

Dynamic Dunescapes

Evaluation and Learning Report - July 2024



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Dynamic Dunescapes - Summary

Dynamic Dunescapes has been a hugely successful landscape scale partnership. It has delivered conservation work at scale and has undertaken engagement work that has made a wider contribution to tackling inequalities, as well as supporting the conservation work. Skills development underpinned the delivery and collaboration between partners meant a culture of sharing and learning between organisations, individuals and sites took place.

38

sites where dune
improvement works have
taken place

92,066

participants have taken
part in engagement events

1,199

engagement events have
taken place

317

hectares of sand dune
rejuvenated



Introduction

Dynamic Dunescapes is a large landscape scale project that is restoring important dunes systems across England and Wales. It has brought together seven partners: Natural England; Cornwall Wildlife Trust; Cumbria Wildlife Trust; Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust; National Trust; Natural Resources Wales; and Plantlife. It is delivering activity at multiple sites across England and Wales, shown opposite, and is organised around the following elements:

- **Conservation** – improving the dune habitats and moving them towards a more favourable condition, including removing scrub and invasive species and increasing dynamism at certain sites.
- **Communication** – supporting more people to understand this way of managing sand dunes, and getting more people participating in activities that lead to a greater understanding of dune heritage.
- **Engagement** – creating opportunities for people from a variety of backgrounds to engage with sand dunes and increasing access to sand dunes.
- **Skills development** – providing opportunities for volunteers to support the management of dunes, facilitating apprenticeships and bursaries, and ensuring training and skills are cascaded across wider staff teams.
- **Collaboration** – delivering as a partnership, sharing best practice from the project across the UK and beyond, ensuring inter and intra organisational learning.

This report shares the achievements and learning from the project delivery.



Dynamic Dunescapes sites

Planning and Development

The project was built on a solid evidence base that introducing more dynamism to dune habitats would help improve their overall condition. The Dynamic Dunescapes partners identified the value of a multi-site landscape scale partnership was not just the improvements to an important habitat at scale. It would also help to facilitate learning as new conservation and engagement techniques were introduced.

38

sites selected for conservation and engagement activity

16

staff posts created to help deliver the work

The partnership brought together seven partners from across England and Wales. All partners were equals and were working towards the shared goals of the project.

Sites were selected based on where partners knew they could make the biggest difference and included sites outside partners' ownership.

Conservation and engagement plans were developed for the project based on what was needed locally. Where long term conservation and engagement plans were in place, Dynamic Dunescapes helped accelerate their implementation.

The key learning from the partnership is:

- **Even with extensive planning, a partnership will not get everything right for every part of the partnership during the planning phase. Build in a project focused (rather than funder focused) review after 6 to 12 months to help check the plans work and to ease the transition from planning to delivery.**
- **It is important to check and challenge all plans that come into the partnership to ensure enough staff time is included, particularly around any administrative requirements for the funders.**

Apprenticeship in Lincolnshire with Natural England

Renata is one of the Apprentices employed by Dynamic Dunescapes. Renata realised during Covid-19 she wanted to spend more of her life making a positive difference by working in conservation. She had been successfully working in the childcare sector and had seen first-hand the difference connecting to nature made to children and young people.

'I could really see how much it inspired the young children that I cared for, and I thought the way things were going, you know, with nature and wildlife and climate change, if I could make a difference, if I could make a small difference and do something for myself and my mental wellbeing, then this is the time to do it'

Renata started looking for opportunities and after a year of looking, aged 48, she found the Dynamic Dunescapes opportunity. The apprenticeship would help her gain a Countryside Ranger Level 4 qualification. But it would also give Renata two years of practical conservation experience.

Dynamic Dunescapes gave Renata the opportunity to use her skills in a new industry and to give her the opportunity to gain qualifications and to make a positive difference in the world. For Renata this means one thing, she is happy.

'I'm just happier, that is all I can say... It is just so variable and there are so many opportunities and that is what I like... I like to explore and I like to learn and this fits me quite well'



Conservation

Dynamic Dunescapes has delivered large scale conservation improvements. It is further strengthening the evidence base for introducing dynamism into sand dunes. This has included reactivating bare sand movement through creating notches, turf stripping, reprofiling, tree and scrub removal, removal of invasive plants and increasing grazing. Habitat works are being monitored at each site and the partners will continue to do so for 10 years following the end of the project. The monitoring has been tailored to each site and has been designed to demonstrate the impact the project has had to improve the condition of the protected site features and species of interest.

Dynamic Dunescapes has helped facilitate a mindset shift in how sand dunes should be managed. Those involved in the project will continue to advocate for the approaches developed through Dynamic Dunescapes that help introduce more dynamism and the positive impact this has on habitats and protected species.



