

Regional Land Use Partnerships: Phase 1 Process Evaluation

Final Report

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Regional Land Use Partnerships: Phase 1 Process Evaluation

Final Report

Prepared by SAC Consulting

**for the Future Rural Policy Frameworks, Land Use and Land
Reform Division**

in the Scottish Government

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List of abbreviations

General

ha	hectares (1 km ² = 100 hectares)
LM	Logic model
LUS	Scotland's Land Use Strategy
MSP	Member of Scottish Parliament
NW2045	Northwest Highland 2045
RLUP	Regional Land Use Partnership
RLUF	Regional Land Use Framework
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
SG	Scottish Government
SLC	Scottish Land Commission
ToC	Theory of Change (model)

Pilot regions

CNPA	Cairngorms National Park Authority
HL	Highland Region
LLTNP	Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park
NE	Northeast Region (includes Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils)
SoS	South of Scotland Region (includes Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway Councils)

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1. Executive Summary

a. Purpose of this process evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide evidence from Phase 1 (Year 1) of the RLUP pilot process (2021-2022) to assist Scottish Ministers in their consideration of wider rollout of RLUPs from 2023. Scottish Ministers' success criteria for the pilots, as outlined in the [Bute House Agreement](#) (BHA), include meeting expectations relating to:

- Adoption of a natural capital approach
- Production of RLUFs which can meet national and regional priorities
- Maximise influence in engaging regional stakeholders
- Taking a democratic, inclusive, local approach to decision-making

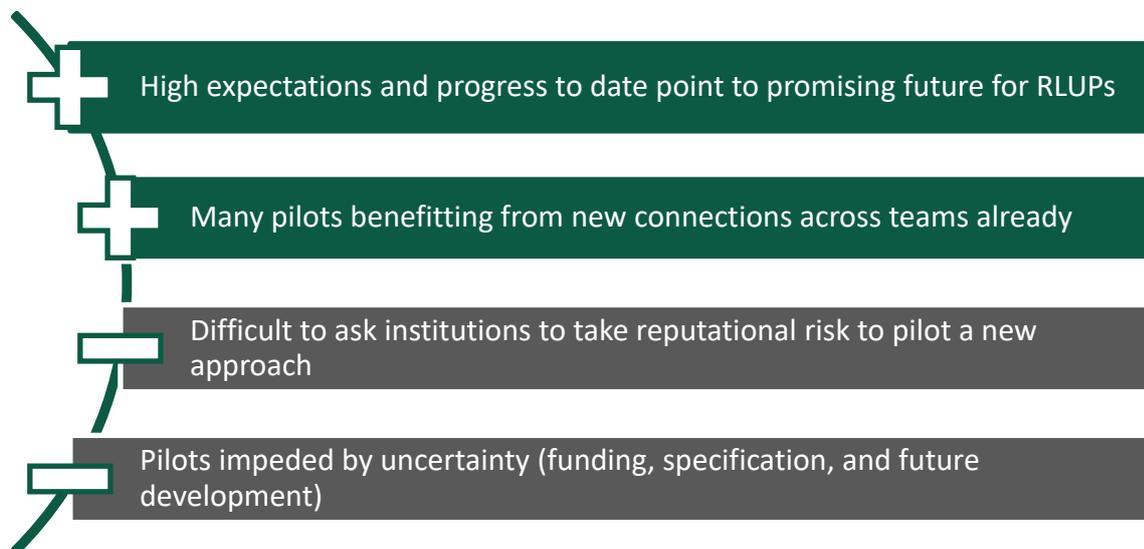
The BHA was published in August 2021 and outlines Ministers' expectations. The RLUPs process is being evaluated based on the Phase 1 milestones, agreed through the grant award process, which include establishment of a board structure and completion of a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy by the end of March 2022.

Considering the widening use of the Place Principle throughout Scottish Government policy, this RLUPs process evaluation provides a key opportunity for learning how to implement regional priorities using local engagement. In addition to determining the factors influencing the achievement of these intended outcomes, this evaluation also seeks to determine the lessons learned from the pilot process. Specifically, the evaluation findings will help identify improvement opportunities, show how context influenced delivery, and inform future decisions relating to RLUPs.

b. Key findings of this evaluation

The high expectations and anticipation that surround the RLUP pilots, cited by several pilots in interviews, indicate that this is a policy mechanism which is seen by many stakeholders as necessary. The advantages of regional level working to address and integrate local and national goals are clear to those involved in the process. The results of this evaluation align with these expectations; given sufficient time and resource to troubleshoot the barriers collated in this report, the evidence suggests that RLUP pilots can be successful in delivering their goals as set out by Scottish Ministers. The regional teams leading the pilots have already benefitted from the space created by the RLUP pilots to form new connections across organisations and think strategically within their areas.

