National Peatlands Action Programme 2020-2025

Summary of the first five years of delivery



Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Natural Resources Wales

Adfer Mawndir Cymru Wales Peatland Action

Llywodraeth Cymru Welsh Government

2025 – English version



National Peatland Action Programme
2020-25 Highlights

>3600ha peatland on the pathway to recovery*

Managed £11.6m spend

Developed contracting sector and green job opportunities

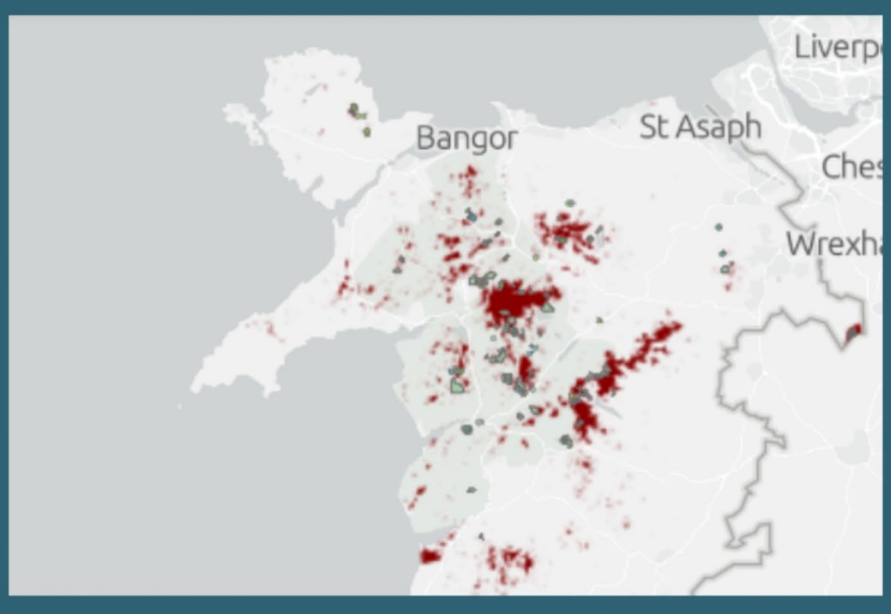
Launched Peatland Restoration Grants

Recorded biodiversity gains on restored sites

Established strong governance structure

Produced peatland restoration glossary

Launched Wales Peatland Map



Restored directly on WGWE and funded around 20 external partners



Set up all-Wales strategic partnership groups



*Reported figures are far higher when including tree clearance.

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1. Introduction

In a document prepared for COP28, the National Peatland Action Programme (NPAP) featured as one of the 'High-level climate champions' in the Yearbook of Global Climate Action 2023. This reflects the profile NPAP has gained, in Wales and beyond, as an example of a strategic national nature-based solution to address both the Climate and Nature emergencies. This is further recognised within the Biodiversity Deep Dive which considered the early successes of NPAP against the delivery requirements to meet both the 30x30 and decarbonisation commitments. NPAP is a strategic Programme, funded by Welsh Government (WG) and managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

This document provides a summary of the five-year review of NPAP progress against the published NPAP Action Plan for 2020-25. Overall, the Review shows that the Programme has been highly effective in its first five years. Some of the highlights include:

NPAP highlights for 2020-25:

- The Programme and first restoration season were established within the Covid19 pandemic yet met year-1 targets.
- >3,600ha of peatland restoration, peatland that has now been set on a recovery pathway, exceeding the target a year early in 2024.
- Safeguarded 2.2 million tonnes of carbon (based on the scale of restoration activity and the average estimated carbon content of Welsh peat soils).
- Established a dedicated staff team and governance structure for NPAP, followed up by planning a staffing structure to prepare for an upscaled programme of delivery.
- Set up strategic all-Wales partnership groups to address important sectoral issues such as Strategy, Evidence, Monitoring, and Practitioner best practice.
- Managed £11.6M of funding from Welsh Government to expand and progress peatland restoration across Wales.
- Supported the development of, and published, the online Wales Peatland Map with data layers, including a peatland activity reporting layer, providing public access and accountability.
- Reported annually on Welsh Government funded restoration activities by partners in the NPAP Annual Reports for Years 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.
- Recorded biodiversity gains on restored Welsh Government Woodland Estate sites, such as water voles moving into a newly rewetted site at Carn Fflur (Tywi Forest).
- Identified evidence of NPAP restored and rewetted peatland acting as a firebreak in 2025 in the Tywi Forest area.
- Launched open external competitive grants, held free guidance webinars, and involved around 20 external partners in peatland restoration.
- Developed a pragmatic effective approach to identifying priorities for afforested peat restoration on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate.
- Brought cohesion to the peatland restoration sector in Wales, uniting a range of partners under the Wales Peatland Action banner, with the unifying aim of 'High Nature Low Carbon'.
- Winner of Tîm Cyfoeth (NRW) Carbon Footprint Award 2022.
- Provided a focus to resource protection to support SSSIs and the implementation of Planning Policy Wales.
- Produced bilingual glossary of over 100 peatland restoration action types applied by the sector.
- Produced an ecological outcome monitoring methodology and a live Hydrological Monitoring Plan for assessing and reporting on Programme effectiveness.
- Engaged extensively and creatively with the public through media, social media @PeatlandCymru, Programme web page, events such as the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, and over 50 video clips online, including the latest explaining the importance of peatland restoration in 'The Good, the Bad, and the Land Healers' and an animation of the 'Wales Peatland Story'.
- Representing Wales in the peatland sector wider afield, including at the IUCN UK Peatland Conferences, COP, BSSS and in the Global Virtual Peatlands Pavillion.
- Developed the contracting sector, with 25 suppliers appointed to two procurement frameworks in the first two years, and ongoing planning for upscale with new frameworks to increase capacity and opportunities for rural green sector employment.

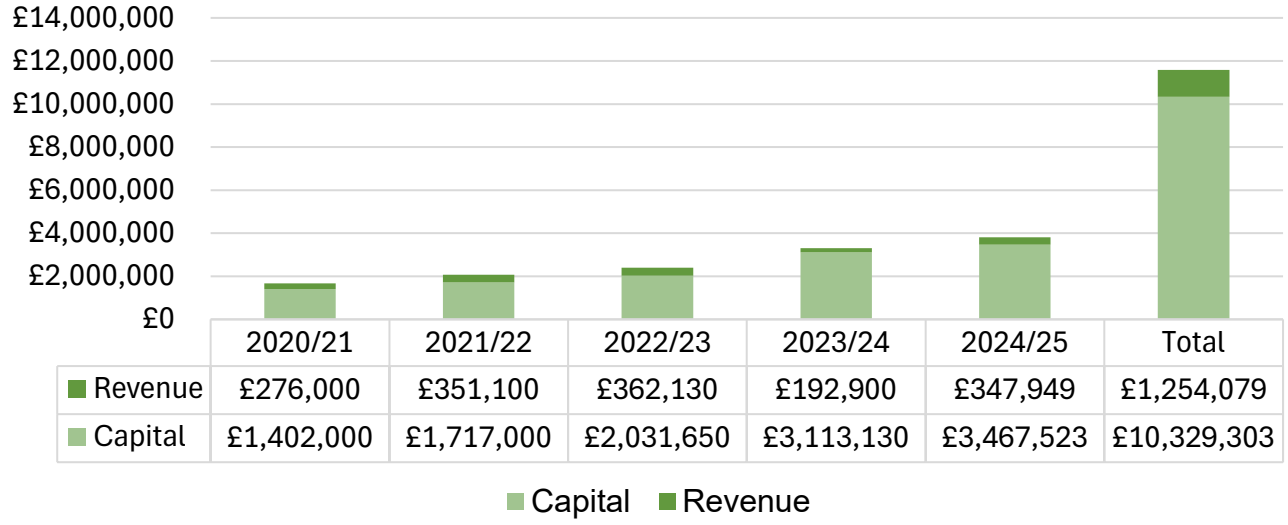
Why NPAP was set up:

Peat soils occupy only 4% of Wales despite storing 30% of our land-based carbon. An estimated 90% of Welsh peatland is damaged, and in this condition releases harmful greenhouse gases contributing to climate change. Welsh peatlands are very diverse in their range of bogs and fens and in a healthy wet condition host unique and endangered biodiversity.

NPAP was jointly conceived by NRW and WG in 2019 as a national Programme to deliver peatland restoration across Wales. It was a recognition of the strong contribution peatlands make in addressing the Nature and Climate emergencies. The Programme arose from decades of activity focusing on the protection, through designation, of many of the best surviving examples of peatland habitat in Wales, with restoration and management being undertaken by a wide range of partners supported through multiple funding mechanisms. Following on from the end of access to EU LIFE funding, NRW and WG recognised the need for national coordination and core funding. Peatland restoration had shown itself to be an effective nature-based solution to address nature depletion, carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas emissions, water management, and climate change mitigation. NPAP's aims, set out in the initial NPAP five-year Programme document with the associated Action Plan for 2020-25, showed the ambition for an extensive Programme, operating on an extended timescale, to capitalise on the expertise, national coverage, national capabilities, and convening power that NRW provides.