‘We changed the narrative around dynamism and the importance of that. We have brought on a new... generation of site managers... we’ve improved populations of threatened species’ Site Manager

Conservation

Across the 38 sites, Dynamic Dunescapes has helped deliver a huge amount of conservation work that otherwise would not have happened. This includes:

- 248 hectares of sand dune rejuvenation.
- 69 hectares of associated wetland rejuvenation.
- 122 hectares of invasive species removal.
- 605 hectares of new grazing regimes.
- 16,609 metres of fencing to enable new grazing.
- 638 metres of new fencing, installed to improve visitor infrastructure.

The key learning from the partnership is:

- Include a central resource (either staff or consultant time) to help large partnerships navigate the licensing and planning requirements.
- Procurement is complex and ongoing training and support needs to be built into the central team's resources.
- Consider options for consistent monitoring at both baseline and during follow ups across all sites involved within the landscape partnership, alongside site specific monitoring.



Conservation and Collaboration: Unexploded Ordnance

One of the key areas where considerable expertise and confidence was built between land managers was around unexploded ordnance. This is an issue in many different sand dune systems because of the different uses of the systems over many decades. Many sites pre-project were managing the issue by putting up signs and careful consideration of the habitat works that were taking place. This meant that managing unexploded ordnance was not specifically built into the project planning phase at some key sites.

In Branton Burrows (North Devon), resource had not been built into the project planning to survey the site for unexploded ordnance. However, as the project progressed it became clear that in order to undertake the habitat works planned, at scale, Branton Burrows would need to appropriately survey the land they working on.

This was a challenging moment for the project. There was not the financial resource available to do these works. However, thanks to the flexibility in the partnership, Branton Burrows developed a strong partnership with the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Dynamic Dunescapes could pay for a temporary site office and facilities and the MoD would do the clearance work. This saved the project £1.76 million in direct costs. In reality the costs would have been even higher than this if private contractors had needed to be used. This partnership is now in place and the MoD are continuing to work on Branton Burrows, providing clearance support to help future management works.

The learning about unexploded ordnance was shared with other site leads. This led to changes in the way invasive species were dealt with across multiple sites and again shows how learning was shared across the project.



Communication

A national communications team was formed as part of the central project management function. The Communications Officers oversaw the brand and national communications, alongside support for the local teams with their communication and engagement work. Dynamic Dunescapes has shown the value of investing in a central communications team that brings both skills and expertise.

22

major media showcases
including national TV,
radio and newspapers

54,309
website views. People
visiting to understand
dunes and access events
and resources

The website provided a focal point for the project. Alongside the Dynamic Dunescapes brand, the website contributed to the project having a shared identity.

The key learning from the partnership is:

- Include a well-resourced communications team and a website as this will provide a central focus point for a project.
- Annual engagement events, such as World Sand Dune Day, will help generate interest in a much broader base beyond the traditional supporters.
- Resources are valuable and work most effectively when they are specifically tailored to their audience. Co-producing resources with users results in the most useful outputs.



Engagement

The engagement team working across the different sites helped connect diverse audiences to nature through a variety of tools and techniques. This included taking the dunes out into communities and using the arts as a way of engaging different groups. The team also demonstrated the value of engagement to supporting conservation works, particularly when new techniques are being introduced. Each site had a different focus to their engagement work. The commonalities across the engagement work were:

Finding the rhythm - matching the activities to the season to maximise interest and engagement.

Finding a hub - providing a central place for people to connect with the project (and provide toilets, warm spaces and seating areas).

Adapting the delivery - creating opportunities for the dunes to come to people rather than people coming to the dunes.

Extending the reach - making use of local partnerships and arts to reach new groups.



‘As a parent this was great, I would never have been brave enough to come here and I certainly wouldn’t have known what to do!...He really wants to look after this place, and I’m going to try and help him do that’

Engagement

Dynamic Dunescapes employed seven Engagement Officers and one Engagement Manager. Between them they delivered:

- 269 Dune Den events enjoyed by 56,842 participants.
- 432 additional events with 22,116 participants.

The key learning from the partnership is:

- Engagement to tackle inequalities means building relationships with people and organisations that allow trust to build and are long lasting beyond the duration of the project. Taking the habitat to people rather than expecting people to always come to the habitat can help broaden the reach of projects and reduce inequalities around access to nature. The arts are a fantastic tool for achieving this.
- Creating a team of Engagement Officers among different organisations requires facilitation, but the amount of facilitation needed varies over time.



Engagement within a framework: Engagement work in Studland

Studland is the dune system that forms part of the Purbeck Coast. Although Purbeck is a relatively affluent coastal area, there are pockets of deprivation that stretch back from the coast and where young people are disconnected from their local landscape.