List 1b: Key findings overview



The central barriers that stand in the way of the RLUP pilots at present relate to the practicalities of taking a pilot approach to trialling this policy mechanism. All pilots have struggled with some form of uncertainty in developing their nascent partnerships. The freedom for each pilot region to take their own approach has created uncertainty around what is being asked in terms of partnership establishment. As a result, pilots were hesitant to commit their limited resources to plans they were unsure would meet expectations. Uncertainty regarding the future of the RLUP pilots (specifically around pilot funding/budgets, whether they will develop into permanent partnerships, and what the powers of those partnerships might be) has made it difficult to engage stakeholders in the process and has affected all Phase 1 work streams and outcomes.

This evaluation considers Phase 1 of the RLUP pilot establishment, however it is highlighted that the pilots have not had a full year to progress their partnerships due to the delayed timings of start-up processes including getting staff in place and agreeing terms of reference between participating groups. The data collection process of this evaluation occurred in January and February 2022, before the planned end of Phase 1. This evaluation provides a useful checkpoint, capturing early insight into the process of establishing these pilots and draws evidence-based conclusions for RLUPs both now and in the future.

2. Introduction

Scotland's land has been recognised by the UK Climate Change Committee as being key to delivering net zero targets and land use is also an essential part of approaches set out in Scotland's [Environment Strategy](#) and [Post-2020 Biodiversity Strategy Statement of Intent](#). The national direction of travel towards achieving these goals is made clear in [Scotland's Land Use Strategy](#), a document renewed every five years in line with the [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#). Balancing the many demands placed on Scotland's finite land area is an essential part of ensuring a just transition to net zero. The regional scale allows for a balance between sensitivity to the needs of local stakeholders and maintaining accountability to national targets. It is in this context that the Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUPs) pilot project seeks to optimise the role Scotland's land plays in addressing the twin climate and nature crises.

The 2020-21 Programme for Government reaffirmed the commitment by Scottish Government (SG) to support five RLUP pilots from 2021 and the development of Regional Land Use Frameworks (RLUFs) by the pilots by 2023. Based on engagement with local communities and other land use stakeholders, the RLUFs will seek fair and inclusive pathways for optimising the contribution of land to help meet Scotland's national climate and environment targets. In 2021, Ministers decided to pilot RLUPs in five Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) areas across Scotland. These areas expressed an interest in acting as pilots and were chosen: Cairngorms National Park; Highlands Council Region; Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park; North East Region (Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils); and South of Scotland (Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders Councils and South of Scotland Enterprise).

The RLUP pilots build on the work of two smaller 2013-15 pilots in Aberdeenshire and Scottish Borders as part of Scotland's Land Use Strategy. The previous pilots demonstrated the benefits of regional working to achieve objectives collaboratively. The current RLUP pilots are in place to test practical approaches to establishing governance structures and collaboration and engagement options. The pilot process will be implemented over the following phases:

- Phase 1 (March 2021-March 2022): Establish a partnership structure able to deliver a collaborative approach to land use decision-making involving national and local government, landowners and managers, communities and other relevant stakeholders.
- Phase 2 (March 2022 to end 2023): Outline in a Framework (RLUF) which uses a natural capital approach to identify and agree upon current and potential land use opportunities and priorities across the region that support the delivery of Scottish Government's targets for climate change, biodiversity, and other environmental objectives.

3. Overview of evaluation methodology

a. Logic model and Theory of Change model

To understand the full context of the RLUP development process, we structured our evaluation method around a logic model (LM). The logic model (see **Figure 3a**) is a schematic which outlines how RLUPs as an intervention collate a series of inputs (resources) to enable outputs (activities), which then forward the delivery of a specific set of outcomes. We have refined an overarching LM for the RLUP pilot work with a primary focus on Phase 1, which has been used to structure our evaluation.

