NATTERGAL

The Nattergal Report on Stakeholder Engagement Best Practice for Landscape-scale Nature Recovery Projects

By the Countryside & Community Research Institute

CCRI COUNTRYSIDE AND COMMUNITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Environment Agency

NATURAL ENGLAND

Landscape Recovery

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery

UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

AGILE INITIATIVE

Project Title:

Stakeholder Engagement Best Practice for Landscape-scale Nature Recovery Projects

Start Date

03/04/23

Project Manager

Chris Short

Finish Date

24/06/23

Research Team

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Duration

3 Months

Date of Initial Report

16/06/23

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When quoting this report, please use the following citation:

Davis, J., Hafferty, C., Ingram, J., & Short, C. (2024). The Nattergal Report on Stakeholder Engagement Best Practice for Landscape-scale Nature Recovery Projects. Carried out by the Countryside and Community Research Institute: University of Gloucestershire, UK

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Acknowledgements

We express our gratitude and appreciation to the project steering group. Without their continued guidance, support, and valued contributions, this report and its subsequent findings would not have been possible.

To this end, special thanks are given to research team member Dr Caitlin Hafferty from the Environmental Change Institute (University of Oxford, in association with the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery and Agile Initiative), alongside Ben Hart (Nattergal Ltd), for their role in establishing this opportunity and collaboratively shaping its initial expectations. We would like to extend our appreciation to Nattergal Ltd and its core staff members (Lorienne, Lizzie, and Ivan) for their time, expertise, and assistance. Special mention is then given to Highlands Rewilding for collaborative knowledge sharing and subsequent contributions to understanding best practice. Lastly, we thank the Countryside & Community Research Institute (CCRI), alongside the Evolution Education Trust (EET), for allowing the lead author to suspend academic work in order to undertake this project, and for support throughout.

This report is supported by DEFRA via Landscape Recovery Development Phase funding.

Views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Nattergal Ltd.

Executive Summary

Engagement is key to improving environmental land use decision-making and achieving multiple benefits/nature-positive outcomes for individuals, communities, and society. For the purposes of this report, ***engagement*** is defined as a process whereby individuals, groups, and/or organisations choose to take an active and participatory role in decisions which have the potential to influence or affect them (after Hafferty, 2023, 2022; Reed, 2008). Through effective public and stakeholder engagement, organisations can work to minimise risk and conflict, facilitate knowledge exchange, and enhance the representation of overlooked, harder-to-reach, and/or marginalised voices within decision-making and implementation processes.

Herein, this report provides a comprehensive synthesis of the current literature on best practice public and stakeholder engagement in environmental decision-making, centred on a review of current standards and certification programmes, engagement strategies, and frameworks for stakeholder engagement and participation across international conservation, private land nature restoration projects, and emerging natural capital markets. The review also draws from, and builds upon, key evidence-led "ingredients" for effective engagement outlined in the Nature-based Solutions Initiative *Recipe for Engagement* guidance (see https://nbshub.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/governance/), alongside similarly relevant reviews (see Elliott *et al.,* 2023; Hafferty, 2022).

Divided into four key sections, the first provides an overview of engagement and its importance in environmental decision-making, aspired benefits and potential risks, alongside brief consideration of the rapidly evolving legislative and financial incentives shaping land use and community involvement. We then identify elements of best practice to provide recommendations for enhancing engagement and participation in nature restoration and rewilding projects: that can be flexibly adapted to project goals, local contexts, and communities to maximise the delivery of environmental, economic, and societal benefits (*summarised below*). The report then outlines key stages for enhancing (and embedding) an effective engagement plan tailored to Nattergal, and Boothby Wildland Landscape Recovery project; before summarising key conclusions and perspectives for future best practice.

Recommendations for Best Practice

1. Treat engagement as an ongoing process, not a ‘one-off’, ‘add-on’, or ‘tick-box’ activity.
2. Prioritise understanding of the local context, purpose, and rationale for engagement.
3. Engage stakeholders in dialogue as early as possible in decision-making processes.
4. Integrate local knowledge alongside scientific expertise for robust decision-making.
5. Understand and manage power dynamics effectively, building trust and encouraging two-way dialogue.
6. Recognise there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to engagement – processes should be adapted to local contexts and use varied participatory (in-person and digital) tools and approaches.
7. Embed monitoring and evaluation of social impact to inform future practice.
8. Think big, by acting local to ensure organisational ambitions are rooted in local communities.
9. Develop organisational capacity for engagement through increased training, resource, and human capital.
10. Frameworks for best practice engagement should be institutionalised – embedding equity, accountability, and inclusivity at the centre of nature recovery efforts.

1. Introduction

1.1. Objectives & Methodology

Public and stakeholder engagement is key to improved land-use decision-making, natural resource management, and achieving mutually beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities, and places [1,2]. Increasingly sought and embedded within national and international policy development [2,3], democratic processes of engagement and participation are essential to identify what works, where, and for whom – given the complex societal challenges of agro-ecological transition, bio-economics, landscape-scale nature recovery, and net zero [4-6]. Moreover, there is increased recognition amongst public- and private-land conservation and restoration projects of the importance of delivering environmental, economic, and socio-cultural benefits [7,8]; that has further solidified engagement and participatory decision-making as central elements for community prosperity, and long-term project success.

Nevertheless, current 'how to' guidance for public and stakeholder engagement remains vague and selectively practised [9]. This report summarises multi-disciplinary evidence for best practice public and stakeholder engagement in landscape-scale, environmental land-use decision-making. Specifically, it is intended for landowners, land managers and engagement/community coordinators (e.g., land managers, practitioners, and practice enablers) who seek to involve participants (individuals, communities, and/or organisations of interest) in the planning and implementation of nature restoration and recovery projects. Given the wealth of existing international guidance, policy documentation, charity, not-for-profit and private industry toolkits, and peer-reviewed academic literature, this report is intended to overview, complement, and build upon - rather than replace – existing guidance for engagement best practice. Rather, it seeks to synthesise key elements of best practice and provide a phased approach to improving public and stakeholder engagement in nature recovery efforts.

The review itself was conducted over several stages. Firstly, a review of existing literature, documentation, and guidelines, alongside key project standards and certification programs, engagement strategies, and best practice frameworks for stakeholder engagement and

consultation within environmental land use and management, nature recovery, and private land conservation projects was conducted, drawing upon relevant peer-reviewed, and grey literature identified using searches conducted through Web of Science and Google Scholar, prior to screening for relevance. Secondly, a rapid assessment of public and stakeholder engagement activity in Nattergal (https://www.nattergal.co.uk) was conducted, centred across its first nature recovery site, Boothby Wildland (https://www.nattergal.co.uk/boothby-wildland). Here, ongoing conversations and semi-structured interviews with key staff members/engagement practitioners were used to identify and assess current institutional capacity, constraints, barriers to engagement, and areas of future innovation. Key findings were then compared with the existing literature, guidance, and available toolkits to develop a series of best practice recommendations for institutionalising (and further embedding) a culture of engagement and long-term communication and engagement strategy.

This report forms part of broader work (commissioned by Nattergal Ltd) to provide evidence-led recommendations for engagement across its first site, Boothby Wildland. As such, whilst this report and its subsequent findings are tailored to the organisational needs and priorities of Nattergal and Boothby Wildland, the outlined principles and recommendations for best practice are expected to be generally relevant and applicable to a number of nature restoration and rewilding initiatives across the UK; alongside contributing to the growing debate around community engagement, land use, and natural capital.

1.2. What is Engagement & Why is it Important?

Across recent years, driven by advancements in deliberative democracy and social justice, stakeholder engagement and participation have grown into widely utilised, but often unclear constructs [10,11]. Nevertheless, processes of community engagement have become an essential tenet of many global biodiversity conservation, rewilding and nature restoration, natural resource management, and land use projects [12-14].

As such, it is essential to clarify key terminology relating to public and stakeholder engagement (***see Glossary - page 66***): to ensure a coherent base of understanding across research, policy, and practice; navigate the complexity of interchangeable terms such as “engagement”, “participation”, “consultation”, “deliberation”, and “involvement” common across existing

guidance and documentation; and ensure best practice in the development and implementation of engagement activity [15]. To this end, this report defines ***engagement*** as a process whereby individuals, groups, and/or organisations choose to take an active and participatory role in decisions which have the potential to influence or affect them [2,15,16]. Within the context of Nattergal's private governance structure, and the decision-making processes of associated projects, this includes focused engagement activity (centred on a specific project or decisions involving particular communities and affected parties) and broader engagement processes (for education and information exchange).

In this way, engagement covers a broad range of processes, activities, and interactions throughout the project cycle, including stakeholder identification, prioritisation, visualisation, consultation, monitoring, and evaluation [17]. Collectively, effective engagement seeks to foster two-way dialogue and development of social capital [18-20], mitigate risk and barriers to nature, offer opportunities for collaboration and co-design of project interventions, and reduce the negative impacts arising from external manipulation, interference, coercion, discrimination, and/or intimidation [21]. In doing so, engagement practitioners and practice enablers can help develop a sense of ownership, identity, and impact on decision-making, project design and implementation, management, and governance structures [20,22-24].