The first five years in figures

NPAP spend summary per financial year



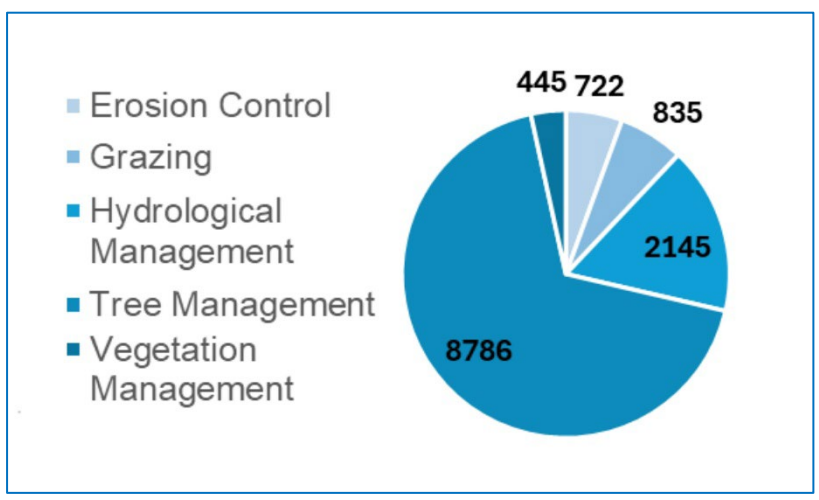
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
Revenue	£276,000	£351,100	£362,130	£192,900	£347,949	£1,254,079
Capital	£1,402,000	£1,717,000	£2,031,650	£3,113,130	£3,467,523	£10,329,303



Summary of Ha of restoration activity per funding mechanism

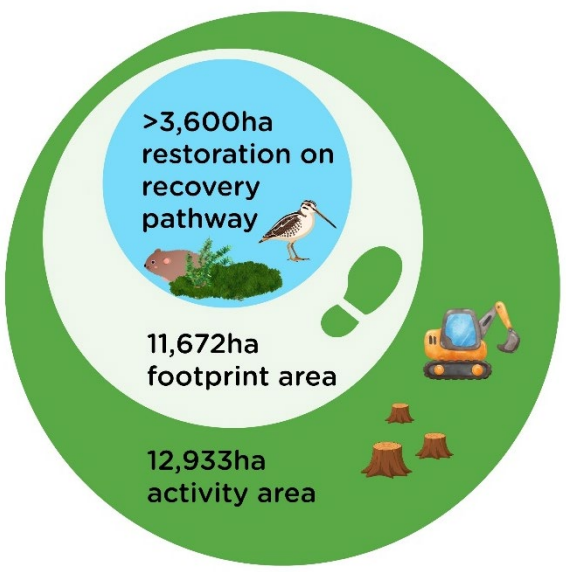
FY	Competitive Grant	Direct Procurement	Memorandum of Agreement	S16 Land Management Agreement	Strategic Allocated Funding	Total
2020/21	0	76	10	197	751	1035
2021/22	0	292	77	295	2339	3002
2022/23	0	119	0	186	3084	3389
2023/24	65	139	0	485	2548	3237
2024/25	38	151	0	209	2396	2794
Total	**103**	**777**	**87**	**1372**	**11118**	**13457**

Ha restoration activity area, by broad activity type



Restoration action area	Total Ha
Total activity*	12,933
Footprint**	11,672
Peatland on recovery pathway***	3,600

Areas are calculated as per Guidance note template PEAT001



Note

* Total activity area for 2020-2025 is c.12,933ha and includes an element of double counting where several activities occur on the same piece of land, i.e. tree management and hydrological restoration.

**Total footprint area for all activities 2020-2025 is c.11,672ha. Footprint area accounts for the double counting above (*) and represents the actual area of peatland worked on, removing overlaps of multiple activities on the same land area. So it is less than the total of all restoration activities.

***The reported area for ‘peatland on a recovery pathway’ is 3,600ha and is lower than the total activity and footprint areas because it only takes account recovery pathway actions to restore peatland function, including erosion control and peatland hydrology. Figures are conservative, based on best available data at the time of reporting until the GIS data is fully quality assured and published on the Wales Peatland Data Portal.