While policy interventions are designed to lead to certain outcomes, realising these on the ground can be uncertain due to influences from a range of factors. A Theory of Change model (ToC) is a way of predicting outcomes of policy actions by capturing baseline conditions and identifying the factors which will influence results.¹ In this evaluation, we revised the LM into a ToC diagram (see **Appendix B: Detail on evaluation methodology**) to provide a concise and interlinked ‘theory of change’ pathway from the inception of RLUPs towards long-term outcomes. These two linked schematics are cross-referenced within this report and provide a useful, visual guide to the written outputs.

b. Data collection

i. Desk-based research

Initial data collection involved reviewing documentation pertaining to RLUP development to date. This included:

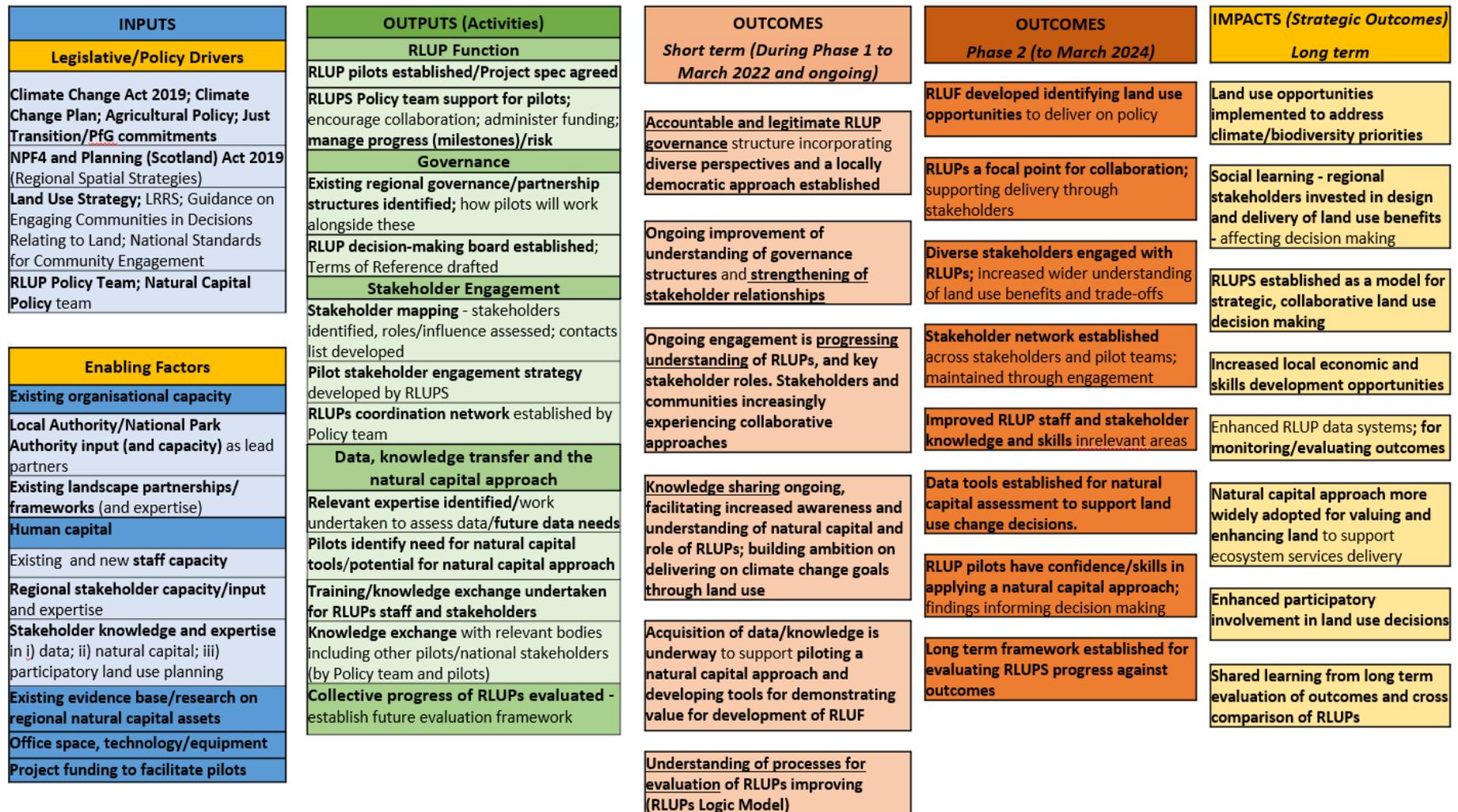
- Relevant Scottish Government policies
- The body of work surrounding the previous 2013-2015 Land Use Strategy pilots
- Advice from the Scottish Land Commission
- Academic literature
- The original project specifications for these pilots
- Meeting agendas and minutes
- Other reports and updates.

