

The British Academy

# Identifying synergies and co-benefits at the intersection of nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector in rural regions

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# Abstract

Creativity, culture and nature are inseparable from humanity and from each other. Social structures have deep connections to ecologies of place, manifested and strengthened through creative and cultural practice. This is especially true of the economies of rural regions. Yet, in regional social and economic policy, these deep and powerful connections that have for eons bound people with nature are lost. At a time of ecological and climate breakdown, supporting nature's recovery through creative and cultural practice becomes not only imperative, but an opportunity for sustainable regional development. This paper illuminates the relationship between nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector by exploring three case studies in Cornwall, identifying key policy considerations and levers that could be scaled and transposed across other rural regions to stimulate co-benefits as part of an integrative regional development path. It argues that the creative and cultural sectors are often an untapped source of sustainable economic growth in rural regions, as well as being critical for, and deeply connected with, successful nature recovery.

**Keywords:** Nature recovery, creative industries, cultural sector, regional development

# Locating the intersection

Focusing on integrating nature recovery and the creative and cultural sectors in regional development policy presents an opportunity to generate co-benefits for people, place, local economies and nature. Whilst an emerging research agenda ties the success of rural economies to nature recovery,<sup>1</sup> so far, the focus is on traditional sectors such as tourism, farming, forest restoration and marine-based enterprises. Simultaneously, opportunities for developing the creative and cultural economy in rural regions are being recognised.<sup>2,3</sup>

Reed et al.<sup>4</sup> define nature recovery as ‘action taken to improve habitat quality, coverage and connections, to enhance biodiversity and species abundance, requiring a place-based, collaborative and community-focused approach.’ The shift from the language of ‘nature conservation’ and ‘preservation’ to ‘nature recovery’ reflects a reorientation towards a policy approach that can involve everyone and happen everywhere.<sup>5</sup> It thus accords with historic, evolving and entwined concerns of environmental and social justice,<sup>6</sup> including who has access to nature and can benefit from its renewal. This also aligns with the recognition that rural geographies contain an overlapping multiplicity of social spaces<sup>7</sup> and are a mixture of environments, connections with place, cultural practices, political economies, industrial histories and economic sectors.<sup>8</sup> With its focus on people and community, nature recovery should be viewed as an integral part of an economy that prioritises the needs of people and planet, of which culture and creativity are also vital components.<sup>9,10</sup>

This paper illuminates the relationship between nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector by exploring three case studies in Cornwall, identifying key policy considerations and levers that could be scaled and transposed across other rural regions to stimulate co-benefits as part of an integrative regional development path. It argues that the creative and cultural sectors are often an untapped source of sustainable economic growth in rural regions, as well as being critical for, and deeply connected with, successful nature recovery.

Empirical data is from interviews conducted as part of the University of Exeter’s Nature Recovery and Regional Development (NaRReD) project. Names have been pseudonymised.

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  - 10 Raworth, K. (2018). *Doughnut economics*. London: Random House.

# Seeking potential in the policy landscape

Discussion of nature recovery is shaped by a fast-changing policy landscape. In England, following Brexit, farmers and landowners are now incentivised to provide public environmental goods for public money via Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs), under the [2020 Agriculture Act](#). In addition, the [2021 Environment Act](#) mandates a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement from all development, and new nature markets have emerged to facilitate the trading of BNG credits between developers, investors and landowners.

Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC), a Defra pilot initiative led by the Environment Agency and delivered through local authorities, has aimed to develop investment-ready natural capital projects and finance mechanisms. As one of four pilot LINC projects, Cornwall Council has established [an online platform](#) that matches investors in natural capital and projects including for the delivery of BNG.<sup>11</sup>

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are also being developed by all 48 upper-tier local authorities in England. Under the [Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill 2025](#), LNRS will fall within the remit of new larger scale Strategic Authorities, raising questions about dislocation with lower tiers of government and hyper-local nature recovery efforts. The Bill also outlines how communities will have a greater ability to take control of public assets, but the emphasis is urban focused and there is currently no mention of asset transfer for nature recovery in urban, peri-urban or rural settings. Since land assets are critical for nature recovery, there is an opportunity to steer the Devolution agenda so that land assets of community value include environmental benefits as well as social. Multi-use assets provide a physical basis from which co-benefits, which are more than the sum of their parts, can flourish.<sup>12</sup>

In November 2024, the government announced its 10-year economic strategy, which includes a renewed focus on Local Growth Plans, to be led by upper-tier local authorities. Although an overarching objective of the new industrial strategy is to 'align sector plans with net zero and environmental objectives',<sup>13</sup> there is, so far, no detail on how this alignment will be achieved, including in individual sectors, nor in rural economies which shoulder a proportionally higher responsibility for nature recovery. That connection will need to be made at a regional level by local authorities in Local Growth Plans.

2021 was designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development<sup>14</sup> and the National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise has described rural creative industries as an 'untapped potential for UK economic recovery'<sup>15</sup> highlighting their growing importance in sustainable regional development. Traditionally centred in urban areas,<sup>16</sup> these industries are now being seen as vital to rural development and regeneration. Sector growth is currently supported by central and local government funding, a share of National Lottery funds,

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11 Local Investment in Nature Cornwall (2025). LINC: Cornwall's Natural Capital Exchange. Available at: <https://www.linc-cornwall.com/hub/home>

12 CLTS (Community Land Trusts Network) (2025). CLTN response to Defra Land Use Consultation. Available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vS60UtKjmT1CSD3SZoRkY2tB-qJYrMGuXPIH98esuGmdTEezjghuHmjAdtmv81rES77K8xLODpxC/pub> [Accessed 25 May 2025]

13 Department for Business and Trade (2024). Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy> [Accessed: 20 May 2025]

14 United Nations (UN) (2021). International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/years/international-year-creative-economy-sustainable-development-2021> [Accessed 20 May 2025].

15 NICRE (2021). Rural creative industries - an untapped potential for UK economic recovery. Available at: <https://nicre.co.uk/blog/2021/may/rural-creative-industries-an-untapped-potential-for-uk-economic-recovery/> [Accessed: 25 May 2025].

16 Bell, D. and Jayne, M. (2010). 'The creative countryside: Policy and practice in the UK rural cultural economy'

the Arts Council and creative industry tax reliefs.<sup>17</sup> In February 2025, the Government committed over £270 million to an 'Arts Everywhere Fund' including for venues, museums, libraries to 'cement Britain's place as cultural powerhouse'<sup>18</sup> although rural regions are not specified.

Funding for nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector is largely treated separately. One exception is Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme, which includes an emphasis on cultural heritage as well as nature recovery; successful projects have included establishing and connecting habitats, farming education and cultural heritage interpretation. Whilst there are no agricultural schemes outside of protected landscapes that have scope to combine these themes, Heritage Lottery funding invites integrated projects. In Scotland, the Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund is specifically designed to support co-benefits at this intersection, but like FiPL and Heritage Lottery Fund projects, the focus is on heritage, not the creative and cultural sectors more broadly. Therefore, there is an emerging policy opportunity to stimulate activity at the intersection of the creative and cultural sectors and nature recovery to support sustainable development in rural regions. The Cornwall case helps to frame this opportunity in more detail.

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17 Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) (2024). Cultural and creative industries: resources, funding, support and future. Available at: <https://post.parliament.uk/cultural-and-creative-industries-resources-funding-support-and-future/> [Accessed 27 May 2025].

18 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2025). Major investment to boost growth and cement Britain's place as cultural powerhouse. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-investment-to-boost-growth-and-cement-britains-place-as-cultural-powerhouse>

# The Cornwall context: Geography, governance and economy

Cornwall offers a compelling overarching case study for investigating the intersection of nature recovery and the rural creative and cultural economy. Like other rural areas in England, it has immense potential for nature recovery, as well as a strong, place-specific cultural identity that is closely tied to its natural environment. It is a rural region where over 70% of the land is farmed, yet it also features a uniquely diverse environment including moorlands, estuaries, cliffs, dunes and valleys. With 400 miles of coastline, Cornwall has one of the longest coastlines of any English county and a deep cultural connection to the sea, not least through its fishing industry.

