpose of the group is to take forward:

- To recommend processes and criteria for recognising, monitoring, and reporting on existing and candidate OECMs and NREAs in Wales.

In addition to improving the existing protected areas, we also recognise the importance of identifying additional areas that can deliver our nature recovery ambition and alternative solutions to managing these. On the management side we want to establish a series of

NREAs – existing or new landscape scale collaborations of public, private, voluntary and community actors that come together to manage and restore nature in protected areas and the wider landscape. In addition, we also want to explore the role of a new IUCN defined status of OECMs in recognising areas outside protected sites that can contribute to 30 by 30.

The group will undertake this work with reference to the targets contained within the post 2020 GBF, especially target three which seeks to:

“Ensure and enable that by 2030 **at least 30 per cent** of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are **effectively conserved and managed** through **ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures**, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and **integrated into wider landscapes**, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.”

The remit of the group is to:

- Recommend **processes** and **criteria** for **recognising, monitoring, and reporting** on existing and candidate OECMs and NREAs in Wales, and
- Report recommendations on identification of candidate sites and mechanisms to fund these within six months.

In doing so,

- Ensure recommendations are integrated with Welsh legislation, the wider range of thematic and spatial strategies and with emerging public and private sector finance opportunities.

Membership of the group

The appointed chair is Professor Steve Ormerod Cardiff University with secretariat provided by the Wales Biodiversity Partnership Support Team. The chair of the group is appointed by the Minister of Climate Change and should be a member of the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group.

Members should have sufficient expertise, knowledge, and capacity to allow rapid and robust development of the outcomes. Additional key specialist expertise may be brought in as and when required. Members are listed in Annex 1.

Ways of working

These will be aligned to the Five Ways of Working outlined within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

- Work collaboratively across organisations, and with other stakeholders and sub-groups.

- In proposing future actions and solutions, take account of relevant evidence and/or identify any key evidence gaps in respect of uncertainties.
- Seek to achieve integrated long-term solutions and take account of the short, medium and long term consequences of actions.
- Work with integrity and respectfully challenge each other to consider how we can do things differently/better, and
- All outputs and recommendations from this group should be justified by reference to a sound evidence base or draw attention to the limitations of the evidence where this not available.

Meeting arrangements (incl. timing)

- Meetings will be held online using Teams or on occasion, face to face.
- Meetings will be held monthly during 2023 (excluding August), and where possible should fit with the reporting deadlines and schedules of the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group.
- Proposed agenda items and papers should be sent to the Chair and Secretariat one week prior to the meeting.
- The Secretariat will circulate the draft minutes within two weeks of the meeting.
- The group will capture risks and issues which will be logged centrally to the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group.
- Any decisions or issues the group cannot resolve should be escalated to the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group.

Communications and reporting

- The chair will report to the core Biodiversity Deep Dive group on a quarterly basis, and feed into the six-monthly reporting schedule.
- The group will look to communicate outputs with relevant parties.
- Engagement with a range of landowners and managers whose land may be considered as part of any OECM and NREA process will be critical in due course.

Annex 3: Global Biodiversity Framework target three information

30 by 30 definition as agreed in the Kunming Montreal Framework - [2030 Targets \(cbd.int\)](https://www.cbd.int/2030/targets)

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

Figure 1: Global Biodiversity Framework target three description

Why this target is important

Well-governed, effectively managed, and representative protected areas and OECMs are a proven method for safeguarding both habitats and populations of species and for delivering important ecosystem services and multiple benefits to people. They are a central element of biodiversity conservation strategies at local, national, and global levels. Protected areas and OECMs can take various forms, ranging from strictly protected areas to areas that allow sustainable use consistent with the protection of species, habitats, and ecosystem processes.

Explanation of the target and its elements

This target calls for the expansion and enhancement of protected and conserved areas, (i.e. areas that are managed with the aim of achieving positive outcomes for biodiversity). The target indicates three approaches that may be employed to achieve this aim:

- Protected areas – The CBD defines a protected area as geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives. IUCN has established a categorization of protected areas.
- OECMs – These are a geographically defined area other than a protected area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.
- Indigenous and traditional territories – Indigenous peoples and local communities often own, occupy and/or manage areas with unique and significant biodiversity. The appropriate recognition of these areas could make important contributions towards this target. However, any decisions regarding these areas must recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities over them and including obtaining free, prior, and informed consent.

