

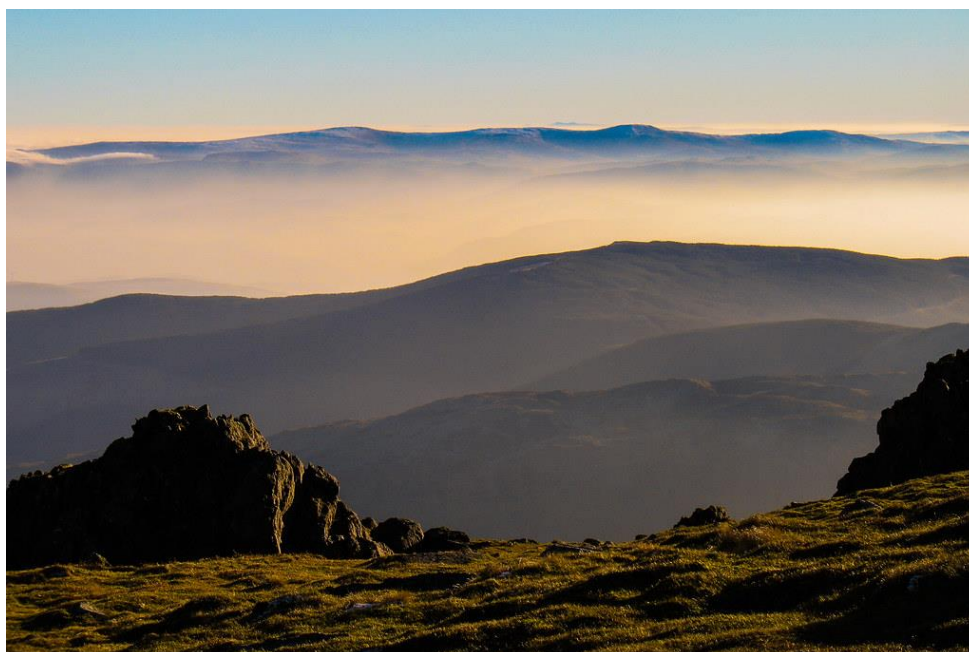


NETHERWOOD SUSTAINABLE FUTURES
Sustainable Governance Policy Practice



Summit to Sea/O'r Mynydd i'r Môr (S2S)

INDEPENDENT MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE SUMMIT TO SEA PROJECT 2017-20



October 2020

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Commissioned by Summit to Sea Partners
Funded by Coed Cadw/Woodland Trust, WWF and Rewilding Britain

1.BACKGROUND

1.1 In January 2020, the Summit to Sea Project commissioned a consortium of Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, Netherwood Sustainable Futures and Well-being Planner to undertake an interim review of the project from the period 2017-20.

1.2 The Summit to Sea Project O'r Mynydd i'r Môr (S2S) began in 2017, as a range of stakeholders came together to explore the possibilities for a large-scale ecological restoration project in the Pumlumon area. A partnership led by Rewilding Britain subsequently applied to the Endangered Landscapes Programme (ELP) for funding to establish a dynamic ecosystem from mountaintops and continuous nature-rich zone from the top of Pumlumon - the highest point in mid- Wales – down through wooded valleys to the Dyfi Estuary and out into Cardigan Bay. Its aim was to work with local communities and landowners in establishing this zone, and work towards a wide range of ecological, economic and social outcomes¹, including ecological restoration, nature-based enterprise and infrastructure. The project was funded by for a 5- year period, with a budget of £3.4 million pounds. It had a wide range of original partners.²

1.3 S2S was launched by the funders as part of a collective launch of other ELP funded projects in October 2018 and started in January 2019. During late 2018 and 2019 the project experienced a high level of criticism from members of the local community, including landowners, resulting in some partners withdrawing from the partnership, and limited progress in fulfilling its objectives. In late 2019, as a result of this, the S2S partnership was re-established with different core partner arrangements, new staff arrangements, and an altered approach was agreed in 2020, consisting of a two-year project development phase, again funded by ELP. This phase is intended to build stronger relationships with the areas' constituents and potential beneficiaries, to plan for future delivery of outcomes. S2S's current core partners³ are keen to learn from their experiences of the project so far to inform their work going forward.

1.4 This research is focused the development phase of the project in 2017/2018 and the implementation phase during 2019/20. The purposes of this review are as follows, to:

- evaluate the successes and drawbacks of the project so far to identify what has contributed to, and impeded the project aims
- evaluate the governance and partnership contributions
- evaluate project conception and management of the project
- recommend areas for improvement to inform the next phase of the S2S project, including learning from S2S for similar landscape level projects

This report summarises this work and provides recommendations for the project going forward,

1.5 It is important to note:

- that this evaluation focuses primarily on the internal workings and management of the project, and how this has impacted on the ability of partners to work towards projects' goals.
- at the same time, separately from this evaluation, S2S project staff are engaging with local communities to understand how they can work more effectively externally as part of a revised Project Planning Phase 2020-22⁴ which is currently being implemented.

¹ The original aims of the S2S project are included in Appendix A.

² Original Partners were Rewilding Britain; Montgomery Wildlife Trust; Wales Wild Land Foundation; Natural Resources Wales; RSPB Cymru; Woodland Trust; Vincent Wildlife Trust; Marine Conservation Society; Whale & Dolphin Conservation, Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC (Gwynedd Council) ; Wildlife Trust South & West Wales and Waterloo Foundation and EcoDyfi

³ Current partners are RSPB Cymru; Woodland Trust; Montgomery Wildlife Trust; Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC (Gwynedd Council); Whale and Dolphin Conservation; Marine Conservation Society and WWF-UK

⁴ Please see details of Project Planning Phase 2020-22 in Appendix C

- it should be noted, here and in the main body of the report, that the findings relate mainly to the terrestrial elements of the project.
- has been overseen by a Working Group made up of S2S partner representatives who provide the evaluation team with guidance on the documentary evidence, 1-1 interviews and workshops that have been used to research the issues outlined above.

1.6 This is an independent evaluation by a team who have a wide range of experience in evaluating programmes at national, regional and local levels across Wales⁵. They have used their experience to understand different people's views, insights and learning from across the project partnership, to review the documentary evidence, and explore through workshops, the key learning from those who have been engaged in the project.

1.7 This analysis has sought to distinguish between the different stages of the project: inception of the project during 2017/18; the bid process in 2018; the S2S launch 2018/19 and its aftermath; year one of implementation during 2019; redesign of the project during 2019/20; the current Project Planning phase 2020/22; and the future beyond 2022. It is very important to note that this is not a chronological history of what has gone in the project, or an overall review, judgement or verdict of its value or worth – to date, but is instead an evaluation focused on the issues outlined in 1.4 to inform future planning and delivery of S2S.

1.8 It is also worth noting that the evaluation took place in summer 2020, during Covid restrictions, over a short timeframe with a limited budget and deadline of the end of September for completion. The evaluation team are extremely grateful for the effort and commitment from existing partners and especially individuals involved in the project in the past and present, who contributed to the survey, workshops and interviews and provided open and candid views on S2S, to inform its future progress.

1.9 All Summit to Sea partners, past and present are keen to learn from the first two years of the project. This report is written to support this, lessons learnt for partners and funders are drawn out throughout the document and in the Executive Summary.

1.10 The report is structured as follows:

Section 1 – BACKGROUND provides the context for the evaluation	2
Section 2 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY outlines key findings and recommendations for partners to consider and take forward.	4
Section 3- EVALUATION METHODOLOGY describes how the evaluation as undertaken	7
Section 4 –GOVERNANCE reflects on the way governance approaches developed throughout the project and suggests ways in which governance can be developed going forward, both within the partnership and the locality.	9
Section 5 –PROJECT MANAGEMENT– reflects on project management approaches 2017-20, from conception to re-establishing the project, what can be learned from this, and ways in which this can be improved in the future	14
Section 6 – PARTNERSHIP WORKING– reflects on what can be learned from the way partners worked together from 2017-20, for both the S2S project and how this can inform similar multi-partner landscape scale projects of this type.	18
Section 7- RECOMMENDATIONS– on the basis of analysis in Sections 4-6, the evaluation team provide recommendations to S2S for improving governance, project management and partnership working as part of the project planning phase 2020-22 and in future activity in the area.	25

⁵ Dr. Alan Netherwood provided methodological input, carried out analysis at each stage of the project and took the lead in writing the final report; Dafydd Thomas supported data collection through workshop design and facilitation; and Paul Renfro and Jetske Germing from Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum provided project management support and data analysis. Brief details of their collective experience are included in Appendix D.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section provides an overall summary of our findings in relation to governance, project management and partnership working, together with key learning for projects of this type and set of recommendations which are designed to strengthen Summit to Sea's work going forward.