Cornwall Council's Good Growth Plan 2025–35, supported by £186 million in Shared Prosperity Fund allocation, provides an explicit link between Cornwall's regional development ambitions, climate commitments and nature recovery.<sup>19</sup> The Plan identifies the creative and cultural sector as a core sector in the region's rural economy, alongside the agri-food and tourism sectors. A key focus of the strategy is on improving these three core sectors' existing impact via targeted support to increase productivity to realise their growth potential. Investment in the creative and cultural sectors is via a [Culture and Creative Investment Programme](#) and the current four-year scheme (2022–2026) includes £1.8m in grant funds for 20 creative and cultural organisations in the region. Distinguishing between the creative and cultural economy and the visitor economy is a key consideration in Cornwall Council's cultural strategy; whilst on one hand tourism is seen as additional income that helps prop up provision for local communities, more widely it is considered a fundamental economic benefit that can be derived from an enhanced natural environment.<sup>20</sup> Fostering synergies between creative and cultural economies, tourism and nature must include considerations around who benefits. In rural peripheral regions, with communities with high indices of multiple deprivation<sup>21</sup> in areas considered 'left behind',<sup>22</sup> sensitivity to issues of environmental and social justice is of critical importance.

There is a strong local tradition of place-sensitive arts performance in Cornwall that connects communities with the natural environment as well as being a draw for visitors. Notable outdoor theatre venues include the Minack Theatre in Porthcurno and Penlee Park Open Air Theatre in Penzance. Established touring companies such as Wildworks and Miracle Theatre specialise in bringing outdoor performances to these and other spaces. Creative Kernow, an arms-length body supported by Cornwall Council funds programmes such as Carn to Cove, which brings high-quality performances to village halls and a village cinema network. They also help to deliver grants to small community and music festivals, and support the regional film organisation, Screen Cornwall. Cornwall is also host to major creative-based businesses including fashion label, Finisterre, which is strongly rooted in the Cornish coastal environment, with a focus on environmentally sustainable outdoor and surf wear.

19 Cornwall Council (2025). Cornwall Good Growth Plan: 2024-2035. Available at: <https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/documents/s180037/Cornwall%20Good%20Growth%20Plan%20-%20Appendix%201.pdf>

20 Hall, C. M. (2019). Tourism and rewilding: an introduction – definition, issues and review. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 18(4), 297-308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2019.1689988>

21 Reed, J. et. al. (2025). 'Nature recovery and regional development'

22 Pike, A., Béal, V., Cauchi-Duval, N., Franklin, R., Kinossian, N., Lang, T., ...Velthuis, S. (2023). 'Left behind places': a geographical etymology. *Regional Studies*, 58(6), 1167-1179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2167972>

As a pilot area for LNRS, Cornwall Council was the first local authority to publish its strategy, receiving high commendation from Defra. Cornwall's LNRS highlights how restoring and enhancing nature provides nature-based solutions that underpin the success of the county. Aspects of natural capital that relate directly or indirectly to the creative and cultural sector include: inspiration for stories, songs and art; heritage, culture and sense of place; connection to nature; jobs, skills and investment; happy, healthy communities; recreation and tourism. There is growing recognition of the socio-economic value of nature in Cornwall's local context as well as an appreciation of the role of the creative and cultural sector in communicating and realising that value.

Cornwall thus offers a valuable lens through which to explore regional development, rural economies, nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector, owing to its geography, history, cultural identity, policy context and local economy.

# The creative and cultural sector in Cornwall: A critical and receptive sector for nature recovery

Place-sensitive connections between the environment, culture and rural economies are historically rooted and central to emerging development paths linking nature recovery with the creative and cultural sector.