The target also sets out several elements that need to be considered:

1. **At least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas** – this quantitative element of the target specifies that, globally, at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and at least 30 per cent of marine and coastal areas should be conserved or protected by 2030.
2. **Areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services** – areas particularly important for biodiversity include areas high in species richness or threatened species, threatened biomes and habitats, areas with particularly important habitats and areas that are important for the continued provision of ecosystem functions and services. The protection of such areas should be prioritised in reaching this target
3. **Effectively conserved and managed** – protected areas and OECMs must be managed with the primary objective of achieving positive outcomes for biodiversity. Effective management and sustained positive outcomes for biodiversity conservation requires the

adoption of appropriate management objectives and processes, governance systems, adequate and appropriate resourcing, and consistent monitoring.

4. **Ecologically representative** - protected area and OECMs should contain adequate samples of the full range of existing ecosystems, ecological processes, and regions.
5. **Well-connected** – in order for protected areas and OECMs to be effective, they should be connected through corridors as well as integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes, and the ocean. This is an essential element of creating effective systems or networks of protected and conserved areas that can meet sustained *in situ* conservation outcomes and cope with stresses and disturbances, including from the impacts of climate change.
6. **Equitably governed** – a key element of the equitable governance of protected areas and OECMs is ensuring that relevant actors are involved and able to fully participate in their establishment, management, and governance and that the costs and benefits of establishing and managing such areas are shared fairly. It also includes effective participation in decision-making, transparent procedures, access to justice in conflicting situations, and the recognition of the rights and diversity of the people that will be affected by the establishment and management of protected areas and OECMs.
7. **Sustainable use consistent with conservation objectives** – some types of protected areas and OECMs allow for limited types of non-industrial, traditional cultural, activities to occur within their boundaries. Examples could include hunting, fishing, gathering and tourism. Where these activities are permitted within protected areas and OECMs, they should be sustainable and consistent with conservation objectives.
8. **The rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities** - all activities carried out under this target must be done so recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories. This includes, as specified in Section C of the Kunming-Montreal GBF that rights, knowledge, including traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity, innovations, worldviews, values and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities are respected, and documented and preserved with their free, prior and informed consent, including through their full and effective participation in decision-making, in accordance with relevant national legislation, international instruments, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Annex 4: OECM criteria

CBD Decision 14/8 Criteria for identification of OECMs

CBD Decision 14/8, pp.12-13 <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf>.

This criteria for identifications of OECMs was provided as scientific and technical advice in Annex III of CBD Decision 14/8. The criteria “**are applicable across all ecosystems currently or potentially important for biodiversity and should be applied in a flexible way and on a case-by-case basis.**”

Criterion A: Area is not currently recognized as a protected area	
Not a protected area	☐ The area is not currently recognized or reported as a protected area or part of a protected area; it may have been established for another function.
Criterion B: Area is governed and managed	
Geographically defined space	☐ Size and area are described, including in three dimensions where necessary. ☐ Boundaries are geographically delineated.
Legitimate governance authorities	☐ Governance has legitimate authority – and is appropriate for achieving <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity within the area; ☐ Governance by indigenous peoples and local communities is self-identified in accordance with national legislation and applicable international obligations; ☐ Governance reflects the equity considerations adopted in the Convention. ☐ Governance may be by a single authority and/or organization or through collaboration among relevant authorities and provides the ability to address threats collectively.
Managed	☐ Managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained outcomes for the conservation of biological diversity. ☐ Relevant authorities and stakeholders are identified and involved in management. ☐ A management system is in place that contributes to sustaining the <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity. ☐ Management is consistent with the ecosystem approach with the ability to adapt to achieve expected biodiversity conservation outcomes, including long-term outcomes, and including the ability to manage a new threat.
Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity	
Effective	☐ The area achieves, or is expected to achieve, positive and sustained outcomes for the <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity. ☐ Threats, existing or reasonably anticipated ones are addressed effectively by preventing, significantly reducing or eliminating them, and by restoring degraded ecosystems. ☐ Mechanisms, such as policy frameworks and regulations, are in place to recognize and respond to new threats. ☐ To the extent relevant and possible, management inside and outside the other effective area-based conservation measure is integrated.
Sustained over long term	☐ The other effective area-based conservation measures are in place for the long term or are likely to be. ☐ “Sustained” pertains to the continuity of governance and management and “long term” pertains to the biodiversity outcome.
<i>In situ</i> conservation of biological diversity	☐ Recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures is expected to include the identification of the range of biodiversity attributes for which the site is considered important (e.g. communities of rare, threatened or endangered species, representative natural ecosystems, range restricted species, key biodiversity areas, areas providing critical ecosystem functions and services, areas for ecological connectivity).