1.3. Benefits & Potential Risks of Engagement

There are several widely adopted ways of categorising the benefits of, and reasons for, undertaking engagement [15] – that, in turn, vary between projects, and are present to varying degrees. These include the consideration of normative (individuals have the right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives), substantive (helps to produce better quality knowledge and evidence to improve decision making), and instrumental reasons (engagement helps increase the likelihood that decisions – and decision-making organisations - are trustworthy and legitimate) [25].

Beyond this, there are several benefits of effective public and stakeholder engagement within environmental decision-making processes, which could include rewilding, conservation, and nature recovery initiatives, as reviewed by [2,6,13]. These include improving the evidence base [20], early identification of local needs and priorities [26], and increased credibility, acceptance,

and likelihood of project success [27,28]. When designed and implemented well, effective engagement can help to navigate conflicting interests, trade-offs, or otherwise contentious decisions [29], foster equitable and representative inclusion of marginal groups, enhance representation of local values and socio-cultural heritage [30], and improve collaboration across landscape scales [31].

However, where poorly designed and/or implemented without due consideration of the potential risks, engagement can lead to a variety of unintended negative impacts. The negative impacts of engagement can include increased tension, disillusionment, and conflict [32], increased scepticism and distrust, and the further exclusion of marginal groups [33], alongside broader issues associated with reinforced top-down control and extractive power structures, false belief of consensus, and over-promising, yet under-delivering on anticipated project outcomes [24,34]. Additional issues can arise within landscape scale agri-environmental, conservation, and recovery projects, given spatiotemporal land ownership and tenure arrangements, administrative complexities, and mismatches between agricultural management scales and ecological processes [5,35]. These can, in turn, affect support amongst individuals, communities, stakeholders, investors, and the broader public.

Engagement best practice involves identifying (and mitigating for) the potential risks, in order to maximise the benefits. While such risks and impacts are not reasons to avoid engagement, they highlight the need for careful consideration and management of engagement processes [6], and further solidify the need for transparency, accountability, equity, and efficiency in environmental decision-making and project implementation [26,36].

1.4. National Context

It is essential to recognise that best practice guidance for engagement and participation exists and operates within a broader landscape of legislative frameworks and recommendations. Despite reform, land use and management remain contentious issues. In turn, achieving effective and sustainable engagement, given complex, multi-scale, and continually evolving socio-environmental issues, represents an ongoing challenge for research, policymaking, and practice [2,37,38]. The smallest of changes can result in controversy and conflict. Local communities may be principally interested and/or affected by project interventions and tied to subsequent

economic and cultural impacts: however, they often lack formal democratic power, reasonable control, or financial resources to influence decision-making [1].

Internationally, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), alongside its associated package of goals and financing agreed upon at COP15 (i.e., the 30 x 30 target for nature's recovery, formal recognition of the rights and contributions of indigenous/local communities) demonstrate a shift towards full and effective stakeholder participation in combating the twin biodiversity-climate crises and ensuring nature recovery [39]. Moreover, as a signatory to the Aarhus Convention, the UK is committed to ensuring public access to information, participation in decision-making, and environmental justice [40, 41]. Closer to home, the long-term 25-Year Environment Plan (25-YEP), alongside medium-term Agricultural Transition- and Environmental Improvement Plans, collectively acknowledge the importance of public and stakeholder engagement for monitoring indicators and achieving environmental goals [42,43], and propose improved frameworks for public consultation and engagement with greater emphasis on local involvement in planning processes, to facilitate the revival and levelling up of rural communities through renewed environmental stewardship: effectively subsidising sustainability through concepts of public goods and ecosystem services [44,45].

To effectively implement public and stakeholder engagement across landscape-scale initiatives, it is vital to first consider this contextual background alongside the potential impacts and opportunities arising from legislative and financial development – effectively viewing the current drivers of land use change as potential 'tools for nature recovery' – as depicted in ***Table 1*** (below). Here, effective public and stakeholder engagement is fundamental to ensuring the legitimacy of project interventions, managing unintended impacts and potential tensions between local views and institutional approaches, and should be acknowledged early in the decision-making process [13,46].

Table 1 – Mechanisms for Nature Recovery & Drivers of Land Use Change across England, and the UK. Further information and review are provided within ***Appendix A***.

Legislative/Financial Mechanism	Overview	Importance
Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)	*Voluntary incentives offered for the provision of specified ecosystem services (derived benefits from the natural environment), or actions anticipated to deliver such services.*	*Restoring, maintaining, and enhancing ecosystem services is increasingly recognised for sustainable economic growth, alongside prioritising the adaptability and resilience of local communities, and human health and well-being.*
Landscape Scale Approaches (e.g., Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund)	*Cooperative partnerships among state and non-governmental conservation organisations, communities, and private landowners and managers (e.g., Heritage Lottery Fund and Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) programme).*	*Facilitates community collaboration drawing out local distinctiveness, culture and heritage as well as strengthening rural cohesion and economic resilience.*
Current Agri-Environment Schemes (AES)	*In operation across England since 1987, AES provide funding to farmers and land managers to farm in a way that supports biodiversity, enhances the landscape, and improves the quality of water, air, and soil.*	*Despite being part way through a process of gradually phasing out payments between 2021-2028, these schemes provide financial incentives, technical support, and guidance to farmers and landowners for the protection and management of the rural historic environment through cross-compliance and proactive works.*
Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMs)	*Post-EU, agri-environmental subsidies that seek to reward farmers and landowners for land-based environment and climate goods and services, through participation in three 'new look' agri-environment schemes - the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI), Countryside Stewardship (CF), and Landscape Recovery (LR).*	*Centre on the promotion of nature-friendly farming practices that deliver public goods, protect natural environments, and support ecosystem recovery through large-scale, land-use change and habitat restoration projects.* *Provide a viable funding mechanism for nature recovery efforts, and an opportunity for integrating restorative conservational ideals alongside regenerative agricultural practices.*

Natural Capital Markets	*Private sector investment/payments for environmental benefits and natural capital, including carbon and biodiversity offset credits, insetting, and diversification.*	*A well-regulated natural capital market, which leads with biodiversity and community benefits, offer potential for blended green finance mechanisms - representative of unique local geographies and contexts across private investment in nature-based solutions, carbon sequestration, and offsets.*
Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	*An approach to development, and/or land management that demonstrates measurable improvements for biodiversity through the creation or enhancement of natural habitats.* *Applying to land managers, advisors, developers, and local planning authorities, BNG can be achieved on-site, off-site or through a combination of measures (i.e., through offsetting and statutory biodiversity credits).*	*BNG seeks to further the development of high-quality biodiversity units and strengthen funding mechanisms for nature recovery.* *In working alongside similar schemes to attract private landowners into conservation, reversing biodiversity declines and providing an economic incentive to avoid initial harm to nature by redirecting development towards low-impact areas.*
Ecotourism	*Ecotourism, or 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment, sustain, and improve the well-being of local people' stands to play a vital role in rural enterprise and business model diversification for large landowners.*	*Nature-based enterprises such as camping, visitor guided walks, and wildlife safaris provide a mechanism for local employment and investment in rural economies; however, they should do so whilst respecting the natural limits of the project area.*

2. Engagement Best Practice

Public and stakeholder engagement is key to navigating complex environmental challenges that often involve multiple stakeholder groups, wide-ranging (often contradictory) knowledge types, and context-dependent socio-ecological, institutional, legal, and economic processes [5,24,47,48]. To this end, 'best practice' stakeholder engagement is an ongoing *process,* as well as an outcome – rather than a series of 'one off', 'add on', or 'tick box' exercises [17]. Drawing upon well-informed, robust evidence for engagement in environmental decision-making is equally important. By grounding decisions in best practice evidence, organisations can create effective strategies that maximise beneficial outcomes and manage risk, build trust and legitimacy, and promote a culture of continuous improvement [13,49].

This section is (in part) centred upon the rapid review of key project standards and certification programs, engagement strategies, and best practice frameworks for stakeholder engagement and consultation within environmental land use and management, nature recovery, and private land conservation projects. More broadly, this has encompassed international guidelines for public engagement and participation, charity, not-for-profit, private industry guidance, and academic literature (as outlined above). For the complete list of reviewed standards, alongside a comprehensive synthesis of best practice guidance, consult ***Appendices B & C***.

2.1. Frameworks for Best Practice Engagement

There are many 'types' of engagement that can shape potential outcomes: themselves impacted by, and adapted to local context and purpose [3,15,24]. To this end, there have been numerous attempts at developing typologies, models, frameworks, theories, toolkits, and guidance (collectively referred to as 'frameworks' here for simplicity) that aim to provide clarity and an overarching structure for undertaking best practice engagement [24,26,50-52]. Collectively, these frameworks provide an explanation and classification of the different forms of engagement that exist, alongside detailing the role and expectations of different actors (including those leading/initiating the engagement process, as well as public and stakeholder participants) and

how such factors can impact the aims, objectives, and subsequent outcomes of engagement [15,16].