As Paul, an officer at Cornwall Council explained:

'A recurring theme for us, which isn't unique to Cornwall...is that because of the geology here, you get particular industries, a particular ecology, and from that a culture [and traditions] stemming from those industries including agriculture.'

Nature continues to influence and inspire industry, especially creative practitioners and businesses. As Dan from Leap, a local design and impact agency, said:

'Nature has always been paramount...if you ask any creative in Cornwall, they are inspired daily by their surroundings...they have a real affinity to nature. So many people make the journey from cities for that reason, because it helps inform [their work].'

As such, the creative and cultural sector is especially receptive to nature and eager to support its recovery. 'They're a receptive sector...super receptive...more than super receptive: they actively want sustainability embedded in their work and for it to be a feature of their work,' Paul said. If this energy can be captured and cultivated, Cornwall can become a leading rural and pro-nature creative economy.

A strength of creative and cultural practitioners is in visualising and storytelling future scenarios to spark public imagination. As Paul said: 'People quite often can't imagine places changing, but cultural organisations are really good at showing how spaces can be used differently...and you can apply that to a valley or any environment'. This has been of vital importance in the development of the county's LNRS.

This context raises broader questions relevant to other rural areas:

- a) In what settings can synergies between nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector take place?
- b) How can policymakers help build capacity in the creative and cultural sector to support nature recovery?
- c) How can nature recovery projects better utilise the creative and cultural sector?

The following projects in Cornwall provide insight into these questions and offer models for scaling place-sensitive sustainable regional development at the intersection of nature recovery and the creative and cultural sectors. The examples explore how mixed-use land assets, an integrative policy focus, cross-sector collaboration, community engagement and combined cultural and nature recovery projects are being developed in Cornwall that are generating co-benefits for people and nature, realising the potential for a creative and cultural rural economy that is both inspired by and inspires action for nature.

## 1. Mixed-use land assets in peri-urban spaces: Newquay Orchard

Community-managed land assets should be recognised as social and cultural infrastructure, contributing to the richness and resilience of communities.<sup>23</sup> Encouraging mixed use of community assets – such as combining nature recovery with creative and cultural activities – broadens inclusivity by engaging a wider cross-section of the community. Peri-urban land offers the strongest potential for mixed-use projects, as it provides both the space needed for nature recovery and accessibility to urban populations via sustainable transport options.

Newquay Orchard is a not-for-profit social enterprise situated on seven acres of Duchy of Cornwall land in the peri-urban zone of Newquay – one of the UK's most deprived areas. Just a 15-minute walk from the town centre, the site includes a community growing space, market garden, amphitheatre, makers space, indoor and outdoor classrooms, and a community building with a café and co-working area. The project offers vocational training, adult education, volunteering and wellbeing activities, alongside creative and cultural programming. The site is recognised as being integral to Cornwall's LNRS, including as being a project that can be supported via the LINC platform.<sup>24</sup>



Image 1: The main building at Newquay Orchard surrounded by wildflower meadows in bloom. Photo Credit: Georgina Treloar.

Creative programming has included engaging with partners to deliver dance workshops, community art projects and music and theatre performances in the amphitheatre. A recent project led by Alma Arts involved the collaborative creation of three monoliths, which will be installed in locations around Newquay, including the Orchard, the old town and in Newquay's oldest known settlement, the Bronze Age Barrowfields. Each monolith is made from casts of natural and human-made objects – such as plants, geological features and waste materials – collected by members of the community and skilfully assembled into the final work by a local artist who is employed on the project. The artwork symbolises the community's connection to place and landscape and, as a piece of co-created public art at Newquay Orchard, will serve as a grounding presence – inviting people to explore and participate in the many layers of creativity, culture and nature that are rooted in the site.