Table 1: IUCN OECM guidelines on criteria.

Criterion A: Area is not currently recognized as a protected area

a. “other than a Protected Area” OECMs can contribute in their own right to area-based targets for terrestrial, freshwater, and marine conservation. This means that areas that are already designated as protected areas or lie within protected areas **should not also be recognised or reported as OECMs**. While protected areas and OECMs are mutually exclusive at any point in time, both protected areas and OECMs have value for biodiversity conservation. Some OECMs may become recognised as protected areas if, for example, nature conservation becomes the primary management objective, or where the area already meets the definition of a protected area, and the governing authority now requests its recognition.

Criterion B: Area is governed and managed

b. “geographically defined area” Geographically defined area implies a spatially delineated area with agreed and demarcated boundaries, which can include land, inland waters, marine and coastal areas, or any combination of these. In exceptional

circumstances, boundaries may be defined by physical features that move over time, such as riverbanks, the high water mark or extent of sea ice.

While the size of OECMs may vary, they should be of sufficient size to achieve the long-term *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, including all ecosystems, habitats, and species communities for which the site is important. “Sufficient size” is highly contextual and is dependent on the ecological requirements for the persistence of the relevant species and ecosystems.

c. “governed”

Governed implies that the area is under the authority of a specified entity, or an agreed upon combination of entities. OECMs can be governed under the same range of governance types as protected areas, namely:

1. Governance by governments (at various levels).
2. Governance by private individuals, organisations, or companies.
3. Governance by Indigenous peoples and/or local communities; and
4. Shared governance (i.e., governance by various rights holders and stakeholders together) (Dudley, 2008; Borini, Feyerabend et al., 2013).

As with protected areas, the governance of OECMs should be equitable and reflect human rights principles recognised in international and regional human rights instruments and in national legislation, including relating to gender equity and Indigenous peoples. Governance mechanisms should be effective in maintaining biodiversity. Any recognition or reporting of OECMs governed by Indigenous peoples and/or local communities should be based on self-identification and requires the free, prior, and informed consent of those traditional governance authority(ies) (United Nations, 2007).

d. “managed”

Managed specifies that the area is being managed in a way that achieves positive and sustained long-term biodiversity conservation outcomes. Relevant authorities, rightsholders and stakeholder should be identified and involved in management.

Unlike protected areas, OECMs do not require a primary objective of conservation, but there must be a direct causal link between the area’s overall objective and management and the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity over the long-term. “Managed” can include a deliberate decision to leave the area untouched.

Management of OECMs should be consistent with the ecosystem approach, with the ability to adapt to achieve expected long-term biodiversity conservation outcomes and to manage emerging new threats (<https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/>). Accordingly, the management of OECMs should include “effective means” of control of activities that could impact biodiversity, whether through legal measures or other effective means (such as customary laws or binding agreements with the landowners). To the extent relevant and possible, management should be integrated across OECMs and integrated with surrounding areas. An area where there is no management regime is not an OECM, even though its biodiversity may remain intact. For example, unmanaged areas of the high seas, areas under military conflict, and other areas currently in a natural or near-natural state should not be considered

as OECMs in the absence of a management regime that provides effective and enduring *in-situ* biodiversity conservation. Management regimes can include deliberate decisions to leave the area untouched.

Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to in situ conservation of biodiversity

e. “positive outcomes” for biodiversity conservation (termed “effective” in the criteria of CBD decision 14/8)

OECMs should be **effective** at delivering positive and sustained outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. Specifically, there should be a clear association between the management and biodiversity outcomes, with mechanisms in place to address existing or anticipated threats (see Mathur et al., 2017 for guidance on identifying and managing threats).

Environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development should not occur in OECMs. This is consistent with IUCN Recommendation 102 (WCC-2016- Rec-102-EN), adopted at the World Conservation Congress 2016 in Hawai'i. This recommendation calls on governments and relevant authorities “to adopt and implement policies that restrict environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development that may have negative impacts on any areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services that are identified by governments as essential to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.” Environmentally damaging industrial activities include, for example, industrial fishing and forestry, mining, oil and gas extraction, industrial agriculture, and environmentally- damaging infrastructure, such as dams, roads, and pipelines. These threats should be avoided. This applies both to environmentally damaging activities inside OECMs and also to those outside the area but impacting on the OECMs.

f. “sustained long-term”

The governance and management of OECMs is expected to be **sustained** and deliver the **long-term** effective *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. Short-term or temporary management strategies do not constitute an OECM. For example, a commercial fishing closure that stays in place only until an overfished area recovers, is not an OECM. IUCN's guidance is that the factors that govern and manage an OECM should be expected to be ongoing and for the long-term.