The broad **findings** and **learning** for Summit to Sea are as follows:

- 2.1 there was not enough clarity on what the S2S project would contribute to the area, or the 'proposition' to local communities and potential beneficiaries. It is essential that this becomes clearer through the Project Planning Phase 2020-22. This includes the potential economic and social benefits of the project as well as ecological benefits.
- 2.2 not enough consideration and time was given to the ways in which local stakeholders and partners could collaborate to design and deliver the project together. The Project Planning Phase needs to establish more transparent and appropriate ways to do this.
- 2.3 the governance of the project should have been better planned by all partners to: establish the project; plan forward and engage local stakeholders. Project governance needs to be re-organised and developed 2020-22 to support local stakeholder and partner collaboration going forward
- 2.4 the approach to project management, risk management and communication was not appropriate or sufficient for a project of this type and complexity. Since RSPB has taken over as the lead partner this has improved and that all partners, and stakeholders should contribute to improve their project management, risk management and communication.
- 2.5 that partner organisations were unclear of their responsibilities and roles in the early stages of the project and while this is becoming clearer, work needs to be done to both; establish a better mutual understanding between partners and stakeholders on what their roles and responsibilities are; and for partners to regularly reflect on their roles and how they are evolving as the project progresses.
- 2.6 that a complex network of local stakeholders and projects should have been engaged better in planning project delivery. This network needs to be better understood as part of the Project Planning Phase and an integral part of planning for post 2022. Drawing on the skills of this local network will be essential to the project going forward.

There is also wider learning for partners and funders of **similar projects** the way that they establish, communicate, deliver and learn from projects of this type:

- 2.7 the need for a pre-application stage for major funding schemes, for potential applicants to establish an understanding of local networks, engage with stakeholders, so that ideas and partnerships can evolve at their own pace
- 2.8 this type of pre-application stage would help to ensure that key actors, including land-owners, farmers and those involved with the marine environment are not only bought into the objectives of the project, but are part of its governance and delivery.

- 2.9 that this type of activity needs funding its own right if co-design and co-production are to be meaningful. It is noted that ELP and Summit to Sea have recognised this, and this is one of the main objectives of the current Project Planning Phase.
- 2.10 the need for partners and funders to work closely together to understand the particular characteristics of the place that may benefit from funding, in a way that is respectful of local contexts, understanding the unique, social, economic, cultural and ecological characteristics of 'place'.
- 2.11 for funders and partners to work *together* to understand risks, opportunities and potential long timescales for delivering complex outcomes and to recognise this as part for reporting mechanisms and ongoing management of the project. This would support a collaborative approach to funding, rather a transactional approach between funder and funded.
- 2.12 It is important to recognise that impact of these types of projects are not just about ecological delivery on the ground, but also provide wider social, cultural, economic benefits which contribute to sustainable development. Funders should provide support to partners to develop innovative ways of capturing this added benefit to the locality and communities engaged in projects of this type.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings and learning we make the following recommendations

R1 -The Project Planning phase needs to bring a **Clarity of Purpose** to the Summit to Sea project. We recommend the project develops a clear and mutual understanding of the benefits of this project between project partners and the local stakeholders. S2S needs to define a clearer 'proposition' to the community and local stakeholders in land and marine environments, making it clear on how collaboration will benefit them, their community and nature. Their role in this 'proposition' should be transparent and agreed with them.

R2 that a **Project Partnership Board** is established to ensure that the project partners can engage with and be guided by local expertise. This should include project partner representatives, representatives from local landowners, marine interests, local economic and social perspectives, non-government organisations and relevant officers and members of Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Powys Councils. If the project is to be successful, building relationships with these representatives will be key.

R3 that a **Management Group** is established to provide oversight, scrutiny, direction to project delivery during 2020-22, and to establish appropriate management for the project post 2022. This Group should support project staff (and the Delivery Group – see below) undertake risk management, guide communications, provide oversight of financial issues, report to funders, and undertake advocacy on behalf of S2S. This should be made up of project staff, be supported by specialist staff from partner organisations and be supported by local representatives with particular skills or insight which would support the management of project. This group should remain throughout 2020-22 and a similar group established for activities post 2022.

R4 that a **Delivery Group** is established which consists of the project team, and staff from organisations working at a community level in the area. This Group would support the activities outlined in the Project Planning phase including: local community engagement; habitat mapping; strategy development, engagement of relevant owners/stewards and resource users; work on nature based enterprises and supply chains; identification of potential interventions. This is where specialist local knowledge feeds into S2S on a practical level. This group supports the day to day running of the project

R5 Responsibilities and Resources We recommend that S2S, in its next phases, encourages partners (and stakeholders) to be specific about what their role and responsibilities are and what resources and expertise can be brought to the project and that this is reviewed regularly. Being explicit about this help to manage resources, skills and expertise, managing expectations and avoiding misunderstanding.

R6 that a **Risk Management System** is established that covers both strategic risks to the project, and management risks to project delivery. This should not be used as a tick box exercise, but should be used as a management tool to help partners and staff to plan, engage, and determine the way forward for the project through the Project Planning phase, as well as deal with any risks that may occur 2020-22 .

R7 the Project Planning Phase should undertake a **Skills Analysis** to determine the skills required and those available locally to establish the next phase of project. This should focus on practical, management and strategic skills. This skills focus should form a key part of the business case for S2S going forward.

R8 the Project Planning Phase should include an assessment of the potential **Economic Impact** of the project to determine how its activity can support the local areas monetary and non-monetary economies, both in the community, for local people with land holdings and land managers This assessment should form a key part of the business case for S2S going forward.

R9 - S2S staff should receive training in **Co-design and Co-production** to apply to the Project Planning Phase and, in turn to use this in their work with stakeholders, Programme Board, Management and Delivery Groups. As a result, partners and stakeholders in the locality can understand the benefits of inclusive approaches to working and can apply this going forward as part of the Project Planning phase 2021-22 and beyond. This will build capacity for collaborative work in the area.

R7 S2S should adopt an approach of **Reflexive Governance**⁶ as the Project Planning phase continues 2020-22, so that the Project Partnership Board regularly reflects on the way partners are working together, whether current approaches are causing any problems (or opportunities), and to identify ways to improve partners' support to the project as a whole.

⁶ **Reflexive Governance**– a more self-aware and critical mode of thinking that is open to multiple perspectives, continually questioning the ends and means of how a policy /project is delivered. Stirling, A. (2006) Precaution, foresight, sustainability: Reflection and reflexivity in the governance of science and technology, in: J.-P. Voss, D. Bauknecht & R. Kemp (Eds) Reflexive Governance for Sustainable Development, pp. 225–272 (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).

3- EVALUATION METHODOLOGY describes how the evaluation was undertaken.

3.1 The evaluation team liaised with a Working Group from S2S to establish the methodology at the inception stage of the commission. This includes the following key steps:

3.2 A bilingual **online MeetingSphere Survey** of key informants⁷: (24th July-11th August 2020), asking questions on partners' involvement; how S2S supported their work; project design; governance; management; partnership work; improvements; benefits⁸. This information was brought together, sense checked with the working group and shared as part of an online workshop (see below). The evaluation team received 130 individual comments to these questions.

3.3 **Documentary Analysis** from material shared by the S2S team of key management documents, includes meeting minutes, internal progress reports, reports to funders, communications material, bid documents. This material was analysed to understand approaches to S2S's governance, project management and partnerships in parallel with the Survey and Workshops. This material has been referred to throughout the commission.

3.4 **Online Workshop#1** on 21st August for stakeholders invited through S2S to: review survey feedback and further investigate governance, management and partnership working through asking questions:

- what did you agree with, disagree with and what is missing from the survey results?
- what worked well?
- what did not work so well?
- and how should workshop#2 be used to inform the way forward for S2S?

11 people took part in the workshop, not including the evaluation team. Welsh Language facilitation was offered. Reaction to survey data presented to participants was that it was an accurate reflection of their experiences with the project. They were then invited to explore what they agreed with, disagreed with and gaps. This data was collated using MeetingSphere, sorted and shared as part of Workshop #2

3.5 **Online Workshop#2** on 27th August for stakeholders to review the material from Workshop# 1; and to explore the following questions:

- what have we learnt from S2S for similar projects of this type (governance; project management; partnerships)?
- how can we use this information to inform the current and future work within the Project Planning phase of S2S?

12 people took part in the workshop, not including the evaluation team. Welsh Language facilitation was offered. The data was collated using MeetingSphere during and after the meeting and sorted to be used as part of the analysis in this report.

3.6 **1-1 interviews** were offered to two groups of people: those that felt more comfortable to share their experiences 1-1; and representatives of the past and present project partnership⁹. 12 interviews were carried out in total during August and September 2020. These were 1-1.5 hour semi-structured interviews focusing on: the design stage of S2S; the launch and year one for the project; project delivery; governance; leadership; partnership working; re-design of the project, current activity and looking forward. Notes were taken and these remain confidential to

⁷ List of key informants: A list of 42 individuals provided by the S2S Working Group.

⁸ List of questions asked at each stage of the project are in Appendix E

⁹ Including: RSPB, Woodland Trust; Montgomery Wildlife Trust; WWF Cymru; Rewilding Britain; Eco-dyfi Partnership; Nearly Wild; Gwynedd Council; Whale & Dolphin Conservation; S2S staff past and present.

the evaluation team. Any material gathered has been used as part of the overall findings and comments are non-attributable.