‘At St Mark’s School.. which is just a mile outside Swanage, 40% of those foundation kids have never been to the beach and Swanage is a seaside town’

Before Dynamic Dunescapes started, the engagement team at Studland had been building a profile of the local community and understanding what the local community felt about Studland and how they were using it. They identified that while lots of local community groups made use of the space, the National Trust was not seen to deliver much to their local community.

The National Trust knew they wanted to develop a long term approach to their work in communities and Dynamic Dunescapes would provide resource to help accelerate that work. The work the Engagement Officer did helped connect the National Trust at Studland to an even broader range of partners. It helped them understand what the community wanted from them.

‘We realised our role was to play more of a participative role in the lives of children and young people based around the landscape’

The National Trust in Studland is now leading on a piece of work that brings together all the children and young people organisations along with landowners, farmers and other non-government organisations around a central vision:

‘Our vision is to provide every child and young person in Purbeck with experiences and opportunities in all that the Purbeck landscape has to offer. To benefit themselves, communities and nature’

This vision recognises this isn’t currently happening. Not all young people in Purbeck are accessing nature. They are leaving school without the basics of understanding their local nature or having visited it. The National Trust are helping to understand the role they can play, along side other community assets in helping to deliver this vision.

Dynamic Dunescapes’ engagement work happened within a framework. It provided the National Trust with additional capacity that enabled them to connect to a wider range of partners. These connections are now progressing into joint projects organised around a long term, locally developed vision.

Skills Development

Dynamic Dunescapes created a long-lasting legacy by building the skills of volunteers, teachers, communities and site managers. Dynamic Dunescapes helped to show the importance of audience engagement, co-production and co-design when developing tools and resources. Dynamic Dunescapes also created the environment where significant skill sharing could take place between site leads and Engagement Officers. Targeted training took place to help develop the skills of groups. 71% of those attending training events identified they had developed new skills through the training and 98% had gained new knowledge about sand dunes. This information is now being cascaded to a much wider audience.

388
training events have taken
place

5,054
people receiving training

The key learning from the partnership is:

- **Skills development helps build the legacy from the delivery phase and should be built into all projects.**
- **Volunteers are an extremely valuable part of supporting conservation efforts. Building their skills and the capacity for volunteer management can have a long-term impact beyond the lifetime of the project.**
- **Citizen science activities and apps or similar system development should start with audience engagement or co-design work.**



Volunteer development: Skills development and a long term legacy

Developing volunteer skills has been a focus across Dynamic Dunescapes. This has included setting up new volunteer groups but also providing training to existing volunteers to develop their skills in dune management and surveying the dunes.

Across the Dynamic Dunescapes project:

- 85% of volunteers have developed new skills and knowledge
- 84% have a greater understanding of their local environment
- 80% are motivated to do more for their environment

Cumbria, Sefton, North Devon and Cornwall all have new volunteer groups that have started as a result of Dynamic Dunescapes. Studland and Lincolnshire continue to work with their existing volunteer groups.

There have also been wider benefits with volunteer opportunities in partner organisations created.

‘Work in Wales has increased volunteering with partner organisations: 5 local volunteer groups have been worked with in North and South Wales. Volunteer groups have increased numbers as new volunteers have been signposted to these groups while engaging with the Dynamic Dunescapes activities. Volunteer groups are engaged with a wider range of ecological surveying through citizen science and other wildlife monitoring, and have the skills, equipment and tools to carry out the surveying. Evergreen training resources will enable them to train new volunteers. Groups have relationships with site managers to enable them to have access and an ongoing point of contact’ Central team



Collaboration

The partnership has worked well and this has been underpinned by high quality project management in the central team. Alongside the national partnership a wide variety of local partnerships have formed. Some of these have been focused on the capital works, but other partnerships have facilitated the engagement and skills development strands of the project.

The governance group took overall responsibility for the project. This was supported by a steering group and by operational forums. The operational forums were where technical details and skills sharing could take place.

Most areas also delivered as part of a local partnership that supported both the engagement and conservation work. The national team played an important role facilitating local partnerships and helping to keep different partners connected and engaged. The national project management was a considerable strength. This central team combined technical capabilities with relationship building skills.

The key learning from the partnership is:

- **A governance structure that combines a governance group comprising senior managers coupled with a steering group of managers and then operational forums is an effective way to help manage a project and to create the environment where learning and collaboration can happen.**
- **Provide enough central resource so the Project Manager can do their role of orchestrating the project effectively. Support, finance and communication are all key to this.**

‘I really would like to give all my appreciation for the work that you’ve done...the whole range of activities that you’re doing to connect with local communities and interact with such a variety of people..I really hope that this can be replicated in other areas’ CINEA

Interested in finding out more?

You can find a copy of the full evaluation report on
www.dynamicdunescape.co.uk