Effective conservation outcomes may arise from strict protection or certain forms of sustainable management consistent with the CBD definitions of “*in-situ* conservation” and “biodiversity.” However, most areas managed for industrial production, even if they have some biodiversity benefits, **should not** be considered as OECMs. Sustainably managed commercial fisheries and commercial forests, for instance, should be reported under Aichi targets 6 and 7, respectively, or other appropriate targets.

On the other hand, sites with a range of management approaches, including seasonal arrangements (e.g. sites managed for migratory bird species) may qualify as OECMs if the seasonal measures are part of a long-term overall management regime that results in the year-round *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity for which the site is important. In some cases,

short-term regulatory instruments, renewed continuously, may provide de facto long-term measures.

Management of OECMs should be consistent with an ecosystem and precautionary approach, with the ability to adapt to maintain biodiversity outcomes in the long-term and to address potential new threats. Practical steps should be in place for monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of OECMs.

g. “*in-situ* conservation of biodiversity”

The CBD defines ***in-situ* conservation**, with respect to biodiversity, as:

The conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties. (CBD Article 2).

OECMs should deliver biodiversity outcomes of comparable importance to, and complementary with, those of protected areas. This includes their contribution to ecological representation, coverage of areas important for biodiversity and associated ecosystem functions and services, connectivity and integration in wider landscapes and seascapes, as well as management effectiveness and equity requirements.

OECMs are expected to **achieve the conservation of nature as a whole**, rather than only selected elements of biodiversity. The CBD definitions of “biodiversity” and “*in-situ* conservation” clearly recognise that a single species can only exist *in-situ* as part of an interconnected web with other species and the abiotic environment. Therefore, conservation measures targeting single species or subsets of biodiversity should not allow the broader ecosystem to be compromised. Recognising the linkage between biological and geological diversity, “geodiversity” may also be an important management focus in OECMs (Zarnetske et al., 2019).

h. “biodiversity”

Given the explicit link between OECMs and **biodiversity conservation outcomes**, it is a clear requirement that OECMs must achieve the effective and sustained *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. While approaches for identifying the important biodiversity elements of such areas vary according to national, subnational, and local circumstances, global guidance now exists for identifying Key Biodiversity Areas (IUCN, 2016) and for describing areas such as Ramsar Sites and Ecologically and Biologically Significant Marine Areas (Dunstan, 2016). The biodiversity conserved by an OECM can occur in areas within and beyond national jurisdiction.

Recognition of an OECM should include the identification of the range of biodiversity attributes for which the site is considered important and be based upon the best available knowledge. These key biodiversity values, as well as the broader conservation values of OECMs, should be described and tracked over time.

Criterion D: Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values

i. “ecosystem functions and services”

Healthy and functioning ecosystems provide a range of services. **Ecosystem functions** are an integral part of biodiversity, and are defined as the biological, geochemical, and physical processes that take place or occur within an ecosystem. **Ecosystem services** include provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as regulation of floods, drought, land degradation and disease; and supporting services such as soil formation and nutrient recycling. Protection of these ecosystem functions and services may be a frequent rationale for the recognition of OECMs. However, management to enhance one particular ecosystem service should not impact negatively on the site’s overall biodiversity conservation values.

j. “cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values”

OECMs include areas where the protection of key species and habitats and management of biodiversity may be achieved as part of **cultural, spiritual socio-economic and other locally relevant values** and practices. In such cases, it will be essential to ensure the recognition and protection of the linkages between biological and cultural diversity and associated governance and management practices that lead to positive biodiversity outcomes, such as customary sustainable uses of biodiversity (CBD Article 10(c)). Conversely, management for cultural, spiritual socio-economic or other locally relevant values within an OECM should not impact negatively on biodiversity conservation values.

Annex 5: Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas information

What constitutes a NREA?

The group agreed that the following characteristics or criteria would be important in defining and recognising NREAs. They also agreed that as NREAs were primarily about the way we deliver and recognise effective nature recovery. Further work to set out more precisely the criteria, recognition, and establishment of these would be carried once we were clearer on the next steps for the OECMs which is primarily concerned about the what and the where.