Intended as a global standard for public participation, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s Spectrum of Public Participation defines different "levels" of engagement and participation, based on the role of the public. These range from processes that inform and consult (lower levels of impact on the decision) to those that involve, collaborate, and empower (higher levels of impact on the decision) [53]. It is important to emphasise here that although the IAP2 Spectrum provides a valuable structure for thinking about and implementing best practice engagement, 'higher levels' of engagement (e.g., collaboration) do not guarantee best practice outcomes in all situations (see Hafferty, [15]; Reed *et al.,* [24]). It is crucial to remember that engagement will always vary considerably between different contexts, local demographics, and subject-specific purposes [15,16,24,47].

More information about the diverse methods, tools, frameworks, types, toolkits, and guidance can be found in knowledge and resource hubs for engagement, including the crowdsourced platform Participedia (https://participedia.net/), the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (https://oecd-opsi.org/case_type/opsi/); the UKERC Observatory for Public Engagement with Energy and Climate Change (https://ukerc-observatory.ac.uk/); and UK public participation charity Involve UK's resource hub (https://involve.org.uk/resources).

2.2. What Constitutes Best Practice?

This report synthesises several elements of engagement best practice throughout the environmental research literature/evidence base. Of note, it is argued that public and stakeholder engagement processes should be underpinned by a dynamic approach that emphasises empowerment, participation, equity, trust, and learning [2,11]. In this way, engagement should be understood and increasingly viewed as an ongoing, two-way process instead of one-off exercises or one-size-fits-all 'toolkit' approaches [2,17,54].

For inclusive and representative environmental land-use decision-making, it is crucial first to identify and analyse key stakeholders - including individuals, groups, and/or communities – that stand to be impacted or affected by project interventions [6]. Where relevant, stakeholder identification and engagement should then be considered as early as possible, commence during

early stages of project planning, and continue throughout the decision-making process in an open and transparent way, offering the opportunity to further strengthen benefits and feedback to future designs. There should be ongoing processes for stakeholder feedback and evaluation, subsequently fed back to stakeholders to maximise the delivery of mutually beneficial outcomes, demonstrate improvements in practice, and mitigate potential risks or grievances [55,56].

Throughout the evidence base, engagement is often highlighted as heavily dependent on local trends and context [57]. As such, the length, type, and frequency of engagement should be adjusted to match the goals of the process, recognising that outcomes are impacted by a complex interplay of spatial-temporal influences, in addition to historical trends, power dynamics, pre-existing networks, social, economic, and cultural capital, shared values, understandings and trust [13,58]. In navigating this complexity, professional facilitation may be required to best incorporate diverse knowledge alongside scientific expertise for a more comprehensive understanding of complex and dynamic socio-ecological systems and processes and to ensure robust decision-making [24,59,60]. Moreover, it is important to consider the objectives, key messages, preferred communication channels, potential barriers to engagement, and specific needs or expectations of stakeholder groups and to tailor communication and engagement activities accordingly.

More recently, studies have explored different approaches for effective digital engagement and their impact on the best practice outcomes of engagement [61,62]. In their study of practitioners in the UK environment sector, [16] found that the key factors influencing outcomes in engagement best practice take on new dimensions in digital and remote environments (i.e., they change, resulting in new and specific considerations). The authors demonstrate that no single digital, in-person, or hybrid approach guarantees successful engagement best-practice in all situations. In this way, effective engagement employs an array of methods, rather than adopting a 'digital by default' or 'digital first' approach that presents novel challenges for engagement in relation to exclusions, accessibility, trust and transparency, useability, ethics, privacy/security issues, and the ability to foster genuine dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders [16, 61].

Finally, it is argued that to be successful in the long-term, and to overcome many of its inherent risks/potential limitations, stakeholder participation and engagement must be ***institutionalised*** (embedding the principles and practices of best practice engagement as part of the governance, culture, and decision-making structures of an organisation in a way that they become the 'norm'

[16] – see ***Section 3.6***. This includes establishing a coherent organisational vision for engagement and associated best practice engagement strategy that can facilitate processes where goals are negotiated and outcomes uncertain [2,15].

These considerations provide a starting point for thinking about best practice engagement. Below, this report illustrates how such findings may be tailored to context, used to inform engagement strategies for environmental land-use decision-making within Nattergal Ltd, and across Boothby Wildland Landscape Recovery project.

2.3. Review of Existing Guidance & Standards for Best Practice

Restoring and rewilding degraded landscapes involves complex trade-offs against limited time and resources, conflicting knowledge, and understandings, and varying societal preferences among stakeholders [63,64]. As a result, many examples of participatory approaches to environmental management and restoration projects fail to deliver upon desired beneficial environmental, economic, and social outcomes [7,33,65]. To combat this, guiding principles and best practice standards seek to improve the effectiveness of environmental decision-making, facilitate knowledge and skills development, ensure adequate processes that account for divergent socio-cultural realities and needs of key stakeholders, and establish ongoing monitoring for adaptive management and improvement [66,67].

Within the emerging field of natural capital markets, this has involved guidance from internationally recognised, long-standing schemes such as Plan Vivo, Verra, Gold Standard, and Natural Forest Standard. Whilst not exclusively centred on engagement, these standards incorporate elements of stakeholder engagement and participation - promoting inclusive, fair, and sustainable approaches to forestry, agricultural, and other land-use projects while improving rural livelihoods and ecosystem services. However, it should be noted that attempting to generalise the international NGO community engagement model to private land ownership across the UK without broader consideration of local guidance may result in bureaucratic overkill to the detriment of biological ambitions and community benefits. Moreover, standards vary significantly in their levels of development and adoption. To this end, it is imperative also to consider voluntary certification standards specific to UK restoration projects, including the UK Peatland- and Woodland-Carbon Codes. Collectively underpinned by the UK Land Carbon

Registry, this aims to ensure projects and their socio-environmental benefits are transparent and open to public scrutiny, in line with relevant policy documentation (i.e., the Nature Markets Framework, 25 Year- and Environmental Improvement Plans) and local agendas to ensure long-term project protection and success.

Collectively, standards emphasise several common principles for effective engagement, mirroring those identified and highlighted across the academic literature. Whilst specifics vary according to context and scope, here, guidance is generally framed against project requirements for effective processes of stakeholder identification, analysis, consultation, and evaluation, alongside broader elements of monitoring and continuous feedback/grievance redress. However, translating principles of engagement into practice often involves further clarification and establishment of central mechanisms for free, prior, and informed consent, ongoing feedback, and benefit sharing [68,69], alongside the development of stakeholder engagement strategies that are commensurate with the scale and risk of the project and that uses differentiated measures to engage disadvantaged, marginalised, or other underrepresented groups, and ensure gender equality [21,65]. Moreover, there is often a greater emphasis on environmental, social/livelihood, and economic baselining and safeguarding (understanding and accounting for both positive contributions and potential risks) during the design, planning, implementation, and operational stages of a given project [21,67].

Across international standards, early engagement of 'local communities, indigenous peoples, and other relevant stakeholders' is encouraged to allow those involved to provide input, identify and address potential concerns, and influence decision-making processes from the outset [68]. Nevertheless, stakeholders should be actively involved across the process, from planning and decision-making to implementation and evaluation. To this end, engagement best practice involves clear and accessible communication of the purpose, process, and potential impacts of engagement. Processes should be flexibly adapted to the specific contexts, needs, and preferences of target stakeholders, taking into consideration potential physical, economic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. This flexibility is also emphasised when considering methods of engagement, to include deliberative and participatory approaches, in-person and online activities, and a range of supporting digital tools to enhance participation, accommodate diverse stakeholder perspectives, and facilitate ongoing communication [22,70]. Regular updates and feedback loops help maintain stakeholder involvement and allow adaptive management.

Stakeholder feedback should be considered and integrated into decision-making processes to enhance transparency and accountability [71]. This involves assessing whether the engagement has achieved its objectives, identifying areas for improvement, and sharing lessons learned for future engagement and demonstrations of how stakeholder input has influenced decision-making and/or project actions [67,68,72].

2.4.Summary of Recommendations for Best Practice

Based on the review presented above, this section summarises 10 evidence-led recommendations for engagement best practice in landscape-scale nature recovery.

As such, the following key principles reflect the common understandings and best practice for public and stakeholder engagement, synthesising current guidance (building upon research conducted by Elliott *et al.,* [1]; Reed, [2]; Haffterty, [15,16]; Hafferty *et al.,* [61]; Reed *et al.,* [24]), documentation and standards to underpin the organisational vision, and strategy for engagement below. However, in practice, organisations may apply these and additional principles in different ways; actively responding to local context and past successes.