3.7 S2S Steering Group key findings and recommendations were shared with the S2S Steering Group in an online meeting on 23rd September for information, to seek any additional observations from them. Advice was sought on how to frame the final report in the best way to support the Project Planning phase 2020-22.

3.6 Analysis and Reporting: the evaluation team have used the above material to provide an overview of the data from each of the stages above in Sections 4, 5 and 6 of this report. They have drawn on this to evaluate the past approaches to governance, project management and partnership to make recommendations to the S2S partnership for work going forward in these areas. In this analysis, it has been very important to distinguish between the different stages of the project: inception of the project during 2017/18; the bid process in 2018; the S2S launch 2018/19 and its aftermath; year one of implementation during 2019; redesign of the project in 2019/ 20; the current Project Planning phase up to 2022; and the future beyond 2022. The analysis has sought to reflect this timeline and evolution within the analysis as much as possible. This final report was completed on October 2nd, 2020.

4 –S2S GOVERNANCE reflects on the way governance approaches developed throughout the project and suggests ways in which governance can be developed going forward, both within the partnership and the locality.

4.1 In this section we refer to 'governance' as "*the way that an organisation or project is managed at the highest level, and the systems for doing this*"¹⁰ By this we mean the overall purpose of S2S, who is involved, the management structures that are put in place to oversee and deliver the project. Our task in the evaluation is to help the S2S project to reflect on its' approach to governance both in the past and looking forward.

4.2 This section focuses on how the people we engaged in the evaluation viewed different aspects of the projects' governance. We draw on the data to outline what they see as key issues going forward. Within this analysis we make our own observations on this data and bring together number of key recommendations for the S2S project to inform the Project Planning phase. S2S can use the analysis in this section as a tool to ensure they continue to develop good practice in governance.

The survey, workshop questions, documentary analysis and interviews produced observations on

- the purpose of S2S
- the S2S partnership
- the management structures
- governance – looking forward

4.3 The purpose of S2S

We gathered much evidence from those involved in the project that questioned the clarity of purpose of S2S, despite the fact that many had signed up as partners and offered to support the project steering group. Criticism of the overall aims of the project were focused on the following

- an absence of a clear message, aims, objectives, methods and long-term outcomes
- a lack of clear objectives and activity on economic and social side
- too much emphasis on ecological benefits rather than community benefits
- lack of clarity what is meant by nature-based interventions
- unclear on what the role of different partners would be
- confusion of what would be delivered by who
- confusion on who the beneficiaries were likely to be and what they might get out of the project, including the financial contributions to some partners
- unclear benefits to landowners and the potential economic benefits
- lack of clarity on specific types of interventions on land and in the marine environment
- unclear on the management structures of the project and how the local community could get involved in this
- tension between partners and funders expectations on timescales for delivering objectives and the need for co-design

While we understand that part of the purpose of S2S was to work collaboratively to determine some of the above, we have found that much of the promotional material and documentation associated with the bid, launch and post launch was unclear about exactly what would be happening in the locality, and how the project would work with local stakeholders. We agree with many contributors to the research that the 'offer' to the local community and beneficiaries should have been much clearer, and that this vagueness exacerbated local opposition and the problems experienced by the project post January 2019.

¹⁰ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

We have also understood the local context that this project was being launched in, the negative effect of the book *Feral* by George Monbiot, the perceived association of RWB with the author and the difficulties in achieving a collective understanding with local stakeholders on the purposes of S2S, which we explore in later sections of this report. It is clear to us that much more careful and locally sensitive planning and communication could have better explained the purposes of S2S to local communities and communities of interest, to engage with local opposition and supporters of the project earlier and that a more sensitively timed and planned launch might have avoided misinformation and conflict. Our research suggested that the straplines, key messages and post launch communications used by RWB continued to be unhelpful within this local context.

We suggest that the lack of clarity on the purposes and the potential outcomes of the project continued throughout much of early 2019 post launch, and that communication of what the project was, and what the project wasn't, didn't occur effectively until August 2019. We explore the reasons for this in other sections of the report. We think that there is a careful balance to be achieved between keeping things open – to achieve co-design and co-production with stakeholders and being specific enough to engage knowledgeable local stakeholders with a clear offer and purpose. We explore the benefits of co-design in greater detail in Section 6 of this report

There needs to be clarity of purpose to S2S. We recommend that the Project Planning Phase 2020-22 develop a clear and mutual understanding of the benefits of this project between project partners and the local stakeholders. S2S needs to define a clearer 'proposition' to the community and local stakeholders in land and marine environments, making it clear on how collaboration will benefit them, their community and nature. Their role in this 'proposition' should be transparent and agreed with them. We suggest that the proposed Management Team and Partnership Board (see later recommendations) should constantly challenge themselves on whether the 'proposition' is becoming clearer during this period.

Articulating potential benefits of the approach at this point will help share understanding of the assets and the needs in the area and where potential benefits lie. These benefits will evolve and change over time, but the principle of working with others to create multiple benefits remains throughout the project.

4.4 The S2S Partnership

Contributors to the evaluation also commented extensively on the structure and the nature of the partnership which was drawn together by RWB to take the opportunity of a funding bid to ELP.

Criticisms included

- the lack of a local voice in the projects' governance at the outset
- RWBs lack of a track record in management of a project of this size and complexity
- the lack of clarity on partnership structure who is doing what
- the lack of economic, social expertise in the partnership to advise on economic and social outcomes
- partners wanted more agency and felt that RWB inhibited this
- the time taken for funders to understand the processes required for progressing the project and complexity of the local context
- establishing links between S2S and existing local schemes
- partners had their own ideas on what the project could deliver related to their own agendas, and there was little consensus on 'purpose'
- community landowner and land management perspectives were missing
- the need for a locally based lead body

A key question for us as evaluators is, if partners felt this about the project from the beginning and during the first year of the project, why weren't these concerns acted upon?

What was it about the way the project was managed which caused this situation and dissatisfaction with the nature of the partnership? Did the project's governance – its management structures get in the way of constructing a more appropriate partnership to deliver S2S?

We suggest from our evidence that the causes of this dissatisfaction were as follows: there was a funding opportunity, this was followed up by a lead body with little experience of establishing a project of this nature, a partnership was quickly established to submit a funding bid, a partnership with common interests. We suggest that this tight timescale, initiated what was intended to be a temporary governance structure, and this did not evolve during the first year of the project. We do suggest however, that given the collective experience of the project partners of running similar projects that greater attention should have been given to establishing a broader more representative partnership. We make recommendations in 4.6 to address these concerns and criticisms.

4.5 The Management Structure

Our review of documentary evidence, discussions with project partners and the workshops illustrated to us that the management structure established for S2S was not effective in managing the project pre and post launch and during the first eight months of the project. Since then there is more evidence that management structures have become more effective to guide the project and support staff.

Our understanding is that there was a Steering Group (SG) made up of senior representatives of partner organisations, RWB Director and the S2S Director ; a Management Team made up of RWB Director and S2S Director and a Project Team –made up of RWB staff and interns who were involved on the ground.

In addition to this, a number of 'technical' Working Groups were established including a natural environment group; a marine working group; and a communication working group. Representatives from partner organisation contributed to these working groups in the early stages of the project. There were not reconvened after initial discussions. We also suggest that the working group approach was overly complex for a project with limited staff resources to manage them

We have reviewed the documentation from these different groupings from pre -launch to present. The early documentation did not indicate to us that information was flowing between these different levels of management, or that communication of progress on the project was sufficient enough for a project of this type and complexity. Our view is that with a budget of £3.4 million, staff resourcing should not have been an issue. This aspect of S2S, establishing sound management structures and governance should have been the priority prior to launch.

Feedback on the Steering Group, which includes views from its members was this it did not function well. RWB was felt to dominate proceedings and not act on the concerns of other SG members. Some felt that the SG didn't gel as a group with shared vision and responsibilities, that it didn't function or 'step up', that 'information wasn't flowing' and that there was an unclear distinction between SG and management with the SG operating as a management group. Importantly members of the SG felt that they were unable to act as advocates for the project. At the same time, some felt that the levels of support offered by some members of the SG to the lead partner was variable. Criticism also focused on the delay in establishing clear mechanism for allocating funding for interventions during the first year of the project. Of particular concern to us was that the SG members did not feel that they received enough information on staff advice and concerns.

Many of the participants in our research felt that the Steering Group lacked knowledge of the area, made assumptions about the lack of expertise in the locality and that the communications support did not understand the local context either. They suggest that this fed the perception of many opponents that this was a group of outsiders coming in, not to listen and learn, but 'to impose a pre-determined project upon them'.

We recognise that in response to this situation that RWB willingly stepped out of the partnership after discussions with the SG, in the best in the best interest of the project.

We explore the role of the SG in more detail in other parts of this report. However, we believe on the evidence that we have gathered, that members felt it was not until RSPB Cymru and the Woodland Trust took over their current roles as lead partners that the SG started functioning properly.