NREAs should:

1. Contribute to the network of protected sites and OECMs that make up 30 by 30 and be informed by:

National

- Nature Networks Map (as described below).
- Welsh Minister’s Natural Resources Policy (NRP).
- National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.
- National Natural Resources areas (where relevant) as referenced in Planning Policy Wales and Future Wales.
- Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs).
- State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR).

Regional

- Area Statements
- Regional State of Nature Reports (where in place)
- Regional Local Nature Recovery Action Plans (where in place)
- Public Service Boards (PSB) Well-being Plans.

Local

- Section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience Plans
- Local Nature Recovery Action Plans
- Green Infrastructure Assessments/Strategies
- Local Climate and Nature Emergency Strategies (where in place)
- Local Well-being Delivery Plans.

Nature Networks Map

The network maps provide a picture of the general patterns of ecological connectivity across a landscape, indicating which patches of habitat are likely to be more or less connected. This information can help locate action such as habitat restoration, creation, and management to complement the mapped networks and so build or enhance Resilient Ecological Networks. Generally, action within, or immediately adjacent to a mapped network will be most beneficial. Actions isolated from the mapped networks may do little for building overall connectivity, although they may be valuable for other reasons.

2. **Demonstrate landscape scale action and be a management vehicle for taking forward collaborative action across Wales on a longer term and more sustainable basis.**
3. **Manage areas in line with the objective and principles of the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR).** The objective is to maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide for well-being.

The principles are:

- Adaptive management – manage adaptively by planning, monitoring, reviewing and where appropriate, changing action.
- Scale – consider the right scale for action.
- Collaboration and engagement - promote and engage in collaboration and co-operation.
- Public Participation – make the right arrangements for public participation in decision-making.
- Evidence – take account of all relevant evidence, and gather evidence on uncertainties.
- Multiple benefits – appreciate the benefits and intrinsic value of natural resources and ecosystems.
- Preventative action – take action to prevent significant damage to ecosystems.

- Building resilience – take account of the resilience of ecosystems.
- Long term – take account of the short, medium, and long-term consequences of actions.

Whilst SMNR is designed to deliver the goals and five ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 for natural resource management, it will be important that alignment with our sustainable development legislation is clearly demonstrated in the NREAs.

4. **Meet high standards.** For example, National Forest exemplar sites are required to be maintained to meet the UK Forestry Standards and the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.
5. **Support active involvement of local communities.** For example, citizen science, upskilling and diversifying volunteer bases, school engagement programmes, placements or apprenticeships like Kickstart and the National Nature Service.
6. **Defined in terms of their:**
 - Natural resources – Biological, animal, plants, and other organisms; geological, geological features, and processes; minerals; physiographical features; environmental media, and flow resources; air, water, and soil; climatic features, and processes.
 - Ecosystems.
 - Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.
 - The provisioning, regulating and cultural ecosystem services delivered by ecosystems in the area, or potential services that could be delivered – perhaps with changes to management together with the current and potential beneficiaries of those services.

7. Management Bodies:

Management bodies will need to:

- demonstrate how they will apply the principles of SMNR and the five ways of working.
- have active management plans in place (or be developing them) for improving the condition of sites and connectivity with other habitats, including protected sites.
- have robust monitoring frameworks, these could be linked to target three, 30 by 30 reporting, potentially through the Nature Networks Map.
- be able to identify and maximise the economic, social, and environmental benefits from becoming an exemplar area.
- demonstrate learning, research, and innovation.
- have a programme in place (or be developing one) to support the active involvement of local communities with the areas.

- demonstrate effective governance and management is in place.
- have or be able to develop long-term funding models to sustain them in the future.

There are multiple types of management bodies and governance arrangements that could deliver and manage NREAs. Any new NREA management vehicle, initiative or funding round would need to include in its criteria a framework specification for the governance structures that would need to be in place to be able to manage and receive funding.

Ideally, partnerships would be given long term allocation of funding, perhaps through a rolling programme which could be made bespoke for each partnership according to the need or fitted around a particular management and delivery structure.