1. Treat engagement as an ongoing process, not a ‘one-off’, ‘add-on’, or ‘tick-box’ activity.
2. Prioritise understanding of the local context, purpose, and rationale for engagement.
3. Engage stakeholders in dialogue as early as possible in decision-making processes.
4. Integrate local knowledge alongside scientific expertise for robust decision-making.
5. Understand and manage power dynamics effectively, building trust and encouraging two-way dialogue.
6. Recognise there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to engagement – processes should be adapted to local contexts and use varied participatory (in-person and digital) tools and approaches.
7. Embed monitoring and evaluation of social impact to inform future practice.
8. Think big, by acting local to ensure organisational ambitions are rooted in local communities.
9. Develop organisational capacity for engagement through increased training, resource, and human capital.
10. Frameworks for engagement best practice should be institutionalised – embedding equity, accountability, and inclusivity at the centre of nature recovery efforts.

3. Developing A Strategy for Best Practice Engagement – Nattergal & Boothby Wildland

This section builds upon the earlier review to offer a synthesis and overview of how Nattergal can develop a long-term strategy for best practice engagement: intended to have broader relevance for current and future organisational ambitions. In the spirit of one of the company's core values, 'collaboration multiplies impact', the guidance and recommendations included within this report will also be shared more broadly, for example, with other Landscape Recovery pilot projects and landscape-scale, nature-recovery initiatives.

Nattergal seek to catalyse global biodiversity recovery, driven by focused investment into rewilding degraded ecosystems via a model of private land ownership (https://www.nattergal.co.uk). Specifically, its mission is to "deliver nature recovery at scale to provide vital benefits for society and sustainable financial returns." At present, activity is governed by a non-executive board of experts, and CEO collectively responsible for organisational management. Day-to-day activities/project interventions are overseen by core team members, including heads of operations and natural capital, Landscape Recovery project manager, and site/community engagement coordinator. Individual sites have an external 'environmental advisory board', consisting of specialist academics, local community representatives, and NGO experts. Their first site, Boothby Wildland in Lincolnshire, seeks to follow lessons learnt from the longer-standing Knepp Wildland in staging lowland arable reversion to encompass the staggered return of pasture, restoration of watercourses, and detailed baseline monitoring in line with emerging natural capital markets.

Geographically bounded by the small villages of Boothby Pagnell, Bitchfield, and Ingoldsby, Boothby Wildland is a 617-hectare arable farm of variable third-grade land quality within the Kesteven Uplands - NCA 75 [73]. Purchased in December 2021, the site remains partially contract farmed – as agricultural operations are gradually phased out, guided by historic field boundaries, alongside local ecological and agronomic factors (i.e., soil type, weather and seed source, and spring cropping). One of 22 first-round Landscape Recovery pilot projects, Boothby Wildland

aims to demonstrate an innovative business model for landscape-scale nature restoration funded through principles of natural capital and ecotourism to develop a natural asset that is rooted amongst the landscape and the local community via best practice stakeholder engagement to maximise the longer-term societal benefits of rewilding as a viable nature-based climate solution.

Deciding how best to do this and the specific outcomes to be aimed for requires collaboration between and across diverse individuals, organisations, and communities. For example, individuals living within, or nearby land managed for nature recovery should be engaged in decisions that have the potential to influence/affect them: improving project planning and implementation through the incorporation of scientific expertise alongside local understandings of ecology, cultural heritage, and socio-economic dynamics. There is always room for improvement, and Nattergal seeks to improve, extend, and further institutionalise an evidence-led, best-practice strategy of public and stakeholder engagement: aligned with organisational ambitions of delivering nature recovery at scale to provide societal benefits and sustainable financial returns across their current (and future) nature restoration sites.

Following the review of existing guidance, alongside ongoing informal conversations with Nattergal staff to understand organisational context and capacity/capability, the following recommendations are made for developing an engagement best practice strategy for Nattergal (and, by extension, associated projects such as Boothby Wildland). To this end, the sub-sections below can be interpreted as key elements of this process; and provide a phased approach to improving public and stakeholder engagement in landscape-scale nature recovery projects (as visually summarised in ***Figure 1*** below).

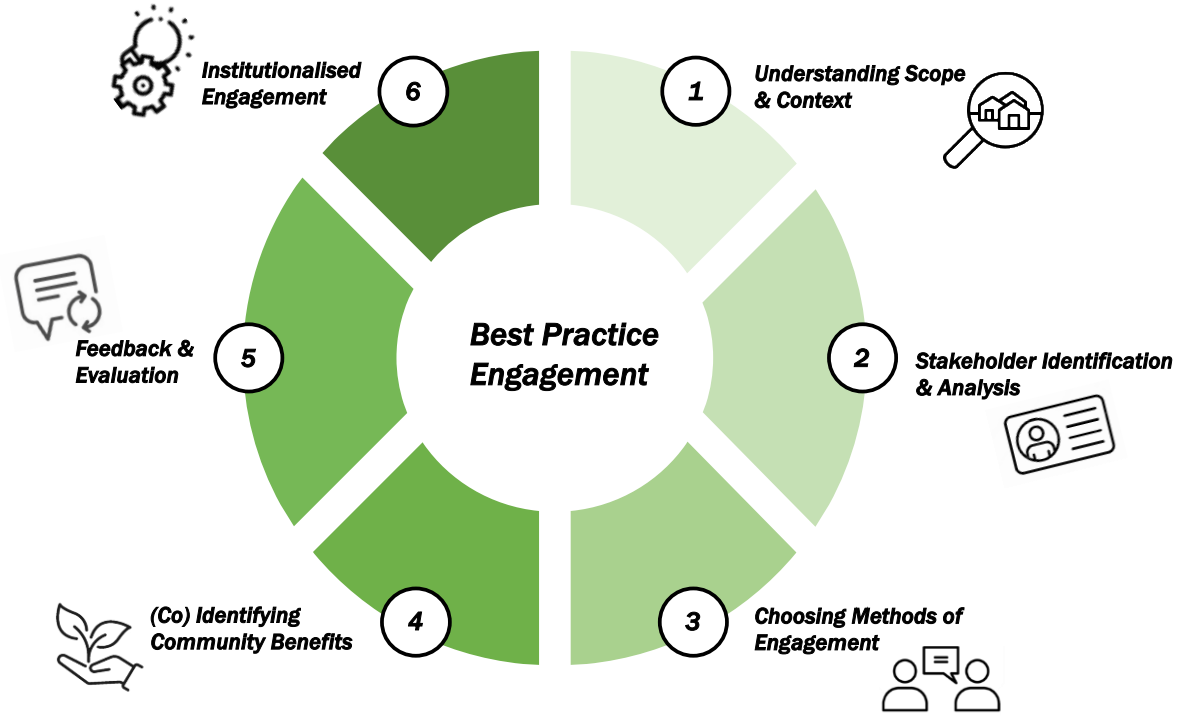

Figure 1 – Graphical Summary of key considerations within a best practice strategy to improving public and stakeholder engagement in landscape-scale nature recovery projects. Figure derived through interpretation of key standards consultation of increasingly detailed route maps/processes of engagement and consultation (See guidance from Gold Standard [21], and the Scottish Land Commission [74].

Note: Whilst this initial guidance provides a starting framework for considering best practice, engagement processes should be flexible, adaptively managed, and tailored to local context. As such, the areas identified should be subject to refinement and co-design.

3.1. Understanding Scope & Context:

To ensure the effectiveness of public and stakeholder engagement processes, it is crucial first to identify why engagement is necessary, the scope and context for engagement activities, and any potential outcomes [68]. Often, this involves the development of overarching statements describing the purpose, scope, and planned objectives of engagement that guide the selection of appropriate partnerships, methodologies, baselines, and measures of success [57,65].

In all cases, engagement should be adapted to the local decision-making context - effectively 'thinking big, by acting local' - taking into consideration socio-cultural and environmental factors (i.e., historical trends, land ownership, credible alternative land-use scenarios, accessibility and inclusion, power dynamics, and specific benefits/risk factors) [59,67], as well as potential organisational constraints (including the availability of resources, time, financing, or human capital) [3,13,60]. For Nattergal, and by extension, each of its associated projects such as Boothby Wildland, this initial process will involve tying broad organisational aims (e.g., nature recovery at scale, societal benefits, sustainable financial returns) to context-specific purpose and planned objectives of engagement, to best identify future avenues for consultation, collaboration, and meaningful co-design.

3.2. Stakeholder Identification & Analysis:

Having established a clear rationale for engagement, the next stage in engagement and participation processes is stakeholder identification. This involves determining all individuals, groups, communities, organisations, and/or entities that have a stake in the project, who might impact (or be impacted) through engagement, alongside those of broader interest and influence. It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach: who is involved (and to what extent) depends on the project, its objectives, anticipated impact, and local context, amongst other factors. Similarly, there may be situations where professional facilitation is required, whilst, in other instances, engagement may be conducted more informally or be initiated by the communities/stakeholder groups themselves.

From identification flows stakeholder analysis - the systematic assessment, visualisation, and prioritisation of stakeholder expectations, perspectives, priorities, contributions, and risks, against broad metrics (i.e., level of interest, participation, power, influence, and/or potential impact) [17,75]. When done well, effective stakeholder analysis allows organisations to delineate a project's sphere of potential influence, ensure adequate representation of interested parties, and aid the development of tailored engagement strategies that maximise collaboration whilst balancing conservation imperatives, land ownership, and sustainable maximisation of profit/return on investment [10].