We understand that some reflection on the role of the Steering Group did occur, including detailed work in early 2020 facilitated by Steve Evison of Nearly Wild to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the project including their own role. This was seen by members of the Steering Group as a positive turning point.

4.6 Governance – looking forward

Those engaged in our research were asked to look forward and provide their ideas on how S2S could improve its approach to governance through the Project Planning phase 2020-22 and beyond. Key issues which emerged from all the discussions and responses were under the following themes:

clarity and transparency

- about what is intended and who is involved and their roles and responsibilities
- that governance will be established in phases
- on how local people can be and are involved
- have greater sensitivity to local perceptions of power and influence in the community
- redesign governance for better representation of the community

broadening the partnership to involve:

- land managers and landowners
- marine interests
- umbrella organisations such as farming unions
- other projects, including those involved with land management, the local economy and social and cultural outcomes
- local authorities, officers and members
- economic and social interests

partner roles

- more clarity on expectations of partners
- partners should have clear agency within the project
- delineate between strategic, management and delivery roles
- use the right skills in the right group

We have reflected on these comments and the analysis from this and other sections of the evaluation report would encourage S2S to establish a clear and simple governance structure, during the Project Planning phase. Our suggestions are that:

A **Project Partnership Board** is established to ensure that the project partners can engage with and be guided by local expertise. This should include project partner representatives, representatives from local landowners, marine interests, local economic and social perspectives, non-government organisations and relevant officers and members of Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Powys Councils. If the project is to be successful, building relationships with these representatives will be key. It is suggested that senior representatives of the core project partners should feed into the group which would meet three times a year to exchange information and undertake activities to help to guide the project. Contributors should be asked to act as advocates for the project informing their constituents, members and colleagues about the project and drawing on their expertise. Information can be provided to this Board in between meetings for information, and the Board can be consulted on forward plans for S2S.

Secondly that a **Management Group** is established to provide oversight, scrutiny, direction to project delivery during 2020-22, and to establish appropriate management for the project post 2022. This Group should support project staff (and the Delivery Group – see below) undertake risk management, guide communications, provide oversight of financial issues, report to funders, and undertake advocacy on behalf of S2S. This should be made up of project staff, be supported by specialist staff from partner organisations, so that the experience of core partners in managing similar projects is fed into this group¹¹. This group should include local representatives with particular skills or insight which would support the management of project. This group can inform the activities of the Board and should meet virtually every month, with clear agendas, actions, and financial reporting. This group should remain throughout 2020-22 and a similar group established for activities post 2022.

Finally, that a **Delivery Group** is established which consists of the project team, and staff from organisations working at a community level in the area. This Group would support the activities outlined in the Project Planning phase including: local community engagement; habitat mapping; strategy development, engagement of relevant owners/stewards and resource users; work on nature based enterprises and supply chains; identification of potential interventions. This is where specialist local knowledge feeds into S2S on a practical level. It is essential that this group also includes local landowners, those working in the marine environment, and receives local advice on economic and social outcomes from proposed activities. This group should meet virtually once a month to exchange information, plan forward and produce brief updates for the Management Group. This group supports the day to day running of the project through emails, phone calls, virtual discussions.

We suggest that the above approach would provide all of the appropriate mechanisms to support project delivery, build relationships in the area and provide transparency to partners, stakeholders and funders. At the same time, we suggest that this would be proportionate for the aims of the project over the next two years.

S2S should also consider how resources both now and post 2022 might support stakeholder groups to contribute effectively to both the Management Team and Partnership Board, For example, a paid independent chair of the Partnership Board to help drive the work forward locally.

There are a number of governance codes available which can inform S2S in the way that it approaches project governance, for example from WCVA¹², and Academi Wales¹³, which describe and discuss what might be expected from different parts of a partnership such as S2S. These typically cover, purpose, leadership, decision making, the role of the board, and approaches to openness, diversity, integrity and accountability. We suggest that these should be used as a resource, guide and a benchmark by the Management Team to question whether the projects' governance is working effectively between 2020 and 2022, and to identify areas to improve. They should also be used to inform S2S's rationale for effective governance post 2022.

¹¹ Learning from successful projects like Living Levels in Gwent, Tir a Môr Llŷn on the Llŷn peninsula which have successfully engaged local interests within their governance frameworks
<https://www.livinglevels.org.uk/>
<https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/local-action-groups-and-projects/projects/tir-mor-llyn-land-and-sea>

¹² <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en>

¹³ <https://academiwales.gov.wales/news/articles/a9185c8b-2528-4129-87ed-c697a659d500>
<https://academiwales.gov.wales/Repository/resource/93183866-a194-4d6b-837a-dcf1fa2e38c9/en>

5 –S2S PROJECT MANAGEMENT– reflects on project management approaches 2017-20, from conception to re-establishing the project, what can be learned from this, and ways in which this can be improved in the future.

5.1 Our analysis of S2S's project management focuses on the methods, processes, and techniques that the project adopted to enable it to work towards its objectives. The MeetingSphere Survey asked respondents to comment on this issue, with Workshop#1 focusing specifically on what went right, what did not go well on project management and 1-1 discussions also further explored this issue. Documentary analysis also gave the evaluation team an insight into the way in which information was managed and communicated in each phase of the project.

5.2 It is important to point out that project management has evolved over this period through a series of key events including: the launch in October 2018, appointment of the Director in December 2019; emerging and growing opposition during the first 8 months of 2019; difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff during 2019; withdrawal of key partners during the last half of 2019; re-design of the partnership in the latter part of 2019 and early 2020; outreach and engagement with stakeholders in late 2019 and early 2020 following the appointment of a Community Engagement Officer; and the new Project Planning phase.

5.3 Of particular importance is for us state that since S2S's redesign, our research has shown that many of the problems and negative feedback outlined in this section have been addressed. Partners, the steering group, project staff and external stakeholders involved in the research suggest they are working together more effectively, and that the Project Planning Phase is giving time and space for more careful project management and planning. Feedback from 1-1s and workshops highlighted the achievement of those involved in redesigning the project, particularly the work of the RSPB Cymru, Coed Cadw/Woodland Trust and current, and some former, S2S staff whose input was seen as exemplary, in both project management and external engagement.

5.4 A number of particular themes have emerged from all of the data gathered on project management (see below) which has enabled the team to make our own observations on this data and bring together number of key recommendations for the S2S project management going forward. S2S should use this analysis as a resource throughout the Project Planning phase as a tool to ensure they continue to develop good practice in project management.

5.5 Our approach is to take general learning from the experience of people involved in S2S, to avoid negative comments on particular individuals, and to make a broad analysis of what has gone on and how this can inform S2S going forward. The survey, workshop questions, documentary analysis and interviews produced many observations on:

- internal communication
- external communication
- local context
- basic project management skills
- approaches to risk management
- financial management
- project management: looking forward

The following sections provide an overview of these reflections

5.6 Internal Communication

The evidence suggests that prior to S2S re-design, the level and quality of internal communications had had a detrimental effect on relationships with partners and key stakeholders. Internally, there were particular and repeated criticisms of:

- poor communication of critical management issues even though information was readily available; risks and activity to the steering group, many partners suggested that they did not realise the scale or breadth of problems for the project
- the poor quality of reporting from certain staff, the lead body and steering group on progress of the project to each other
- lack of regular reporting amongst partners, with up to date information on their involvement and responsibilities to each other
- poor communication by the original lead body to partner organisations on decision making and a lack of (and delayed) follow up to concerns raised in Steering Group meetings.
- the lead partners

Our analysis of the documentary evidence up to August 2019, and 1-1 interviews supports these views. While throughout the project annual and quarterly and financial reports have provided funders with the required amount of information, we generally found the quality of information in documentation available on S2S to be highly variable between team members. We suggest that this lack of quality contributed to the poor communication between internal partners. This also presented problems for the evaluation team in understanding decision making, for example the lack of documentation available on RWBs, Eco Dyfi's and others withdrawal from S2S and how RSPB Cymru came to lead the project. These gaps have been filled through 1-1 interviews however, key management decisions of this type should be recorded more clearly.

Internal information provision has improved markedly since August 2019. It is important to note that this is the point in the project where S2S had a nearly full complement of staff, nearly 10 months after project launch. An example of this improvement is the resumption of a log of activity with external partners, this records not just what activity has taken place, but provides a reflection on the outcomes of the engagement. We would encourage S2S to apply the same rigorous and reflective approach towards its internal reporting to partners and funders.

5.7 External Communication

Problems with communications from the project to external stakeholders were seen as being significant up to August 2019. Partners and other stakeholder organisations felt that the lead body, project partners and some of the S2S Team had been unable to communicate effectively with local stakeholders. Of particular concern were:

- levels and quality of engagement with other landscape projects that engaged landowners and farmers
- the decision that staff would not be engaging in larger public meetings until more staff were in place
- lack of regular updates to community groups
- lack of bilingual engagement in the projects' early stages
- lack of feedback loops from some external engagement to the steering group
- external communication support not understanding the local context

Participants in our research felt that this poor communication created a vacuum, together with delays in information provision resulting in opponents to the project developing their own narrative of project aims and objectives. It is clear that this approach exacerbated the external opposition to the project.