Management bodies would require the ability to employ staff, receive grants, raise and manage money, and potentially generate profit. Several options for management bodies are outlined below, increasing in complexity:

- A lead non-governmental organisation (NGO) of a partnership who can host and manage the area as a project and can be funded – for example, like the Nature Fund and the Sustainable Management Scheme.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), Partnership Agreement or collaboration led by an NGO, National Landscapes, National Park Authorities or Local Authorities where partners could receive grant funding, employ staff and manage finances. It could also, for example, like the Great Fen Project, include an agreed annual contribution from core partners for a defined period. It is important here that there is the ability to lever in additional funding from a variety of funding sources, including the private funders.
- A bespoke delivery body dedicated to delivering the objectives of an NREA. Such a body could be a separate Charitable Trust or a not-for-profit company, for example like “Pennine Prospects.” Either way, external funding, and the ability to generate a sustainable flow of funding or income from other services would be essential to justify setting up such a body, similarly a regeneration company would ideally need some assets to trade or services to sell.

How could NREAs be identified?

For NREAs to contribute to 30 by 30 they will need to be part of the network of sites counting towards the 30% target, which means that they need to be within or cover the management of protected sites, recognised OECMs, or both. The approach for identifying potential NREAs will need to firstly consider the extent to which they contribute towards the management of that network, including the OECM criteria and secondly their exemplary nature and opportunity to develop sustainable delivery solutions will be important for selecting them.

A range of approaches may be suitable for identifying NREAs, similar to the combined model for identifying OECMs (See Theme 3).

The combined model of using top-down and bottom-up approaches, could see NREAs being identified by stakeholders developing local propositions responding to set criteria such as those outlined above. This is similar to the processes used in Wales for existing and past

grant programmes such as the Nature Fund, Sustainable Management Scheme, and the Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being grants.

The current Nature Networks Programme seeks bids based on a series of national derived PENs and the Nature Networks Map. Another example includes the Gwent Green Grid partnership approach which seeks to deliver a regional Gwent nature recovery opportunity spatial dataset based upon the Nature Networks Map. In addition, the approach being pursued in the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park is based on a series of biogeographical spatial areas.

Distinguishing between NREAs and OECMs

Neither NREAs nor OECMs are terms recognised in existing legislation and as such are not statutory designations. OECMs, following the CBD criteria, must not include protected sites, such as SSSIs, but NREAs can cover both. Indeed, NREAs could form a larger 'umbrella' covering areas of OECMs and protected sites, which, as a result of scale, could potentially provide enhanced and more efficient management across much larger areas.

The potential role of NREAs in delivering 30 by 30

The group felt that whilst OECMs had an established and internationally recognised route for recognition as areas that could count towards the 30 by 30 target, NREAs do not and are more about developing and delivering exemplar ways of working within both protected sites and OECMs. As such, their potential role as demonstration or best practice delivery vehicles across Wales, including their potential to deliver at scale, perhaps across multiple OECMs and protected sites is their best role within the 30 by 30 context. The group also felt that much of the NREA thinking could be applied to assist in both the recognition and development of OECMs and the delivery of 30 by 30 as a whole.

Other roles for NREAs identified by the group included:

- Providing landscape scale delivery opportunities, as a management vehicle for collaborative action. For example, a catchment partnership.
- Providing focus for accelerating nature recovery, including managing, and restoring biodiversity, and as such contributing to Target 2, restoring 30% of all degraded ecosystems.
- Be a focus for tackling negative pressures.
- A tool to drive ecosystem scale action.
- A space to test innovative approaches and experimental powers.
- Provide a more flexible approach to nature recovery.
- Providing the potential for recognition, whether through awards, accreditation schemes, or national benchmark standard. An example is the Green Flag Award which has seen the improvement of management and quality of local parks and green spaces.
- A charter approach may also provide value, for example the French National Park system (www.calanques-parcnational.fr/en/charter-national-park).
- Provide the opportunity to deliver a wider range of benefits.
- Provide a buffer to protected sites, reducing pressures on them, and support opportunities for action in intervening land matrices, thus extending effective management and improving ecosystem resilience as a result of increased scale.

- Other roles could include a delivery mechanism regionally for PSB's Well-being Plans, Strategic Development Plans, Area Statements and locally to deliver Climate and Nature Emergency Strategies and Actions, Section 6 Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Forward Plans, Local Nature Recovery Action Plans, and Green Infrastructure Strategies and Action Plans.

Overall, the group felt that whilst the concept of NREAs is a very useful one, we needed to be careful at this stage not to conflate the identification, development, and recognition of NREAs with that of the more formal and internationally recognised approach for OECMs. Once this has been established, NREAs could be a way of recognising exemplary and innovative ways of working to showcase nature recovery in different contexts and to explore future funding models which is key to effective and sustainable delivery of 30 by 30. Further development work is proposed under a next steps workstream.