Nattergal seeks to engage across a wide range of individuals and organisations, commonly referred to as ***stakeholders***[1], ***communities***, and the wider ***public***. Here, the term '*stakeholder*' refers to all individuals, groups, and/or organisations who can affect or could be affected by, a given decision/project intervention [2,15] – i.e., they have a vested interest, potential influence, or 'stake' in the process [76]. For Boothby Wildland, this collectively encompasses local residents, farmers, landowners/land managers, recreational land users, delivery partners (policymakers, charities, businesses, and non-governmental organisations), local governance (local authorities, parish- and district councils, catchment partnerships), members of the wider public, community initiatives, schools, research institutes, non-local interest groups, and additional groups as appropriate.

This may, in future, also involve further networks and potential groups, including ACRE representatives (https://www.lincsymca.co.uk/in-your-community/), Landworkers Alliance (https://landworkersalliance.org.uk), rural support networks (https://www.lrsn.co.uk/), and both local nature and catchment level partnerships (https://glnp.org.uk/).

For clarity, *local communities* represent groups of people who derive income, livelihood or cultural values and other contributions to well-being from the project area [71]. This can be further sub-categorised into specific '*communities of place*' (those who live and/or work on the land and stand to be directly impacted by project interventions and decisions) and '*communities of interest*' (specific members of the public who share a common interest). Lastly, the wider *public* signifies any individuals who are (or could be) involved in the engagement process [15,50,79]. It is worth noting, however, that individuals may fall into multiple categories or listed groups; and may not necessarily share the same values, identities, or ways of thinking [1,80]. Often, the list of potential stakeholders exceeds the time available for subsequent analysis and the capacity to map the results. The challenge, therefore, lies in focusing on the key stakeholders to form a representative subset of all interested parties and explicitly identifying who is (and who is not) involved within this process – and by extension – whose voices are heard and why [81]. Across Boothby Wildland, initial processes of stakeholder identification and analysis are ongoing.

[1] It is important to note that the word 'stakeholder' is problematic due to its roots in colonial practices and potential to exclude/marginalise Indigenous groups and people, with numerous calls for the word to be used with care, or banished entirely [77,78].

Whilst recognising these debates, this report continues to use the term with careful acknowledgement given the definition provided by Freeman [76] is clear, useful, relevant and (perhaps most importantly), widely used and understood across academic and practitioner spheres.

This began with informal conversations with individuals, community groups and interested parties and has now progressed to involve external expertise in conducting independent stakeholder analysis and mapping. To this end, future long-term research partnerships are encouraged to address organisational capacity/potential shortfall and provide external expertise and advisory oversight.

3.3. Methods of Engagement:

As with broader processes of effective stakeholder engagement, the methods and tools that are utilised should be carefully adapted to local context (where feasible and appropriate): co-designed with key stakeholders to maximise representation of diverse voices, account for power relations, and develop trust and transparency that can serve as capital in the event of potential tensions or conflict [82-84]. As a result, it is important to understand and account for potential diversity amongst stakeholders and adjust messaging accordingly to minimise bias and misrepresentation, ensure equal opportunity for participation, and feedback on intended project outcomes [21,53].

To this end, a varied range of participatory, hybrid (in-person/digital) techniques, tools, and approaches are recommended. These will suit different 'levels' of engagement, and differ depending upon the type of stakeholder/community and purpose of engagement, such as the communication of project goals and education (e.g., websites, social media, videos and podcasts, newsletters, and leaflets), specific consultation (e.g., feedback forms, public meetings, 'walk & talk' events, and opinion polls), collaboration (e.g., citizen science, participatory mapping and stakeholder advisory boards), community empowerment (e.g., delegated decision-making and self-governance models of community ownership and wealth building). Further information and examples of digital techniques, tools, and approaches are provided in ***Appendix C.***

To date, engagement activity conducted at Boothby Wildland has involved a mix of in-person (i.e., public meetings, community 'walk and talk' and 'Q & A' events, site visits, volunteering, family sessions, and work parties) and digital (remote) engagement methods (i.e., website and social media outreach, Facebook, WhatsApp, email exchanges, virtual talks/webinars, and communication via digital and printed media). Principally, such initial engagement activity has

centred on informing and involving the local community (residents, landowners, land users, farmers, local authorities, community groups, and businesses) across Boothby's geographic sphere of influence (the small villages of Boothby Pagnell, Bitchfield, and Ingoldsby); however, this has also included broader engagement with local government bodies and environmental NGOs, local farming clusters, academic institutions and researchers, charities, private companies, and further organisations and/or interested parties. Alongside the formal mechanisms of engagement outlined above, a bulk of current activity has resulted from ongoing, informal conversations with local people in and around the project area. Whilst making significant progress towards achieving some of the goals and aspired benefits of engagement best practice (building rapport, sharing expertise, informing key stakeholders of project goals, and fostering involvement and collaboration for community benefit), there remain important opportunities for expanding upon and improving the structure and clarity of engagement - particularly when considering future avenues for collaboration, co-production, and empowerment.

To support this, we recommend aligning current (and prospective) local community engagement activity against a broader spectrum of engagement (as identified in ***Figure 2***). By doing so, this provides an avenue for initial consideration of to what extent engagement may vary between higher-level, fixed organisational objectives (e.g., nature restoration, societal benefit, sustainable financial returns) that are best suited to processes of informing and consulting with interested parties; and increasingly site-specific, on-the-ground interventions or processes that allow for greater involvement, collaboration, co-design, and community empowerment), and associated methods.

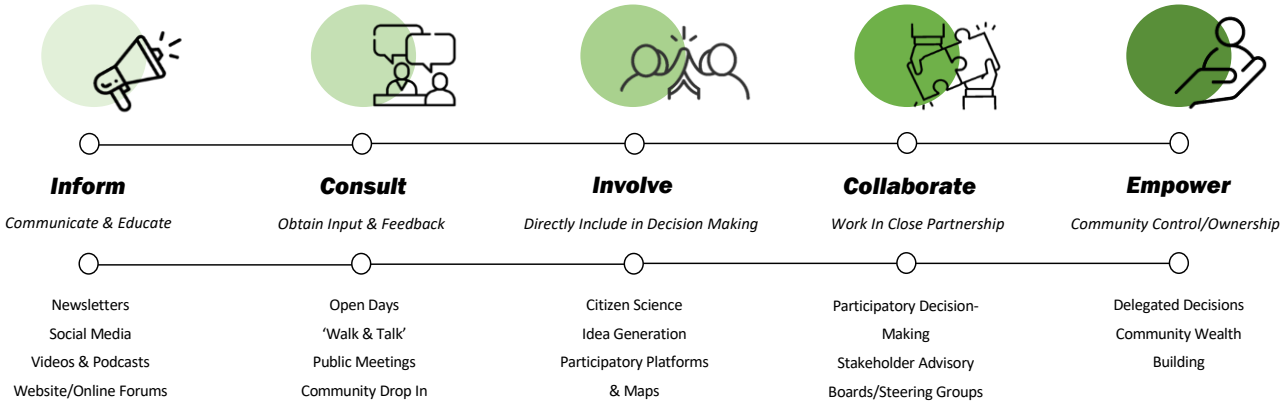

Figure 2 – Spectrum of Engagement and examples of applicable methods for understanding how to align local community engagement across nature recovery projects.

Figure adapted from best practice guidance (including the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation [53], International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Good Practice Handbook for Companies Doing Business in Emerging Markets [79], and Facilitating Power's Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership [85].

3.4. Community Benefits:

Variably defined between major disciplines and subject areas, concepts of 'community benefits' or 'social requirements' are vital to ensuring land use projects deliver multiple environmental and socio-economic benefits. In this way, they seek to provide a mechanism for individuals to work alongside the public-private sector for the long-term benefits of the community [86].

A rapidly developing area amongst land-use decision-making and natural capital investment, ***community benefits*** are defined as 'packages of intentional benefits, arising from investment in natural capital enhancement, creation, and restoration projects, provided on a negotiated basis for the long-term benefit of the geographically local community' [87]. Thus, community benefits are for the community/communities of place local to, and thus, most affected by, investment in land use change and natural capital projects/planning. These are distinct from broader public benefits and include direct economic gain, improved well-being and livelihoods, enhanced ecosystem services, respect and preservation of socio-cultural heritage, education and outreach, and community cohesion and resilience. Fostering socio-personal connectedness and enabling collaborative working/peer learning is effective in previous landscape-scale approaches, leading to improved environmental understanding and voluntary involvement. In such cases, improved access to the natural environment is also thought to improve physical fitness, mental well-being, connectedness to nature, and offer mechanisms for accreditation and formal qualifications [58,88,89].