We recognise that from August 2019 engagement with external stakeholders has been a central part of S2S's activity leading up to the project's redesign. External stakeholders' concerns have been addressed through meetings with COPA, and through drop-in sessions run prior to Covid. This engagement has been well documented, and feedback has been used in developing S2S's approach to the Project Planning Phase.

5.8 Local context

We have found that in the early stages of the S2S partnership, those engaged in our research felt that there was an inadequate approach to understanding and reflecting the local context in the projects work, particular criticisms were:

- poor understanding of the sensitivity of land ownership in the local area
- underestimation of the opposition to rewilding following the publication of *Feral*
- an inability of the lead partner to listen to local advice and learn from the experts of established 'players' in the area
- poor understanding from the lead partner of the need to utilise local support for the project rather than external expertise
- lack of engagement with opposition groups during the first half of 2019
- lack of use of stakeholder mapping and poor engagement with stakeholders up to August 2019
- poorly planned and delivered approach to developing positive relationships and connections in the area
- lack of bilingual resource at the beginning of the project to facilitate engagement

We understand that the S2S Management Team were faced with an extraordinarily difficult start to the project in the area, given the publicity that had developed around the project. Those that contributed to our research concurred that a number of factors exacerbated the above:

- inadequate forward planning by the S2S partnership pre and post launch to manage information, communication and establishing resources, including 'people' to start the project within the locality
- inadequate understanding and application of approaches to risk management pre and post launch to deal with the controversy and to support newly appointed staff working in the areas
- a lack of appreciation of the wider context of farming and land use in the area to build a clear offer for potential beneficiaries of the project, including farmers and landowners and marine stakeholders

It is clear that the S2S partners have listened and learnt from their experience, moving into the project planning phase and are seeking to address these criticisms. Contributors to the evaluation felt that going forward, in order to properly reflect the local context and work with local stakeholders', project staff would need to:

- deliver activities to build relationships with local stakeholder groups to better understand the local context and target groups
- undertake deep and broad stakeholder mapping to support this
- utilise and buy in local skills and expertise where appropriate
- undertake outreach to other projects in the area, not only those involving landowners, and marine stakeholders but projects supporting economic, social and cultural activity in the area to identify opportunities for collaboration
- establish ways of including local stakeholders in the projects' governance to include the community's voice

We agree with these suggestions and have made recommendations in both the governance and partnership sections of this report which will enable the local context to be taken into account more fully in the Project Planning Phase and beyond.

Finally, some of those we engaged were concerned at the nature and level of on the ground delivery in the locality in the first year of the project in terms of having the right specific land and marine management advice to ensure any planned interventions were appropriate. We suggest that

S2S draws on local expertise to supply this land management advice and explores ways in which local landowners and stakeholders in the marine environment can support this process.

5.9 Basic project management skills

Our view is that, based on the evidence that we have gathered, the project management of S2S up to August 2019 was lacking many basic elements of what might be expected of a project of this complexity and size. Our analysis suggests that the following key elements were not evident in the way the partners and the lead partner organisation managed the project:

strategic planning – we found little evidence that the funder, lead partner organisation, staff or the steering group were strategic in the way that they managed the launch, established the project, engaged the local community, or dealt with the opposition to the project. Many comments we heard through the evaluation were that staff and partners were 'firefighting' and being reactive to problems as they occurred. We suggest that a longer, more thought through lead in time to the project launch, with a team already in place to respond in the locality would have been a more strategic approach and a longer low-key engagement period with stakeholders would have been more appropriate given the local context and the nature of the S2S project.

clarity of objectives – while we understand that part of the original plan was to determine the objectives with potential beneficiaries and local stakeholders, we suggest that the lack of clearly communicated objectives was a fundamental flaw in the way the project was introduced to the local community and potential beneficiaries. Landowners, farmers, marine stakeholders and local people should have had a clearer idea, earlier, of what types of specific interventions might help to deliver S2S's objectives. This should have been done at the launch of the project and communicated more clearly in pre -and post launch discussions with stakeholders.

managing resources – we believe that the partnership should have been clearer, earlier on in the project, to communicate to stakeholders how and when the ELP funding would potentially be spent. Clearer, earlier explanation of the levels of financial support for practical interventions over the project period to landowners, and the way this money might support the local economy would have been beneficial. Caveats could have been communicated. This would have dealt with misinformation and perceptions of partners dividing funding up between them and help to engage and those involved with local stakeholders and potential beneficiaries.

people – we suggest that the lack of pre-planning to have staff in place at the time of the launch was a key mistake in project inception. However, we have also found many of the basic activities of recruitment, management of staff, staff reviews within RWB and the support to staff from the steering group created serious problems for the project in its first year.

leadership –our evaluation has also highlighted to us that the level of management skills of RWB were not at the level that one would expect from a lead partner on a project of this type and size. Communication breakdowns between staff in RWB, a lack of transparency in dealing with problems; a lack of recognition of gravity of risks, scale, importance, ignoring advice (around the launch), slow responses to requests for information and a defensiveness to steering group criticism were all cited as problems which inhibited S2S's progress. It is important to state that contributors from RWB to this evaluation acknowledge that a project of this nature needed a different type of lead partner. Steering group members from other partner organisations have also acknowledged they could have done more to address many of the issues highlighted above and provided more support to lead the project.

We recognise that RSPB Cymru as the main project partner are now leading S2S through the Project Planning Phase, staff are employed by them to support the project. We are confident that the organisation has well-established project management approaches which are being applied to S2S, providing a stronger basis to work strategically and to support staff in project delivery.

5.10 Approaches to risk management

Many contributors raised the lack of risk management as a serious issue for S2S up to August 2019. 1-1 interviews also provided evidence that risk management techniques were not used within the project prior to the project launch or during the first 8 months of 2019. Risks were highlighted in the bid document, but we found little evidence in our analysis of Quarterly and Annual Reports to ELP that risks were adequately quantified, discussed or planned for within the project.

At the steering group level, risks were raised by project partners, and many felt that these were not taken seriously or acted upon. Our view is that there was poor prioritisation, communication and management of risks as critical issues by the lead partner and steering group. Examples of risks highlighted by interviewees which weren't adequately managed include:

- *at a strategic level:* acknowledging the need to redesign the project earlier
- *at a practical level:* certain S2S staff withdrawn from undertaking meetings with more than 3 people; stopping communication during periods post launch, as a result of local opposition
- *at a staff level:* dealing with risks to staff, who felt intimidated and fearful for their safety within the locality, given the level of opposition to the project.

These are obvious risks which needed sensitive and careful management by the project partnership. Unfortunately, our findings are that these were not adequately dealt with either at a steering group or lead partner level, resulting in tension within the project with subsequent negative consequences for the projects reputation and capacity for delivery.

We recommend that S2S establishes a risk management system that covers both strategic risks to the project, and management risks to project delivery. This should not be used as a tick box exercise, but should be used as a management tool to help partners and staff to plan, engage, and determine the way forward for the project through the Project Planning phase, as well as deal with any risks that may occur 2020-22. Good practice in risk management from partner organisations and similar projects should be shared to inform the above. This should be regularly reviewed and acted upon by the Management Team and Project Partnership Board.

5.11 Financial Management

We are clear from our documentary analysis and discussion with project partners that financial management and processes within S2S have been handled professionally by RWB and Woodland Trust (as lead financial partner), with the funder ELP.

We received relatively few comments on the financial aspects of the project other than:

- those concerned with communicating clearly with stakeholders how funding will be used (see previous)
- that the process for partners to bid in to the original project fund to undertake interventions on the ground took a long time to get established in the first year of the project, and the rationale for supporting these could have been communicated more clearly to the Steering Group
- there should be clearer delineation between paid and unpaid contribution to the project
- that there should be flexibility in procuring local expertise and skills, where appropriate to spread the economic benefit of the project and support local businesses
- records should be made of unpaid contribution

- partners and stakeholders should be clear about their own contribution to the project in staff and volunteer time

Given that one of the key goals of the project is to support the local economy, we suggest that S2S, as part of the Planning Phase assesses how its activity can support the areas monetary and non-monetary economies, both in the community and for local people with land holdings and land managers. Being clear and recording about how S2S funds are used, how they could lever further finance into the project and recording the paid and unpaid contributions of those involved in the project, will aid transparency and learning going forward.

5.11 Looking Forward: Project Management

Those engaged in our research were asked to look forward and provide their ideas on how S2S could improve its approach to project management through the Project Planning phase 2020-22 and beyond.