This information review enabled us to establish an understanding of local circumstances (baselines) before meeting with representatives from the pilot regions. This also ensured the evaluation captured the separate starting points of each region. This initial review enabled efficient use of interview time such that these

¹ Piroska Bullen. [‘Theory of Change vs Logical Framework—What’s the difference?’](#)

sessions could focus on exploring the qualitative aspects and lessons learned, following confirmation of the initial baseline data for each region.

Figure 3a: Logic model for RLUPs. This schematic provides a conceptual map of the RLUP process for Phase 1 and beyond.



ii. Interviews with pilots

Interview questions were developed by the evaluation team and refined in consultation with the SG policy team. For more detail on the questions and wider methodology, see **Appendix B: Detail on evaluation methodology** and **Appendix D: Full list of interview questions**. The pilots were contacted via emails provided by the SG RLUPs policy team. Interviews were scheduled with pilot representatives and all participants were provided with a project information sheet and each signed a data consent form. Interviews ran between 12 Jan – 2 Feb 2022 and lasted between 50 and 94 minutes. There were five interviews in total (one session with each pilot region); two interviews were one-on-one and three were in groups, with 2-4 pilot representatives attending. Eleven pilot representatives were interviewed in total. All interviews were conducted via MS Teams by the Principal Investigator from the SAC Consulting evaluation team.

c. Data analysis

Transcripts of the interviews and the background material were collated and analysed using a thematic analysis process. This involved reviewing the transcripts to develop a set of overarching codes to identify key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) relating to the four main themes of the evaluation (governance, stakeholder engagement, natural capital, and data) developed from Ministerial expectations, outlined in the Bute House Agreement. In addition, results were considered under a 'pilot process' theme to capture the practical lessons around taking a pilot approach to this new RLUP policy mechanism. The thematic analysis identified emerging commonalities between pilots regarding strengths and weaknesses, and highlighted individual innovations and lessons learned. These are reported in **Results and discussion**, below. For more on the development of the methods used in this evaluation, see **Appendix B: Detail on evaluation methodology**.

d. Inception and Closing Workshops

Our evaluation was bookended by workshops led by the evaluation team and attended by the SG RLUP policy team and the entire cohort of pilots. The inception workshop of 8th December 2021 included a presentation by the evaluation team on the process, the inputs required from pilots, and the desired outcomes. It also included a discussion around the enabling factors and existing activities taking place within each pilot. Since this evaluation will signpost future opportunities and threats for RLUPs, a key value added was the creation of space to discuss participants' reflections on the process. Pilots came forward in round-table fashion with updates regarding ongoing activities. This was an opportunity to introduce the themes of the evaluation and get pilots talking and thinking about the ideas the interviews would interrogate.

Our closing workshop on 14 March 2022 provided an opportunity for pilot regions to revisit the priority outcomes for the evaluation. The evaluation team presented the headline findings from the data collection and thematic analysis process. The following plenary discussion with the pilots ensured validation of the results. These workshops were useful in that they made the evaluation process transparent to pilots and allowed them to raise any concerns, which led to increased trust and buy-in to the process.

4. Results and discussion

This section highlights key lessons learned by the pilots during the process of becoming established and working towards the Phase 1 outcomes. This section presents a synthesis which aggregates the five pilots to look across the entire RLUP process, identifying the key innovations, inhibiting factors, and opportunities for improvement in moving towards each RLUP pilot outcome. This aligns with the spirit and foundations inherent in taking a pilot approach, embracing the diversity of these regions and trusting each to generate innovative solutions. For detail on the starting conditions, experiences and progress of the individual pilot regions, see **Appendix A: Pilot region overviews**. Direct quotes from interviews are included in italics.