In line with best practice guidance, livelihood/community baselines and social monitoring plans should be developed prior to the start of any project intervention [21,67,90], using simple and cost-effective indicators of social impact that follow the SMART framework - 'specific,

measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound'. Wherever possible, community benefits and baselines should be co-identified and designed alongside local feedback and evaluation processes to ensure they reflect the needs and priorities of those involved, and feed into ongoing monitoring of ecological and socio-economic benefits/outcomes associated with nature restoration (i.e., capturing and incorporating local ecological knowledge, values, attachments to place, perceptions on health and well-being value of the landscape, encouraging participation in citizen science). Similarly, social baselines should be conducted alongside longer-standing natural capital baselines to form a robust foundation for developing robust socio-environmental targets for community benefit. All baselines and benefits should be subject to periodic review and reported (annually and, in detail, every five years throughout the project lifetime).

Where necessary, project activities should then be adjusted to address any failure to achieve anticipated benefits or justify why updates are not appropriate/required [91]. For Boothby Wildland, community benefits can be maximised through instigating and understanding social/livelihood baselines, via impact assessment(s), alongside the broader use of longitudinal stakeholder surveys, farm census data, evaluative discussions, community workshops, and storytelling. Longer term, as part of efforts to institutionally embed engagement activity, increased emphasis should be placed on the development, utilisation, and ongoing monitoring of social metrics (i.e., in-person and online access, outreach and education, job creation and volunteering, heritage, alongside broader indicators of rural stewardship and economic resilience). This may entail additional funding and/or resourcing, which should be discussed and accounted for at an early stage of project planning.

3.5. Feedback & Evaluation:

It is essential that engagement is embedded as part of broader feedback, monitoring and evaluation processes. Local knowledge and perspectives also need to be considered as an inherent part of the knowledge and evidence base upon which decisions are made. Longer-term, continued feedback and evaluation of engagement activities (both internal and external) is key to effectively embedding a holistic, long-term culture of engagement and should be considered from the project outset [15,16,92]. When conducted effectively, this allows for self-assessment and organisational learning to inform the demonstrable improvement in and enhancement of future engagement [13,68,93], alongside co-delivery of social benefit (as discussed), through

shared learning, alongside identification of aspired benefits and potential risks [24]. Nevertheless, monitoring and evaluation processes for engagement remain largely informal, ad-hoc, and selectively practised. The wider evidence suggests numerous challenges for evaluating best practice engagement, and the findings of these evaluation processes are rarely shared and/or lead to demonstrable improvements in practice [94]. To avoid such common criticisms, it is crucial that Nattergal, and associated projects such as Boothby Wildland, provide early opportunities for stakeholder feedback and grievance redress through informal outlets (i.e., feedback forms, drop-in sessions, coffee mornings) and ongoing outreach and evaluation of stakeholder perceptions and wellbeing.

Engagement should be subject to review and (where appropriate) necessary revision to reflect any spatial-temporal changes in project objectives, stakeholder interest, influence, or the emergence of novel parties. By incorporating these elements into the decision-making process, land use decisions can be more effective, sustainable, and responsive to the needs and concerns of local communities and the broader landscape.

3.6. Institutionalising Engagement:

Developing an appropriate, effective, and meaningful approach to engagement is crucial for institutionalising and embedding the value of stakeholder experience and social equity issues at the centre of nature recovery projects [15,16, 65]. As discussed above, ***institutionalisation*** is understood as 'the embedding of principles and practices of engagement best practice into existing governance and decision-making structures in such a way that they become the norm' (which may require organisational and/or wider sectoral culture change; see Hafferty [16]).

Nattergal can work towards this goal in a number of ways, as highlighted. Principally, this should include increases in organisational capacity and capability to engage as part of a long-term and evolving strategy for engagement best practice (treating participation and engagement as central to organisational development; managed as any other integral business function). This includes several core challenges and opportunities, as identified by Hafferty [16], including the availability of key resources (i.e., time, finance, and human capital), increased clarity around roles/responsibilities for engagement, and presence of an engagement expert; (ii) skills, expertise, and confidence in engaging; (iii) managing practitioner and participant expectations of

the engagement process; (iv) practitioners' agency to engage effectively and independently; and (v) whether is viewed and embedded as a long-term, dynamic process, rather than an 'add-on' activity to existing job roles. When put into practice, they may involve additional staffing (i.e., hiring of site leads, engagement coordinators, and project wardens), specialist training and skills development, and/or greater external facilitation to maximise the impact of current engagement and free up organisational expertise for future engagement activity.

Effective engagement requires working closely with affected parties to understand their preferences on how, when, and to what level they wish to be engaged in project interventions. Whilst some may prefer to provide input or be consulted at pre-determined times only, others may prefer more active collaboration and co-design, being involved within decision-making authorities. To this end, socially embedding projects within the broader context of transition to a different way of thinking and towards locally adaptive governance are part of the engagement approach [95,96]. Moreover, moving toward effective public and stakeholder engagement often requires decision-makers to defer to communities and embrace power-sharing and mechanisms of co-design [68,85].

However, it is important to caveat that such goals for engagement best practice may conflict with private-organisational governance structures, ambitions for recovery, and sustainable return on investment. As such, any potential inconsistencies or points of tension should be addressed early within the decision-making and engagement processes. This is particularly important for emerging natural capital markets and blended finance models for landscape recovery, which need to evolve to encourage (rather than override) public and stakeholder engagement through recognition of the importance and utility of integrating local knowledge alongside scientific expertise for robust decision making in the development of clear governance and administrative structures that enable sustainable management, and involvement in decision-making for wider social, environmental and economic outcomes; rooted in the local landscape and communities [1]. Boothby Wildland can seek to address these and future unseen risks through a commitment to community involvement in organisational governance structures by establishing stakeholder advisory boards/project steering committees comprised of local residents, key representatives, and interested parties to provide regular oversight and collaboration within specific project interventions (e.g., creation of a community orchard/garden, clarification surrounding optimal site access, understanding of local heritage and preservation of historical monuments).

The long-term success of engagement processes depends on defining minimum requirements and monitoring their achievement. For Boothby Wildland, given the current emphasis on natural capital baselining, this means navigating issues of capacity/capability (i.e., constrained budgets, lack of staff, limited knowledge, and/or expertise) for the equal prioritisation of systematic processes for monitoring social impact [24]. Alongside developing detailed, flexible metrics for social well-being and community benefits, organisations can work towards this goal by strengthening stakeholder feedback and grievance redress procedures to promote trust and transparency.

4. Conclusion & Future Perspectives

As efforts for nature recovery increase, approaches are needed that maximise the adaptive capacity of sustainable land use practices alongside the large-scale restoration of natural ecosystems [39,97,98], ensure a just transition to net zero and nature-positive systems [5,6], govern the complex relationship between humans and the natural world [99], and support diversified environmental, economic, and societal opportunities over greater timeframes than traditional conservation ideals [100]. To do so necessitates a landscape-scale perspective and collaborative approach to identify what works, where, and for whom [10,101,102]. For this, and several additional reasons highlighted within this report, effective public and stakeholder engagement is essential for successful nature restoration and improving environmental land-use decision-making [2,13].

Crucially, effective engagement is both multi-faceted and context-dependent, varying upon the purpose and objectives for engaging, organisational cultures of engagement, institutional capacity, and broader environmental, cultural, and socio-political contexts [15]. Engagement processes require appropriate design and understanding, ongoing adaptative management, and tailored strategies to maximise beneficial outcomes, build trust, and promote continuous improvement [2,49]. By incorporating these principles and the broader recommendations of this report, organisations can increase the effectiveness of ecological restoration efforts by maximising collaboration, co-design, and community empowerment alongside delivering long-term societal benefits [6,13,66]. To this end, ***Table 2*** (provided below) provides a concise summary of both general recommendations for best practice engagement, and site-specific recommendations for implementation, centred on the work of Boothby Wildland Landscape Recovery project.

In summary, for Boothby Wildland to enhance project outcomes, improve the efficiency, legitimacy, and accountability of decision-making processes, and institutionalise a long-term culture of engagement [15,26,36], this report recommends increased organisational capability/capacity as a means to facilitate proactive engagement (achieved through increased staffing, and skills development on higher-level engagement processes). Furthermore, by championing locally adaptive governance, facilitated via a stakeholder advisory/steering group

committee, Boothby can provide a mechanism for community collaboration and co-design of specific project interventions, balanced against core organisational commitments and socio-economic practicalities. This report also emphasises the importance of embedding social/livelihood indicators and monitoring plans in the longer-term development of social metrics that effectively detail changes in well-being and other stakeholder characteristics throughout project implementation. Lastly, we recommend 'thinking big by acting local' - recognising the utility of national and international outreach amongst environmental NGOs, nature restoration initiatives, and relevant policy makers – but doing so whilst rooted in the local landscape and community, actively encouraging stakeholder collaboration on day-to-day issues of access, education and outreach, and culture and heritage to ensure decision-making processes are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially representative.

Table 2 – Summary of general recommendations for best practice public and stakeholder engagement in landscape-scale nature-recovery initiatives, aligned against site-specific recommendations for implementing best practice across the Boothby Wildland Landscape Recovery project.