A key issue which emerged from all the discussions and responses was the need to understand and better utilise the skills that are available within partner organisations, stakeholders and individuals living in the locality. Comments covered the following issues:

- that the project requires a complex set of skills set required from partners and locality
- S2S should use the skills set from partner organisations (not just the nominated representative) to support the project
- S2S should undertake a skills audit to understand:
 - the skills set required to deliver the project
 - what is available within the existing partnership for S2S
 - what skills needs to be bought in
- S2S should be flexible on filling roles to address local needs/context
- S2S should establish a budget for securing services locally

We agree that S2S, as part of the Project Planning Phase should explore the skills required and those available locally to establish the next phase of project. This should focus on practical, management and strategic skills. This will help to support the projects thinking about strategic issues such as potential locally based lead bodies; practical issues, like survey skills; to land and marine management skills from landowners and marine stakeholders. This skills focus should form a key part of the business case for S2S going forward.

6 – S2S PARTNERSHIP WORKING– reflects on what can be learned from the way partners worked together from 2017-20, for both the S2S project and how this can inform similar multi-partner landscape scale projects of this type

6.1 In this section we refer to 'partners' as organisations and groups who were formally part of S2S project, separately from 'stakeholders', who we define as other organisations and groups and individuals that the partners engaged with, and continue to involve in the Project Planning Phase 2020-22.

6.2 This Section firstly focuses on how the people we engaged in the evaluation viewed different aspects of partnership working. We then draw on the data to outline what they see as key issues going forward. Within this analysis we make our own observations on this data and bring together number of key recommendations for the S2S project on partnership working to inform the Project Planning phase. S2S can use the analysis to ensure that they continue to develop good practice in partnership working.

The survey, workshop questions, documentary analysis and interviews produced observations on

- the way S2S's partners worked together,
- relationships with stakeholders then and now
- impacts of S2S within the partner organisations
- looking forward: co-design and co-production

The following sections provide an overview of these reflections

6.3 The way partners worked together and work together now

The evidence suggests that prior to S2S's re-design many of the partner organisations did not see S2S as a cohesive partnership or 'collective resource', with

- varied levels of support, commitment and resources being provided from partner organisations to the steering group, to the management team and in project delivery.
- different motivations for participating in the project, and, in the absence of clear objectives in year one, developing their own ideas about what the project could deliver for their individual organisational objectives
- different levels of 'buy in' to the project aims, with a lack of clarity on what different partners could bring to the table, paid and unpaid, and what was expected of them
- the lack of opportunity to co-design the project with the lead partner
- the lack of experience of RWB in managing a programme of this type and criticism of RWB in the way it established, led the partnership and communicated with partners, causing many to question their continued participation in S2S
- a perception that many of the partners saw the S2S project as 'business as usual' helping them to deliver their nature recovery interventions on the ground
- poor communication between project partners on withdrawal and distancing themselves from the project as problems emerged and grew
- stalling of potential collaborative work to deliver ecological restoration on the ground

It is understood that these types of issues continued to cause problems for S2S throughout each stage of the project until its redesign post August 2019.

We have found that some felt that new positive working relationships between partner organisations has emerged as a result of managing risks, conflicts and 'fallout' when the project ran into difficulties. Since then RSPB Cymru and Woodland Trust have been seen as the key catalysts for redesigning the partnership to bring clarity to partners' roles and engaging more effectively with

stakeholders. Advice and support from Nearly Wild to the project in early 2020 was also seen as critical in helping project partners re-design the project into the Project Planning phase.

Those engaged in our research also identified some positive broader impacts from the S2S project: that the controversy in the first year of the project has resulted in a higher and more positive profile of conservation activity (as opposed to rewilding) among stakeholders; and that as a result this has recentred debates on biodiversity and ecological connectivity in the locality, strengthening local views on the benefits of nature recovery and conservation. Activity to date has also strengthened partners' understanding of relationship between terrestrial and marine environments in the area.

We suggest that partners within the steering group should have spent much more time at project inception on how they could work collectively together and to understand their strengths, weaknesses, risks and concerns and ways in which they could work together effectively. This reflective approach should be a key feature of planning going forward up to and including 2022.

Effective project planning and delivery is reliant on effective leadership, communications, decision making and delivery. Projects of this type are high profile, complex and difficult to manage. We believe that the project partners should have recognised the value of bringing their collective experience together of managing similar successful projects (e.g. Living Levels, Tir a Môr Llŷn – Land and Sea) and brought this learning to the steering group and management team.

As the Project Planning phase continues 2020-22, we suggest that the Project Partnership Board regularly reflects on the way partners are working together, whether current approaches are causing any problems (or opportunities), and to identify ways to improve partners' support to the project as a whole.

- this should be a standing item on Project Partnership Board, Management Team and Delivery Group meetings, and insights should be used to inform the potential implementation phase from 2022 onwards
- that partners should organise virtual learning events from their own successful landscape projects elsewhere to inform S2S approach and invite other local projects to share in this learning to build capacity in the locality

6.4 Relationships with stakeholders then and now

It is clear from the data that has been gathered in this evaluation that the way that S2S has been managed has impacted significantly on relationships between the partner organisations and stakeholders, individuals, groups, communities and organisations living and working in the area. This data has provided us with insight into how partners view this aspect of their work suggesting that:

- there was a major gap between the aspiration of S2S for local stakeholder involvement in the bid documents and the reality of ineffective relationship management with local stakeholders in the first 8 months of the project
- that despite a great deal of pre-launch engagement by various individuals as the bid was being developed, it was still felt that this was insufficient to properly engage key stakeholders
- that there was a failure of the partners to understand the levels of dissatisfaction and anger among stakeholders and the gravity of feeling, especially to land ownership issues in the area, and that this should have been recognised by both the lead partner, funders and steering group prior to launch; and more effectively managed in the first 8 months of the project
- perceptions of the community and particularly landowners were heavily influenced by the book *Feral* by George Monbiot, and his association with RWB, leading to misconceptions of the aims of S2S

- that this situation impacted on levels of trust between community and partners, even though many partners had already worked effectively with local communities and landowners in the area
- that the controversy surrounding the project led to difficulties for other stakeholders, and partners engaging with potential beneficiaries in their own projects
- a lack of clarity on how the ELP funding would be spent led to perceptions from stakeholders that the partner organisations would be the main beneficiaries of the funding
- that poorly managed engagement by the S2S Management Team with other landscape projects and individuals with local knowledge and expertise in the locality minimised the opportunities for S2S to build effective relationships with local stakeholders and landowner groups
- that an over-riding focus on ecological outcomes-led to an under-appreciation of the economic and social aims of the project among stakeholders
- S2S partner have learnt that there needs to be an effective balance between local expertise, internal expertise and buying in non-local expertise; and financial systems need to be flexible to buy in the right expertise for local needs

Partners also perceived positive outcomes from the situation described above. They suggested that the controversy surrounding S2S had galvanised the farming community and brought the community together. COPA was established, and as a result enabled community views to be heard by S2S partners, and for the project to engage and build relationships and mutual understanding. All of this activity, they believe has helped to develop debate with landowners about appropriate ways forward.

It is clear to us that relationships with stakeholders have improved since August 2019, with the appointment and effective work of a Community Engagement Officer. As previously discussed, her work is highly regarded. Clear communications, drop-in sessions and outreach work has enabled a positive dialogue with COPA and other local organisations as the project has evolved into the Project Planning phase.

Our view is that partners have reflected at length on the lessons learnt from their experience of working with local stakeholders. This experience has informed the Project Planning phase and work programme going forward. We understand that approaches to governance and stakeholder engagement is part of this phase, however we suggest that co-design of the project would be supported by ensuring that local stakeholders are represented on the S2S Project Partnership Board to ensure that their insights inform the Project Planning phase and help to shape S2S activity beyond 2022. This should include three representatives from the locality:

- one to act as advocate and liaison with **local landowners and land managers**, representing their views and supporting delivery of S2S through their expertise in land management
- one able to act as advocate and liaison with **local communities**, representing their views and supporting delivery of S2S giving insights into social outcomes
- one able to act as advocate and liaison with **local businesses**, representing their views and supporting delivery of S2S giving insights into economic outcomes

6.5 Impact of S2S within the partner organisations

Our evidence gathering also resulted in data on how partners' experience of S2S, the learning from year one and subsequent redesign of the project had impacted on how their own organisations should approach to this type of landscape scale project. Participants were able to reflect on the 'journey' their organisations had been on and lessons learnt. This has enabled us to identify a number of important issues for projects partners to consider as S2S progresses, but also to apply to similar projects of this type:

- ensuring that key parts of their 'parent' organisations contribute to the project can often require careful internal management and communication with colleagues and Board members. This required time and resource which needs to be accounted for and planned for in business and financial planning.
- that reflecting on a projects' organisational impact can support the organisation's thinking: S2S helped partner organisations to debate, test and develop their own positions and approaches to landscape scale partnership working in general; to nature restoration and rewilding; and to supporting delivery projects as part of their policy advocacy work.
- the importance of risk management techniques to be used by partners individually at concept, bid and delivery stages of projects, rather than solely in retrospect at a time of crisis; and for these risk techniques to be used as management tools, rather than as meeting a requirement for a bid process.
- to identify exactly what resource each individual organisation is able to bring in to support the project as a whole, to review this regularly and adapt where needed. This is in addition to a nominated person to sit on a steering, management or delivery groups. It is important to utilise expertise from within each organisation, beyond the nominated representative.
- for partners to communicate in time, as the project progresses, how their thinking is developing on what role they see themselves playing in S2S post 2022. This date will come around quickly and checking in with each other regularly on this issue at Programme Board level will be essential through 2021 -22.