a. Governance

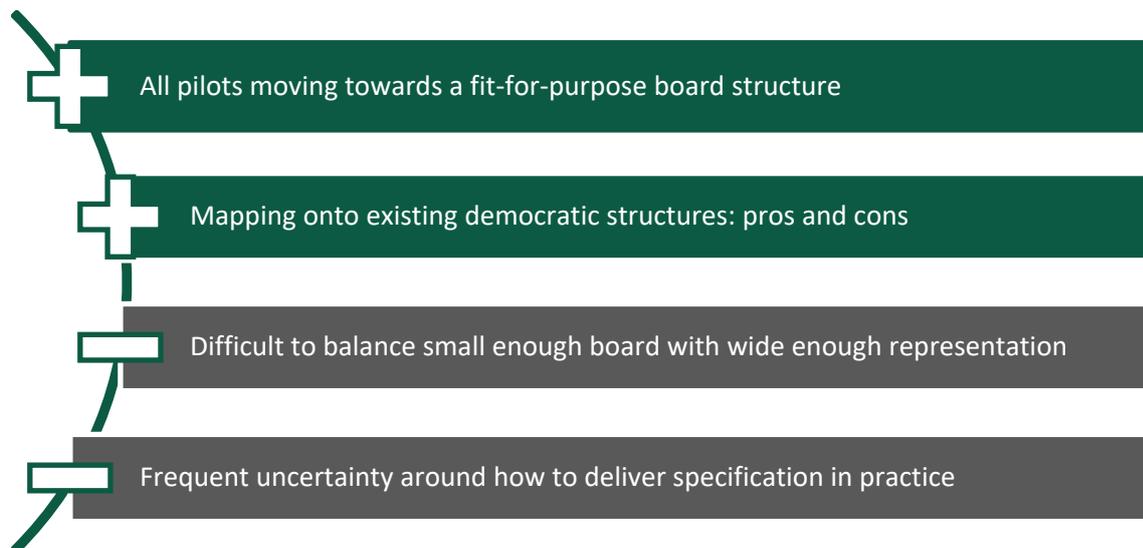
Pilots were given the following specification by SG for Phase 1 regarding the establishment of governance structures:

- Establish a suitable governance structure for the RLUP pilot (including, for example, a governance or policy board) that ensures accountability and transparency.
- Decide how members of the governance structure will be chosen and carry out this process to appoint members.
- Draft terms of reference for the Board / governance structure that outline how the RLUP will function.
- The most suitable governance structure will depend on the specifics of the region and their individual requirements. Pilots should consider whether they have existing arrangements that could be augmented, for example through the inclusion of representatives with relevant sector expertise and from communities. The pilots' proposed arrangements will be agreed with SG.²

The specification also states that boards should be composed of relevant, local land use stakeholders and be capable of capturing input from a broad cross section of regional interests. This is essential to a fair and inclusive approach to the land use discussions that will be needed by each RLUP pilots and the co-production of an RLUF.

² Project specification: Cairngorms, 19 April 2021. Supplied by SG RLUPs Policy Team.

List 4a: Governance headline findings



i. Tripartite model

Most pilots are embracing some form of tripartite governance³ for their board structure. Pilots commented that this model is fit for purpose for RLUPs as these are the relevant groups of stakeholders when it comes to land use decision-making. The pilots received a strong steer from the SG RLUPs policy team to adopt this structure, because ‘tripartite’ was written into their original grant letter,. The pilots agree that it is a promising way to structure the partnership board.

All pilots are striving to meet the specification listed above and are moving towards the adoption of governance structures that bring together representatives from relevant stakeholder groups. There remains some uncertainty, however, around how to achieve governance which satisfies the descriptors (accountable, transparent, local, democratic) in a measurable way. The project specification and other RLUP advice indicate that the formation of governance structures should be informed by stakeholder engagement, which is presently underway in most pilots. No finalised governance structure can emerge before the necessary engagement is in place, confirmed by multiple pilots emphasizing their commitment to “*getting this right the first time*” (interview quote).

One pilot highlighted that they have been flexible and cautious in structuring and labelling their partnership governance and questioned “*whether those sorts of words [e.g. ‘board’ and ‘terms of reference’] are actually the right way to be going forward in our particular patch, because they point to something perhaps more structured, an entity in itself [...] we need to be careful about how we describe it*” (interview quote). While this pilot will establish a partnership, they have backed up a step behind the

³ The term ‘tripartite’ entered the RLUP body of work via advice from the Scottish Land Commission and refers to local government, land-based industry, and community representation.

specification to leave the structure and title of their governance structure open-ended, to be informed by their forthcoming stakeholder engagement. This seems to be truly in the spirit of taking a pilot approach and highlights an opportunity for pilots to build something more likely to work for and be accepted by regional stakeholders. For the purposes of this report, we will continue to use this language (i.e. 'board' and 'terms of reference') for consistency with existing RLUP materials, however we agree that this is an opportunity that requires more thought.