General Recommendations for Best Practice Engagement	**Site-Specific Recommendations for Implementing Engagement Best Practice (Boothby Wildland)**
Treat engagement as an ongoing process, not a 'one-off', 'add-on', or 'tick-box' activity.	Embed long-term, flexible, and context-dependent processes of stakeholder engagement and participation (see ***Figure 1***) – rather than viewing engagement as an additional, or 'add-on' activity to existing job roles.
Prioritise understanding of the local context, purpose, and rationale for engagement.	Develop overarching statements describing the purpose, scope, and planned objectives of engagement, centred on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions – used to guide the future selection of appropriate partnerships, methodologies, baselines, and measures of success. Align organisational aims (nature recovery at scale, societal benefits, sustainable financial returns) to the purpose and planned objectives of engagement - taking into consideration local environmental, socio-cultural, socio-political, and institutional factors that may impact upon the decision-making context.

Engage stakeholders in dialogue as early as possible in decision-making processes.	Facilitate ongoing processes of stakeholder identification and analysis to allow for detailed understanding and prioritisation of stakeholder groups for optimal future management. Ensure regular stakeholder consultation (utilising a range of in-person and digital tools – i.e., feedback forms, community drop-in sessions, social media, etc) to gain valuable experiential information on local environmental issues, and to provide early and ongoing opportunities for stakeholder feedback and grievance redress.
Integrate local knowledge alongside scientific expertise for robust decision-making.	Alongside the development of external 'environmental advisory boards', facilitate local stakeholder, and youth steering committees to optimise collaboration and co-design of specific project interventions (i.e., community garden/orchards, supporting local enterprise and access to land).
Recognise there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to engagement – processes should be adapted to local contexts and use varied participatory (in-person and digital) tools and approaches.	Adaptively manage engagement processes – recognising that who is involved (and to what extent) depends, in part, on project objectives, anticipated impact, and local context. Align current (and prospective) local community engagement activity against a broader spectrum of engagement (see ***Figure 2***) to identify and understand how engagement may vary between higher-level, fixed organisational objectives, and increasingly project-specific, on-the-ground interventions that allow for greater stakeholder collaboration, co-design, and community empowerment.
Embed monitoring and evaluation of social impact to inform future practice.	Strengthen processes of stakeholder feedback and grievance redress to provide all interested parties the opportunity to comment on project interventions, and express potential concerns. Continue collaborative partnerships (Defra, Natural England, Rewilding Britain) to further shape the development of effective indicators/metrics of social impact (encompassing elements of access, education, outreach, job creation, volunteering, heritage, rural stewardship, and economic resilience). Conduct social/community baselining to identify and assess social conditions and community perceptions via impact assessment(s), longitudinal stakeholder surveys, attendance and feedback forms, farm census data, evaluative discussion/workshops, and the development of relevant, cost-effective indicators of social impact.
Think big, by acting local to ensure organisational ambitions are rooted in local communities.	Balance national outreach against day-to-day activity, ensuring project delivery is rooted within the local landscape and community, to maximise project buy-in and sense of place/ownership.

Develop organisational capacity for engagement through increased training, resource, and human capital.	Maximise availability of key resources (i.e., time, finances, and human capital). Within this, clarify roles/responsibilities for engagement, staffing constraints (i.e., hiring of project/site leads, project wardens, etc) to maximise the impact of current engagement and free up organisational expertise for future engagement activity. Further develop skills, expertise, and confidence in engaging, particularly surrounding 'higher level' processes of community collaboration and meaningful co-design.
Frameworks for engagement best practice should be institutionalised – embedding equity, accountability, and inclusivity at the centre of nature recovery efforts.	Embed principles and practices of engagement best practice into existing governance, organisational culture, and decision-making structures. Establish organisational vision for engagement and associated strategy for engagement best practice activity, aligned with organisation ambition and mission statements.

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Appendix:

A. Review of Policy/Finance Mechanisms for Nature Recovery:

Given decades of anthropogenic change and degradation of natural capital, the UK stands at a historic crossroads in its governance of land and the natural environment. Agriculture dominates some 71% of the landscape [103], and as such, departure from the European Union and subsequent legislative overhaul of agri-environmental policy has provided an opportunity to: improve upon existing policy frameworks; reform current patterns of land use and management [104], mitigate the often adverse socio-environmental impacts of industrial farming practices [105,106], redefine human-social interactions within natural landscapes [97], champion actions for addressing and adapting to climate change, and prioritise sustainable food production, alongside landscape-scale nature recovery initiatives [107,108].

Despite past efforts to pioneer agri-environmental policy change, until recently, the EU-derived Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has largely dictated agricultural land use and management. Here, public funding through the CAPs basic payment scheme (BPS) was centred on maximising agricultural productivity: with financial incentives based on the total area farmed, often at the broader expense of biodiversity, climate, and soil complexity [109]. Whilst the receipt of EU agricultural subsidisation is increasingly predicated upon the delivery of public goods and environmental objectives, post-Brexit agricultural transition across England has seen a move away from BPS funding toward the new Environmental Landscape Management Schemes (ELMS): which seeks to reward farmers and landowners through participation in three agri-environment schemes - the Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI), Countryside Stewardship (CF), and Landscape Recovery (LR). Whilst the bulk of future ELM payments centre on the promotion of nature-friendly farming practices that deliver public goods and protect natural environments, the higher tier agreement, Landscape Recovery, aims to move beyond conservation - to actively enhance the natural environment and support ecosystem recovery through long-term, large-scale, land-use change and habitat restoration projects. In this way, LR provides a funding mechanism for rewilding and nature recovery efforts (which, in the past, has been mainly limited to wealthy landowners or charitable organisations) and an opportunity for integrating restorative conservational ideals alongside regenerative agricultural practices [84,107]. To this end, this

report has been funded though the Boothby Wildland Landscape Recovery Scheme round one pilot.

Beyond public subsidy, net outcome biodiversity policies are proliferating globally as perceived mechanisms to reconcile the need for diversified long-term economic development and conservation objectives [110]. The most wide-ranging of its type, the UK Environment Bill mandates that new developments across England must demonstrate 'Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)' – measurable improvements for biodiversity through the creation or enhancement of natural habitats in association with development. Applying to land managers (including landowners, farmers, estate owners/managers, local authorities, and land agents), advisors, developers, and local planning authorities (LPA), BNG can be achieved on-site, off-site or through a combination of measures (i.e., through offsetting and statutory biodiversity credits). The hope is that BNG will further market development of high-quality biodiversity units and strengthen funding mechanisms for nature recovery. In doing so, BNG seeks to attract private landowners into conservation and providing sources of funding for habitat bankers and LPAs, alongside investment in local nature recovery networks: reversing biodiversity declines through nature-based solutions and providing an economic incentive to avoid initial harm to nature (i.e., redirecting development towards low-impact areas). Nevertheless, given the relative infancy of the markets, key questions remain. Previous research has highlighted governance gaps that risk undermining BNG's ecological outcomes, alongside broader regulatory constraints that may constrain the magnitude of any positive impacts [111].

Despite little empirical work critically engaging with the role of ecotourism in rewilding and nature recovery projects across the UK, stands to play a vital role in rural enterprise and business model diversification for large landowners. Nature-based enterprises such as camping, visitor guided walks, and wildlife safaris provide a mechanism for local employment and investment in rural economies. There are, however, opportunities for unintended impacts and tensions between local views and institutional approaches to eco-tourism, given the neo-liberalisation of nature, and right of public access, which must be acknowledged and addressed early into the decision-making process [46].

Lastly, the demand for forward crediting (ex-ante) and post-sequestration (ex-post) offsets of environmental impact via ecosystem markets and voluntary carbon and biodiversity credits is readily increasing in response to private sector awareness of joint biodiversity-climate crises

[112]. Despite challenges, such 'natural capital' markets seek to promote inclusive and sustainable development and environmental restoration beyond regulatory compliance, generate financial gains for local communities, incentivise nature-friendly land use and management practices, and minimise ecosystem service trade-offs [113-115]. Whilst the debate surrounding the commodification of nature continues, financial incentives are increasingly targeted at nature-based, environmental, and societal outcomes [116]. Given their infancy, land managers may prefer relying on government subsidies and longer-standing, well-regulated public financing – choosing to avoid private markets previously criticised for short-term, reductionist commodification of public assets [117]. In response, a series of regulatory frameworks for carbon (and, increasingly, biodiversity) markets have been developed to consolidate clear principles, standards, and governance arrangements necessary for market expansion. In this way, a mature and well-regulated market for high-quality nature credits, that encompass wider environmental, ecological, and social benefits, offer potential for blended green finance mechanisms in ways that are representative of unique local geographies and contexts: capitalising on private investment in nature-based solutions, developmental biodiversity net gain, and carbon sequestration and offsets [42,94].

Again, the evidence presents a strong case for utilising public finance to catalyse private investment, however, ambiguity remains as to how this is best achieved in practice. Blended finance mechanisms require public-private consensus and a multi-stakeholder partnership approach. As with any process of engagement, issues of trust, capacity building, and spatiotemporal context are key to ensuring the success of public-private partnerships for nature recovery, as is identified in collaborative agri-environmental schemes [118]. Moreover, whilst bespoke arrangements across Landscape Recovery pilots maximise scheme uptake, the public goods associated with these schemes are often localised in nature. With non-excludable benefits, it may be hard to effectively 'value' and create an appropriate market; thus, increasing investment risk and uncertainties for the immediate future [35,119].