While these are broad aspects of learning from the S2S we suggest that one aspect of this should be applied to the way partners, stakeholders and groups work together, which would support transparency and communication in the Project Planning phase and beyond.

We recommend that S2S, in its next phases, encourages partners (and stakeholders) to be specific about what their role, responsibilities are and what resources and expertise can be brought to the project. Being explicit about this help to manage resources, skills and expertise, manages expectations and avoids misunderstanding. This can be done in different ways for different partners and stakeholders – through memoranda of understanding, terms of reference or less formal letters and correspondence where appropriate.

6.6 Looking Forward: Co-design or Co-production?

Those engaged in our research were asked to look forward and provide their ideas on how S2S could improve its approach through the Project Planning phase 2020-22 and beyond. Much emphasis was placed the need to co-design between partners and the community from now on. If this is to be the approach that S2S adopts the key aspects of co-design¹⁴ which need to be built in are ways in which

- the S2S project seeks opinions and insights from potential beneficiaries who are considered 'experts in their own experience' (in this case landowners, communities and businesses) and for S2S to recognise their agency
- ways for S2S to help these groups to engage with each other as well as with staff, to communicate, be creative, share insights, test out new ideas and create a culture of participation

¹⁴ See What Works Well-being (2019) Guidance on co-design and community spaces. As an example of co-design process
<https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Co-Design-Community-Spaces-Guidance-2.pdf>

- S2S supports these stakeholders so they can develop the skills, knowledge, and experience so they can get fully involved in the co-design process

We recognise from our work that S2S has entered a new phase of partnership working where there is more information sharing, engagement with COPA, groups and individuals and 'warmer' relations with constituents and landowners. This is a positive basis for S2S to properly engage in the locality and develop a co-design approach. There were many suggestions of what should be achieved through a co-design framework, including many issues already raised in previous sections, which provide an idea of what co-design for S2S might look like:

- *strategic activity*: agreeing the message, aims, objectives, methods and potential long-term outcomes of S2S through co-design; define/imagine a clearer economic offer to engage economic stakeholders/partners; developing a much clearer offer for beneficiaries
- *local context*: informal communication within the target area, regular exploration in the planning phase with other local projects to explore synergies, overlaps with S2S's evolving aims and objectives; supporting local 'leads' on the ground.; developing understanding of the local context, opportunities and sensitivities
- *organisational*: transparency and flexibility on financial beneficiaries; good communication; co-design through internal relationships within partner organisations; identify a skills set from partner organisations to support the project; be clear on what partners can bring to the table, both paid and unpaid; being clear on expectations and responsibilities of the different partners
- *funders*: funders want to fund successful projects, so funders need to learn from the co-design process, especially the need for up-front resource requirements, providing the space to experiment and flexibility on the timing for deliverables .

If co-design is the preferred approach to delivering this phase of S2S, those involved in the project need to understand exactly what this means. There is a risk that this is used as a broad catch all phrase for different techniques of engaging the community by S2S.

There is also emerging practice in co-production in Wales and elsewhere which may be a more suitable frame for S2S going forward. This is being used in the public sector and community sector to bring different agencies, partners and service users together as part of a whole process of citizen centred planning and delivery, with stakeholders having an ongoing role beyond what is initially planned¹⁵. Co-production is also being used in the Mid and North Wales NRW Area Statements as part of a consultation with the farming community last year. Co-production has been described as : *what happens when the raw materials needed to do something are brought together and combined to generate something new*¹⁷."

It is suggested that S2S staff receive training in Co-design and Co-production to apply to the Project Planning Phase and, in turn to use this in their work with stakeholders, Programme Board, Management and Delivery Groups. As a result, partners and stakeholders in the locality can understand the benefits of inclusive approaches to working and can apply this going forward as part of the Project Planning phase 2021-22 and beyond. This will build capacity for collaborative work in the area.

¹⁵ <https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/orkingTogetherR9.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://info.copronet.wales/>

¹⁷ <https://www.stakeholderdesign.com/co-production-versus-co-design-what-is-the-difference/>

7- RECOMMENDATIONS TO S2S— on the basis of analysis, in Sections 4-6, the evaluation team provide recommendations to S2S for improving governance, project management and partnership working as part of both the project planning phase 2020-22 and future activity in the area. The following summarises the recommendations we have made in our analysis:

R1 -Clarity of Purpose There needs to be clarity of purpose to S2S. We recommend that the Project Planning Phase 2020-22 develop a clear and mutual understanding of the benefits of this project between project partners and the local stakeholders. S2S needs to define a clearer 'proposition' to the community and local stakeholders in land and marine environments, making it clear on how collaboration will benefit them, their community and nature. Their role in this 'proposition' should be transparent and agreed with them. We suggest that the proposed Partnership Board and Management Team should constantly challenge themselves on whether the 'proposition' is becoming clearer during this period.

R2 - that a Project Partnership Board is established to ensure that the project partners can engage with and be guided by local expertise. This should include project partner representatives, representatives from local landowners, marine interests, local economic and social perspectives, non-government organisations and relevant officers and members of Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Powys Councils. If the project is to be successful, building relationships with these representatives will be key. It is suggested that senior representatives of the core project partners should feed into the group which would meet three times a year to exchange information and undertake activities to help to guide the project. Contributors should be asked to act as advocates for the project to inform their constituents, members and colleagues about the project and to draw on their expertise. Information can be provided to this Board in between meetings for information, and the Board can be consulted on forward plans for S2S.

R3 -that a Management Group is established to provide oversight, scrutiny, direction to project delivery during 2020-22, and to establish appropriate management for the project post 2022. This Group should support project staff (and the Delivery Group – see below) undertake risk management, guide communications, provide oversight of financial issues, report to funders, and undertake advocacy on behalf of S2S. This should be made up of project staff, be supported by specialist staff from partner organisations, so that the experience of core partners in managing similar projects is fed into this group¹⁸. This group should include local representatives with particular skills or insight which would support the management of project. This group can inform the activities of the Board and should meet virtually every month, with clear agendas, actions, and financial reporting. This group should remain throughout 2020-22 and a similar group established for activities post 2022.

R4 -that a Delivery Group is established which consists of the project team, and staff from organisations working at a community level in the area. This Group would support the activities outlined in the Project Planning phase including: local community engagement; habitat mapping; strategy development, engagement of relevant owners/stewards and resource users; work on nature based enterprises and supply chains; identification of potential interventions. This is where specialist local knowledge feeds into S2S on a practical level. It is essential that this group also includes local landowners and land managers, those working in the marine environment, and receives local advice on economic and social outcomes from proposed activities. This group should meet virtually once a month to exchange information, plan forward and produce brief updates for the Management Group. This group supports the day to day running of the project through emails, phone calls, virtual discussions.

¹⁸ Learning from successful projects like Living Levels in Gwent, Tir a Môr Llŷn – Land and Sea which have successfully engaged local interests within their governance frameworks
<https://www.livinglevels.org.uk/>
<https://businesswales.gov.wales/walesruralnetwork/local-action-groups-and-projects/projects/tir-mor-llyn-land-and-sea>

R5 Responsibilities and Resources We recommend that S2S, in its next phases, encourages partners (and stakeholders) to be specific about what their role and responsibilities are and what resources and expertise can be brought to the project and that this is reviewed regularly. Being explicit about this help to manage resources, skills and expertise, managing expectations and avoiding misunderstanding. This can be done in different ways for different partners and stakeholders – through memoranda of understanding, terms of reference or less formal letters and email correspondence where appropriate.

R6- Risk Management We recommend that S2S establishes a risk management system that covers both strategic risks to the project, and management risks to project delivery. This should not be used as a tick box exercise, but should be used as a management tool to help partners and staff to plan, engage, and determine the way forward for the project through the Project Planning phase, as well as deal with any risks that may occur 2020-22 . Good practice in risk management from partner organisations and similar projects should be shared to inform the above. This should be regularly reviewed and acted upon by the Management Team and Project Partnership Board.

R7 Skills Analysis – the Project Planning Phase should explore the skills required and those available locally to establish the next phase of project. This should focus on practical, management and strategic skills. This will help to support the projects thinking about strategic issues such as potential locally based lead bodies; practical issues, like survey skills; to land and marine management skills from landowners and marine stakeholders. This skills focus should form a key part of the business case for S2S going forward.

R8 Economic Impact Given that one of the key goals of the project is to support the local economy, we suggest that S2S, as part of the Planning Phase assesses how its activity can support the areas monetary and non-monetary economies, both in the community, for local people with land holdings and land managers. Being clear and recording about how S2S funds are used, how they could lever further finance into the project and recording the paid and unpaid contributions of those involved in the project, will aid transparency and learning going forward.