23 British Academy (2023). *Space for community: Strengthening our social infrastructure*. London: British Academy.

24 <https://defraenvironment.blog.gov.uk/2025/07/07/locally-rooted-community-shaped-launch-of-the-isle-of-wight-and-cornwall-isles-of-scilly-local-nature-recovery-strategies/>

By integrating creativity, education and ecological restoration in a peri-urban site, Newquay Orchard exemplifies the power of mixed-use land assets to support community-led projects. The co-location of functions enables cross-pollination, where nature and creativity are inseparable from community, providing further inspiration and engagement from practitioners and participants alike.

Although Newquay Orchard is situated on Duchy land, it illustrates the wider potential of public asset transfer – supported by the Devolution agenda – to enable similar initiatives. Interest in this approach is growing, and as a Cornwall Council officer observed: 'I'm sure some will be looking to what's happened at Newquay. I think there's a lot of interest in that.'

Public asset transfer (e.g. of council-owned land) can take various forms: full transfer of ownership, long-term leases, or municipal-public partnerships, in which local councils and community organisations co-deliver projects. Whilst the Framework for Assets of Community Value (ACV) currently supports the protection of assets with existing community significance, it does not extend to acquiring new assets for the purpose of creating value, such as through nature recovery. Examples of innovative governance models – such as those in [Barcelona's Citizen Assets Programme](#) – demonstrate the potential of municipal-public collaboration, though, as Degan and García<sup>25</sup> note, tensions may arise between top-down governance structures and community-led participatory approaches.<sup>26</sup>

Policymakers might consider:

- Supporting the transfer (ownership or management) of publicly owned peri-urban land to community-led, mixed-use projects that integrate cultural and creative activities with nature recovery, with a funding programme to support combined projects.
- Identifying opportunities within the English Devolution agenda to support and legitimise the development of such multi-functional community assets.
- Exploring and formalising collaborative governance models, developing a flexible framework to support various types of asset transfer – from full community ownership to co-management arrangements.

## **2. Building cross-sector capacity for nature communications, engagement and investment: A Sustainability Action Plan for the Creative and Cultural Sector**

Policy should support stronger intra-organisational cooperation including dialogue between culture and nature teams within local authorities to identify and create co-benefits for nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector. Local authorities can act as sector intermediaries connecting the needs and objectives of the local creative and cultural sector with national funders and policymakers. They also play a key role in marrying national environmental objectives with local industry.

As part of Cornwall Council's Culture and Creative Investment Programme, a ringfenced grant was awarded to Leap, a Truro-based design and impact agency, to produce a Sustainability Action Plan for the Creative and Cultural Sector in Cornwall. It arose from local policymakers' recognition of the strong desire within the sector to embed sustainability in creative and cultural practice. Cornwall Council officer, Paul, said: 'that absolutely fits with what's coming back from people [in the sector]: they absolutely see the environment as part of their work – it's not something to be separated out.'

25 Degen, M. and García, M. (2012). 'The transformation of the 'Barcelona model': an analysis of culture, urban regeneration and governance'. *International journal of urban and regional research*, 36(5), pp.1022-1038.

26 Fransman, J. (2024). 'Engaging local communities with the governance' in British Academy (ed.) *Social and cultural infrastructure for people and policy: Discussion Papers of social and cultural infrastructures*. London: British Academy.

Founded 20 years ago by a former Eden Project design director, Leap became the UK's first B-Corp certified design agency in 2015 and has since championed the triple bottom line – people, planet and profit – across the creative sector in Cornwall. Leap has played a pioneering role in regional sustainability movements, helping launch and support the [Sustainable Creative Charter](#) and the [Better Business Act](#).