B. Review of engagement principles & standards:

Alongside partner organisations, we are conducted a rapid review of best practice guidance for public and stakeholder engagement in landscape-scale, nature-recovery projects. The overarching aim of which is to develop a structure for engagement by Nattergal (and associated

projects) that meets the highest possible standards, specifically tailored to local context and project objectives.

Current sources are presented below.

National/International Guidelines for Public Engagement & Participation:

- Global Reporting Initiative (GPI) – Universal Standards (https://www.globalreporting.org/standards/standards-development/universal-standards/)

- OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes (https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/f765caf6en.pdf?expires=1678902742&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=CBAF42A0A953374AFE74983786AF0C98)

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) - Core Values for Public Participation (https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/2017_core_values-24x36_iap2_.pdf)

- International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) - Spectrum of Public Participation (https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf)

- ClientEarth - Public Participation in Environmental Matters in the UK/England & Wales Guidance Notes (https://www.clientearth.org/media/ftxnaemc/draft-guidance-on-public-participation-9-february-2022-public.pdf)

- BiodivERsA – The BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook (https://www.biodiversa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/stakeholder-engagement-handbook.pdf)

- Climate Change Committee (CCC) Commissioned Report - The role of deliberative public engagement in climate policy development (https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/The-role-of-deliberative-public-engagement-in-climate-policy-development-University-of-Lancaster.pdf)

- Scottish Land Commission - Responsible Natural Capital and Carbon Management Protocol (https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/62eb846b28bdb_Responsible%20Natural%20Capital%20and%20Carbon%20Management%20Protocol.pdf)

- Scottish Land Commission - Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land Protocol (https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/628e17641fd5d_Comm%20Engagement%20Protocol%202021.pdf)

- Scottish Government/Ministerial Guidance - Engaging communities in decisions relating to land (https://www.gov.scot/policies/land-reform/engaging-communities-in-decisions-relating-to-land/)

- Scottish Community Development Centre - National Standards for Community Engagement (https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5943c23a440243c1fa28585f/t/63c6badff203e74f2ba4c4d3/1673968356909/NSfCE%2Bonline_October.pdf)

- Third Sector Support Wales - National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales (https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/app/uploads/2022/06/National-Principles-for-Public-Engagement-in-Wales.pdf)

- Accountability Framework Initiative – Core Principles (https://accountability-framework.org/fileadmin/uploads/afi/Documents/Core_Principles/AFi_Core_Principles__April_2023_.pdf)

- Society for Ecological Restoration – International Principles & Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration (https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ser.org/resource/resmgr/publications/ser_international_standards_.pdf)

Charity, Not-for-Profit, NGO & Private Industry Documentation:

- Commonplace - Digital Community Engagement 101 (https://www.commonplace.is/hubfs/Community%20engagement%20101%20.pdf?hsCtaTracking=e99f1da0-3961-494f-8c67-895c21898cdf%7C6133c55b-5a44-40a2-a90d-b1d64da2d7a5)

- Involve UK - Public Engagement & Net Zero - How government should involve citizens in climate policy making (https://involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/Public%20engagement%20and%20net%20zero_0.pdf)

- International Finance Corporation (IFC) - Stakeholder Engagement: A Good Practice Handbook for Companies Doing Business in Emerging Markets (https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/affbc005-2569-4e58-9962-280c483baa12/IFC_StakeholderEngagement.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=jkD13-p)

- Association for Project Management (APM) - 10 key principles of stakeholder engagement (https://www.apm.org.uk/resources/find-a-resource/stakeholder-engagement/key-principles/)

- Jeffrey, N. (2009). Stakeholder Engagement: A Road Map to Meaningful Engagement. Doughty Centre, Cranfield School of Management. (https://www.fundacionseres.org/lists/informes/attachments/1118/stakeholder%20engagement.pdf)

International Natural Capital Market (Carbon & Biodiversity) Standards:

- Plan Vivo (Carbon Standard) Project Requirements (https://www.planvivo.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=9fd4491d-6851-4819-a970-e2e94338445e)

- Plan Vivo (Biodiversity Standard - PV Nature) Draft Project Requirements (https://www.planvivo.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a99f0ac6-f923-4463-9e89-5884cce2616e)

- VERRA Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) - Project Guidance (https://verra.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/VCS-Standard-v4.4-FINAL.pdf)

- VERRA Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards (CCBS) (https://verra.org/wp-content/uploads/CCB-Standards-v3.1_ENG.pdf)

- Gold Standard for the Global Goals - Stakeholder Consultation & Engagement Requirements (https://globalgoals.goldstandard.org/standards/102_V2.1_PAR_Stakeholder-Consultation-Requirements.pdf)

- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) - Principles & Criteria for Forest Stewardship (https://connect.fsc.org/document-centre/documents/resource/392)

- National Forest Standard (NFS) – Standard Requirements (https://naturalforeststandard.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Natural-Forest-Standard-Requirements-v1.2-March2014.pdf)

UK Accredited Standards & Associated Documentation:

- HM Government - Nature markets: A framework for scaling up private investment in nature recovery and sustainable farming (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1147397/nature-markets.pdf)

- HM Government – Mobilising Green Investment (2023 Green Finance Strategy) (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1149690/mobilising-green-investment-2023-green-finance-strategy.pdf)

- Woodland Carbon Code - Requirements for Voluntary Carbon Sequestration Projects (https://woodlandcarboncode.org.uk/images/PDFs/Woodland_Carbon_Code_V2.2_April_2022.pdf)

- IUCN Peatland Code - Overview & Requirements (https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Peatland%20Code%20V2%20-%20FINAL%20-%20WEB_0.pdf)

- Wilder Carbon – Standard for Nature & Climate (https://wilder-carbon.cdn.prismic.io/wilder-carbon/e02b6dbc-f4e5-4db0-b0d9-8b21dc9d1f5e_Wilder+Carbon+Standard+V2+updated+29th+March+PRESS.pdf)

- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) - Landscape Recovery Project Development Phase Handbook

- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) – Review of Public Engagement (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152344/public-engagement-review-221010.pdf)

- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) - Payments for Ecosystem Services: A Best Practice Guide (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/200920/pb13932-pes-bestpractice-20130522.pdf)

- Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) – Research Report Paper. The use of public engagement for technological innovation: Literature review and case studies. (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachme nt_data/file/955880/use-of-public-engagement-for-technological-innovation.pdf)

- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Research Note - Net Zero Public Engagement and Participation (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969428/net-zero-public-engagement-participation-research-note.pdf)

- Forestry Commission Report - Public Engagement in Forestry - A toolbox for public engagement in forest and woodland planning (https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2022/02/toolbox_introduction.pdf)

- Government Communication Service – Ensuring Effective Stakeholder Engagement (https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/ensuring-effective-stakeholder-engagement/)

- Green Finance Institute (GFI) - Investment Readiness Toolkit (https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.co.uk/gfihive/toolkit/)

- Local Government Association - Guide to engagement (https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/New%20Conversations%20Guide%2012.pdf)

- Local Government Association - Successful Stakeholder Management (https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11.178%20Successful%20stakeholder%20management%20%20WEB.pdf)

- Planning Aid - Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes (http://camdencen.org.uk/Resources/Planning/Communities/Good%20Practice%20Guide%20to%20Public%20Engagement%20Development%20Schemes.pdf)

Relevant Evidence-led Reviews:

- Hafferty, C. (2022). Embedding an evidence-led, best- practice culture of engagement: learning from the evidence. Natural England Commissioned Report NECR448 (http://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/5365328451469312)

- Hafferty, C. (forthcoming 2023). Stakeholder engagement in the digital age: practitioners' perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for planning and environmental decision-making. Countryside and Community Research Institute, University of Gloucestershire, UK.

- Elliott, J., Giritharan, A., & Wheeler, F. (2023). Green Expectations: engaging communities in landscape change. Green Alliance Report (https://green-alliance.org.uk/publication/green-expectations-engaging-people-on-changing-land-use-for-climate-and-nature/)

- Food, Farming & Countryside Commission Report. (2023). Natural Capital Markets: What farmers and policy makers need to know (https://cdn2.assets-servd.host/ffcc-uk/production/assets/downloads/Natural-Capital-report-April-2023.pdf)

C. Synthesis of Key Standards & Best Practice Guidance:

The table below gathers the key principles/standards (condensed and paraphrased, grouped according to emergent themes) from reviewed guidance, literature, and documentation as a basis for, where possible, reaching these standards through further development of engagement best practice in land use and management, and nature recovery projects.

Note: this synthesis represents a singular interpretation of standards, often expressed in broad terms, and the potential for different perspectives on compliance remains. Moreover, whilst utilising a tiered system to aid organisational prioritisation and optimal allocation of resources given realistically demands, involving 'higher tier' (e.g., collaboration and co-design) and 'lower tier' (one-way communication and information provision) processes of engagement, 'best practice' engagement will vary depending upon context (i.e., time and capacity of both the organisation and the stakeholders involved).