R9 Co-design and Co-production– It is suggested that S2S staff receive training in Co-design and Co-production to apply to the Project Planning Phase and, in turn to use this in their work with stakeholders, Programme Board, Management and Delivery Groups. As a result, partners and stakeholders in the locality can understand the benefits of inclusive approaches to working and can apply this going forward as part of the Project Planning phase 2021-22 and beyond. This will build capacity for collaborative work in the area.

R10 Reflexive Governance¹⁹ as the Project Planning phase continues 2020-22, that the Project Partnership Board regularly reflects on the way partners are working together, whether current approaches are causing any problems (or opportunities), and to identify ways to improve partners' support to the project as a whole.

- this should be a standing item on Project Partnership Board, Management Team and Delivery Group meetings, and insights should be used to inform the potential implementation phase from 2022 onwards.
- that partners should organise virtual learning events from their own successful landscape projects elsewhere to inform S2S approach and invite other local projects to share in this learning to build capacity in the locality.

¹⁹ **Reflexive Governance**– a more self-aware and critical mode of thinking that is open to multiple perspectives, continually questioning the ends and means of how a policy /project is delivered. Stirling, A. (2006) Precaution, foresight, sustainability: Reflection and reflexivity in the governance of science and technology, in: J.-P. Voss, D. Bauknecht & R. Kemp (Eds) Reflexive Governance for Sustainable Development, pp. 225–272 (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).

Appendix A – Original S2S Project aims (taken from S2S Evaluation Terms of Reference)

The Summit to Sea/O'r Mynydd i'r Môr (S2S) project was intended to be the first in Britain to establish a dynamic ecosystem from mountaintops to the sea. With the idea of establishing a continuous nature-rich zone of at least 1000 ha of land and 20km² of sea from the top of Pumlumon - the highest point in mid- Wales – down through wooded valleys to the Dyfi Estuary and out into Cardigan Bay. Demonstrating a ground-breaking model for conservation and natural resource management that could be replicated in other areas of Wales and the UK.

The goal being to provide ecosystem services through the restoration of natural processes, to support the transition to a resilient, self-sustained nature-based economy, providing a sustainable future for local communities with alternative livelihoods, as well as creating opportunities for people to reconnect with wild nature.

The objectives of the project were:

1. Obj. 1: Initiate a process of ecological restoration of 10,000 ha of land and 20km² of sea as core or buffer areas with collective agreement of owners/stewards.
2. Obj. 2: Establish a phase 1 nature-based enterprises and infrastructure established linked to an iconic S2S destination providing alternative income streams as part of a transition economy
3. Obj. 3: Establish a S2S partnership between owners/stewards and key stakeholders with effective governance mechanisms for collective decision-making and sharing revenue/benefits
4. Obj. 4: Engage local communities and wider public in informing, shaping, monitoring, learning about and benefitting from S2S
5. Obj. 5: Ensure policy/legislative mechanisms are in place which support delivery of S2S's long term approach

Appendix B - Current S2S Project Planning Phase 2020-22 (taken from ELP Grant Application 2020)

The Summit to Sea project is seeking funding for a full development phase to take place over the next 12-24 months in response to the current status of the project. Within this planning phase the overarching aim will be to work towards how the project can co-produce with local stakeholders, landowners and sea users a nature-rich zone from the top of Pumlumon - the highest point in mid-Wales – down through wooded valleys to the Dyfi Estuary and out into Cardigan Bay. This will build on linking existing habitats by enhancing and restoring these, whilst delivering a co-managed marine area to improve the management for marine habitat restoration and link this, through coastal and transitional habitats, to the land area.

We will expand the restoration of natural and naturalised processes across this area through peat bog, river, marine and woodland restoration. Natural patterns and distributions of species will be encouraged as the habitat changes and native species will expand their range. The project aims to deliver significant ecosystem services across the catchment. Flood risk to downstream communities will be reduced through interventions developed with local stakeholders and likely to include peat bog restoration and native woodland, riparian copses and scrub creation. Carbon sequestration and water quality will improve significantly, and recreational users (local and visitor alike) will benefit in terms of health and wellbeing.

The revised outcomes for the project are as follows:

1. Local communities and wider public have had meaningful input into the vision and objectives, informing, shaping, and learning about the potential for nature-based activities which align with local culture and values.
2. Habitats are mapped and a strategy is developed to increase connectivity between wildlife rich ecosystems and ecologically positive interventions. Supporting new and existing links between terrestrial and marine towards continued ecological enhancement through engagement of relevant owners/stewards and resource users.
3. Nature-based enterprises are identified, along with opportunities to network and further develop nature-based supply chains.
4. The local partnership to deliver the full project is identified / established including agreement on effective governance mechanisms for collaborative decision-making, collective visioning and benefit/revenue sharing.
5. Potential project interventions are locally driven and in support of national policy. Interventions engage public sector bodies where appropriate.
6. A cross sectoral monitoring and evaluation plan developed for the project, with experts from NGOs, government and academic institutions.
7. A funding proposal, if appropriate, for the full project is prepared, along with supporting documentation, and submitted to the ELP

Appendix C: The Evaluation Team

The Evaluation Team is made up of the following partners:

Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum (PCF) is a multi-award-winning coastal partnership that has been developing ground-breaking best practice in coastal management since 2000. PCF works across a broad spectrum of sustainability-related sectors including water quality & payment for ecosystems services; marine energy; sustainable recreation; conservation & restoration; climate change behaviour change and education and has delivered projects and work viewed as best practice nationally and beyond the UK including the Marine Code, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group, Wales Activity Mapping and Marine Energy Wales. PCF regularly undertakes consultancy work, often focused on stakeholder engagement. Examples range from annual Stakeholder Perception Studies (Port of Milford Haven); stakeholder scoping and community engagement for WWF's Seagrass Ocean Rescue project; Stakeholder engagement for Welsh Government – Wales National Marine Plan. For this brief PCF took the lead in providing project management for the evaluation, but also provided input into the analysis of data and report writing. This role was undertaken by Senior Project Manager **Paul Renfro**.

Netherwood Sustainable Futures (NSF) established in 2007, run by **Dr. Alan Netherwood**, provides expert consultancy advice and research on sustainable development, climate adaptation, SMNR, public policy, future trends and foresighting. Support is provided to government, public, third and community sectors in developing strategy, policy, process and practice which supports sustainability and long-term delivery – this has included advice to Welsh Government, local government, NRW, PSBs, National Parks and NGOs in Wales. Evaluations have been undertaken for Welsh Government on the Environment & Sustainable Development Grant, Sustainable Development Scheme and recent Climate Adaptation Plan. NSF is working with Wellbeing Planner (WBP) on an evaluation of the Building Resilience in Catchments Project (BRICs) SMS landscape project in the Milford Haven area (of which PCF is a core partner). NSF has a strong track record of working in collaboration with WWF Cymru on ecological footprints, climate change, SMNR policy, the Future Generations Act, and most recently on the relationship between the environment and foundational economy. Alan has been working recently with the North Wales Public Service Boards on a regional approach to climate mitigation including recommendations for carbon sequestration and storage through land management. Alan is an Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University specialising in governance for sustainable development. Alan took the lead on research and writing the draft and final reports, drawing on input from PCF and WBP.

Dafydd Thomas is an experienced and highly qualified facilitator and a qualitative researcher. He established the **Wellbeing Planner (WBP)** in 2013 to provide independent, bespoke, customer focused service on project and organisational development, evaluation and research. He has over 25 years of experience working with different groups across Wales in participative techniques to evaluate interventions, develop projects and implement change. Wellbeing Planner has worked with Natural Resources Wales, communities and agencies in Gwynedd and Ynys Mon on climate adaptation planning and Area Statements in North Wales and Mid Wales. Dafydd and Alan are collaborating on the evaluation of the BRIC landscape project. Dafydd has an academic background in Applied Oceanography and Marine Biology. A first language Welsh speaker, Dafydd is an experienced facilitator and qualitative researcher. Dafydd organised and delivered participative engagement online with MeetingSphere.

APPENDIX E – QUESTIONS ASKED IN THE EVALUATION

The following questions and lines of enquiry were used to gather data to inform the analysis.

MeetingSphere Survey

1. Briefly explain how/why you are involved in the S2S project
2. How does S2S link in with your own, or your organisation's activities?
3. Have you any views on how the S2S project was designed?
4. Have you any comments on the structures which were set up to manage S2S?
5. Are there any specific aspects of project delivery that you would like to comment on?
6. What has been the impact of S2S on partnership working?
7. What could have improved S2S's approach to delivering its aims?

Workshop # 1

1. What did you agree with, disagree with, and what is missing from the survey response?
2. What went well in Summit to Sea?
3. What didn't go so well in Summit to Sea?
4. How should we focus Workshop#2?

Workshop#2

1. What can we learn from Summit to Sea for other projects of this type with regard to governance, project management and partnership working?
2. How should S2S plan forward with regard to governance, project management and partnerships?

1-1 Semi-structured Interviews themes

- inception
- design stage
- launch and year one
- governance
- leadership
- project delivery
- partnership working
- re-design of the project
- current activity
- looking forward.