Developing the Sustainability Action Plan involved a comprehensive engagement programme led by Leap. They brought together creative practitioners and organisations from across Cornwall through an in-person event designed to foster shared learning, break down barriers to isolation and build confidence in taking positive environmental action. Pottery studios, theatre companies, film makers and painters contributed to the session, providing input into the Plan, which features a five-step sustainability framework, along with practical resources, best practices and an online platform for sharing stories and tools. Another participant was [Plant One Cornwall CIC](#), a local woodland reforestation organisation that matches investors in nature recovery with landowners, also delivering the tree planting and long-term management for the resulting projects. They are deeply invested in creative engagement with nature recovery, rooting it in deep cultural significance, for example by commissioning a 12-foot Green Man puppet, hosting film nights and building a cultural understanding around Celtic rainforests.

This networking between local authorities, creative and cultural practitioners, and on-the-ground nature recovery organisations shows how the creative and cultural sector can engage with on-the-ground nature recovery organisations to help stimulate new nature markets and, ultimately, nature recovery. Support from local authorities can help stimulate growth at the intersection of nature, creativity and culture. This support might include:

- Place-based nature communication, literacy and engagement programmes tailored to the creative and cultural sectors that also serve to build and strengthen networks between creative and cultural practitioners and nature recovery organisations.
- To capture the enthusiasm for collaboration between these sectors, there is potential to create a dedicated subsection within LINC (Local Investment in Nature Capital) where investment from creative and cultural practitioners and businesses could be aggregated for on-the-ground nature recovery projects.
- BNG could also be considered in a more flexible way, where it is integrated with social co-benefits supported through creative and cultural practice.
- The role of the creative and cultural sector for nature recovery should be embedded in local growth strategies and across respective teams within local authorities.
- This important intersection should also be included in discussions within local economic forums and Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) to align regional strategy with the national policy goal of integrating environmental sustainability within industrial strategy.

### **3. Place-sensitive projects and programmes: Cornwall National Landscape**

Nature recovery at scale is only possible with community buy-in, including with farmers and landowners. Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) is an effective funding mechanism that supports creative engagement with both tangible nature recovery and its cultural significance. However, its scope is currently limited to protected landscapes and its long-term future remains uncertain. Heritage Lottery funding also supports this intersection, and the Cornwall National Landscape team has successfully secured funding from both sources to promote nature recovery and foster community involvement.

Several small-scale projects led by the Cornwall National Landscape team and funded by Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Heritage Lottery funding offer strong examples of how creative and cultural initiatives can be meaningfully integrated with on-the-ground nature recovery efforts. These projects also foster positive community engagement with nature – particularly with farmers and landowners, who play a crucial role in delivering nature recovery at scale in rural areas, and with people who are traditionally considered underserved by the protected landscape, including those experiencing multiple indices of deprivation. Emily, from the National Landscape team said they use art, ‘...to break down barriers between different groups of people’.

Recent FiPL-funded projects at this intersection include a comedy night and film screening around the theme of regenerative agriculture in Pensilva, and a communal singing project with the farming community of Bodmin. ‘Don’t Soil Yourself’ was an event combining a film screening of 6 Inches of Soil, Q&A discussions with soil experts, comedy and locally sourced food to explore themes of regenerative farming, climate and nature resilience. Held in rural Pensilva, near Liskeard, it attracted around 150 attendees, including local residents, farmers and land managers – many from economically deprived areas.

By incorporating hyper-local comedy, the event resonated deeply with the audience and broke down barriers around nature, climate and farming discussions. It proved particularly effective in engaging ‘harder-to-reach’ farmers and smallholders who, by attending the event, also learned about funding opportunities through the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme (FiPL) which could support their operations and on-the-ground nature recovery work. Where ELM schemes are often considered too rigid by farmers and landowners, FiPL offers greater flexibility to support unique, place-sensitive projects that enhance biodiversity, are culturally meaningful to communities and integrate well with the needs of individual farm businesses. For Emily, from the National Landscapes team, ‘It really worked...it’s built relationships between farmers, land managers and as well as local people...which is great.’