2. Overall evaluation and conclusions

The National Peatland Action Programme (NPAP) has (up until the end of the 2024/25 financial year) received £11.6M of additional funding from Welsh Government to progress peatland restoration across Wales, involving around 20 external partners and placing over 3,600ha of peatland on a recovery pathway. A detailed assessment against each work area identified in the original 2020 plan evidences the success of the Programme in terms of the scale and quality of restoration delivery and learning taken from it. It also confirms the validity of an approach centred around a focused, nationally coordinated Programme led by a public body directly accountable to Welsh Government. NRW's role in leading this Programme has meant NPAP was able to harness the full range of funding mechanisms available to NRW, and to tap into an extensive range of critical support services with expertise, capacity and national reach.

On reflection, the full range of original actions in the 2020 plan was ambitious when reviewed against the staff resource allocation, the Welsh Government restoration target, and establishing a new Programme from a zero-starting position during a pandemic year. Prioritisation was given to enable restoration delivery, engagement, evidence and national coordination whilst also putting in place capacity building to allow the Programme to grow in future years. Welsh Government and NRW worked closely together to ensure the Programme remained focused on delivery and enabling delivery. The number of strategic groups formed also helped to refine the approach to enable restoration over the five-year period through the contractor engagement, practitioners' group, strategic partner group, and the joint Nature and Climate Emergencies Capital Programme oversight group. The learning over this period has been invaluable; and, when taken together with the Review, it will help shape, structure and focus the future approach to deliver the full range of peatland ecosystem recovery enablers, and Welsh Government and NRW strategic outcomes.

Key elements of success from NPAP's delivery experience in the first five years:

- **Strong and productive relationship with Programme commissioning staff in Welsh Government**
  The strong and productive relationship between the two teams has been hugely appreciated by the NPAP team and has meant all team members had a strong understanding of the Programme goals and direction of travel. The sustained and supportive interest shown in the Programme by Welsh Government has played a very important role in shaping it and has been instrumental in ensuring policy remains appropriate and ultimately deliverable.

- **Dedicated staff and team approach within NPAP**
  The NPAP team developed a strong and unified purpose from the outset and focused exclusively on developing the tools, processes, linkages, and expertise needed to implement a large-scale restoration programme. This commonality of purpose could not have been achieved using a more 'generalist' approach within the context of a team or group structure delivering multiple objectives, particularly where these include statutory duties. Several key staff were central to the delivery and success of the first five years of NPAP despite lying outside the Programme funding arrangement.

- **Partnership working**
  NPAP has been able to harness the collective and enormous expertise and experience available externally and internally. Externally, as the Wales Peatland Action collective, the strategic partnership groups have fed into the development and delivery of the Programme. Within NRW, NPAP has been able to capitalise on the strong national and local links to partners accessed via subject matter experts and NRW's five People & Places teams.

- **Range of funding mechanisms and access to specialist staff within each key funding area**
  NRW is uniquely well placed in this regard, with significant grant-awarding and management capability, the use of the influential and highly effective Section 16 mechanism, the ability to use Memoranda of Agreements and other instruments, and all supported by a strong procurement team with established processes. In particular, both grants and procurement teams devoted significant staff time and expertise to the development of funding routes in their respective areas and each became invested in the aims and ethos of the Programme.

- **Governance**
  NRW's mature governance process has been applied in securing support and direction at all key stages in the Programme and in so doing paving the way for the effective engagement with other NRW functions.

- **Support of other functional areas within NRW**
  NRW's range and depth of capability has been utilised across all aspects of the Programme and includes financial management and accountancy, the input of ecosystem and species group subject matter experts, land managers, site leads within environment teams, People & Places team members, contract management, species licencing, environmental assessment, historic landscapes, forest policy and delivery, and land agency. NRW's role as Wales's integrated environmental body has given the Programme the ability to tackle and resolve complex issues which cut across strongly contrasting areas of NRW's remit. NPAP's collective success in developing an approach for afforested peat has been a key success story in this area, with another being NPAP's effective input through evidence and expert advice to the development of Forest Resource Plans.

3. Next Steps

Following Welsh Government's evaluation of the detailed Five-Year Review document, NPAP is looking forward to the next phase of the Programme development and upscale. For 2025/26, the Deputy First Minister, with responsibility for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies, announced: "For the year ahead, our 6th year, I have committed an additional £5.2m to continue and build upon the wonderful work achieved to date, including contributing towards green job opportunities in Wales."

In preparation for the upscale of targets an eight-year Framework for contractors was launched Summer 2025 and recruitment by NPAP to key strategic roles to expand expertise and capacity is underway.