Farmers and landowners also took part in ‘Natural Beauty and the Beast’, a creative pilot project aimed at reconnecting communities with the Bodmin Moor landscape through music and communal singing. Led by a local ethno-musicologist and supported by local arts organisation Into Bodmin and intangible cultural heritage specialists Lowender, the project used song to explore local identity, reduce loneliness and build a stronger sense of community and place amongst the farming community. It resulted in a co-created shanty that celebrates the moor’s distinct character. The event also had positive economic ripple effects – the local pub that hosted it reported its busiest night since before the pandemic. Subject to funding, the project is looking to run similar events with working fishing communities on the southwest coast including Mousehole and Newlyn. Although the connection to nature recovery is indirect, as Emily from the National Landscapes team suggested: ‘It’s very simple and I don’t know how you prove this, but my general belief is that happy people do good things.’ This includes a proclivity towards making positive decisions for nature in farming practices.

A third example of the National Landscapes team leading a project that combines creativity, culture and nature recovery is the Monumental Improvement Plan, funded by the National Heritage Lottery fund, which is focused on removing 38-40 scheduled monuments from the Heritage at Risk register. This has involved combining heritage restoration with nature recovery with a heavy emphasis on using creative and digital tools for interpretation and public engagement. It has employed the skills of virtual reality specialists, drone footage producers, animators and other creative interpretation and digital practitioners from within the regional economy. Farm plans were developed for landowners, supporting best practices for preserving heritage alongside biodiversity and ecosystem services and public access was also granted with permission of the landowners. The project illustrates how cultural heritage, environmental restoration and creative practice can work together to produce impactful, place-based outcomes.

Emily highlighted how the project represented a 'melding of creative imaginative work with tangible practical outputs on the ground that have created an accessible resource for people...which is hugely, hugely exciting.'

With the imperative for scaled nature recovery in rural areas, policymakers might consider:

- Sustaining and expanding funding opportunities that incentivise integrated approaches to creativity, culture and nature.
- The continuation of FiPL is critical at the national level, but a complementary scheme should be developed for areas outside Protected Landscapes and established as a more fixed and predictable model than what Lottery funding offers.
- Local authorities can play a key role by supporting integrated creative-culture-nature projects through ringfenced funding programmes.
- Integrated on-the-ground projects could also be more visibly promoted through LINC, potentially via a dedicated subsection for the culture and creative sector.

# Conclusion: Fostering a nature-culture economy in rural regions

The case studies demonstrate the importance of creativity and culture for engagement with and delivery of nature recovery. Far from being 'soft', or 'nice-to-have' elements of nature recovery work, these projects show that creative and cultural skills and practitioners are vital for nature recovery. The economic, social and environmental benefits of stimulating growth at this intersection are more than the sum of its parts. Policy must recognise that nature recovery is a people-focussed enterprise, and that creativity and culture connect people to nature in a way that recognises humanity's inseparability from nature, but also its economic reliance on healthy and flourishing ecosystems.

Through investigating three case studies within the Cornwall context, this paper makes key policy suggestions to amplify synergies and generate co-benefits between nature recovery and the creative and cultural sector. These relate to communication and engagement, new nature markets, programme integration and asset transfer. Policy should support place-based environmental communications, literacy and engagement programmes tailored to the sector. Local growth strategies must explicitly recognise the sector's contribution, ensuring representation in Local Nature Partnerships and economic forums. Investment mechanisms like LINC could be enhanced to include a dedicated stream to attract sector-specific investors and showcase integrated nature-culture projects. Cross-sector funding should be sustained and expanded – beyond Protected Landscapes – through schemes that incentivise collaborative approaches and accommodate a wider scope of creative and cultural practice. Local authorities can strengthen this by ringfencing funds for combined initiatives and facilitating the transfer or management of peri-urban public land to community-led, multi-use projects that combine creative practice with ecological stewardship. The English Devolution agenda should be steered towards the transfer of multi-use community assets that support nature recovery and creative and cultural practice and events.

The creative and cultural sector reflects but also shapes relationships with place and nature in rural regions. Moreover, there is a strong willingness within the sector to engage with environmental sustainability in and beyond its work. It is thus a powerful but underused ally in nature recovery.

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