ii. Using existing democratic structures

As partnership boards, the membership of these new structures will draw from existing groups in the region, each with their own structures and often similar goals. For example, local authorities are made up of locally elected representatives who already have a democratic mandate to serve their communities. Furthermore, these existing groups (which also include the national park authorities, government agencies, eNGOs, and other partnerships) have ongoing workstreams that complement the goals of an RLUP/RLUF, driving environmental improvements and maximising community benefits. Indeed, a key step in the Phase 1 specification for the pilots was to 'detect and evaluate partnership and collaborative working arrangements already in place in the region and determine how the RLUP pilot will work alongside these.'⁴ Alignment with these other groupings is an essential consideration for RLUP development and the pilots emphasised this. For example, one interviewee explained:

"Avoiding duplication of effort I think is an important one [...] The plan would be to utilise existing groups and their expertise where we can and utilise existing strategies and reports [...] We already have that information, let's just slot it into what we're trying to do with the RLUP."

These 'other groups' could be included through engagement when creating the RLUF and the regional priorities and action plan therein, or more actively as members of the partnership board. In either case, there are clear benefits to this, including harnessing the wealth of experience and human capital that exists in these regions, knowledge of and alignment with similar plans, and avoiding duplication of efforts.

However, interviewees noted that there are also drawbacks to including a large proportion of RLUP board membership from these groups. Firstly, given the pace of change and the urgency for climate action, people working on these goals tend to be over-stretched already. The organisations that came forward to deliver these pilots struggled to allocate time to the project and find those that they contacted for input are similarly working at capacity, pilots commenting that *"people are very stretched, people who I've been involved with, with the RLUP [...] we're still working within that*

⁴ Project specification: Cairngorms, 19 April 2021. Supplied by SG RLUPs Policy Team.

parameter of the people." This is also evidenced in the fact that many pilots cited employing a full-time project manager as central to the progress they have made so far, shifting the burden away from those with existing roles in these groups and to coordinate efforts towards the RLUP pilot process.

Another challenge or risk of integrating an RLUP into existing organisations is the time that it takes to move through these organisations' internal processes. This is particularly apparent in the context of the pilots not having had a full twelve months to deliver the Phase 1 outcomes.

As a solution, pilots suggested that, if SG were to set up similar partnerships in the same way again, more lead-in time would be helpful, similar to what was provided in the 2013-15 LUS pilots: *"That sort of practicality should be considered when government is doing these sorts of projects. We'd all like to be able to respond just like that but it doesn't work within bureaucratic organisations"* (interview quote). This lead-in time would also be helpful in seeking alignment and understanding of how different organisations' goals map onto those of an RLUP and where the added value might be. When speaking about adding an RLUP into the existing policy and planning landscape within their region, one pilot compared this to *"turning an oil tanker."* The added activities of an RLUP will inform regional plans which are already in motion, but true integration with those plans, and reaching the full potential of RLUPs to influence these, will need to evolve over time.

Another risk of mapping an RLUP directly onto existing governance structures (for example, by forming a committee within a local or national park authority to act as an RLUP board) is that these structures may not be entirely fit to serve as an RLUP. To this end, a couple of pilots indicated that the governance structures they are putting in place for the purposes of the pilot are not likely to be the same as a formally established and fully operational RLUP board. Multiple pilots raised concerns regarding the existing governance structures in place in their regions, pointing out that *"what it doesn't have is the right breadth and depth of information coming into it for them to then make a decision."* This is not to say that existing regional governance structures are unfit to serve their current roles (indeed, in many cases, these organisations have land use planning responsibilities and are currently delivering the work that an RLUP would do). Potential blind spots within an RLUP board may be avoided through purposive stakeholder mapping and engagement to determine who the relevant regional parties are, building these partnerships from the ground up rather than co-opting structures that exist already. While the final RLUP boards will inevitably draw members from these existing groups, most are moving towards these best practices in building their boards from scratch:

“We’re only going to have one chance at this, and we accept it’s done on an interim basis, because it’s for the term of the pilot, but the aspiration is this is for the long term. [...] So right from the start it is a challenge, and we want to carefully consider the best way of achieving that.”

Nonetheless, understanding the challenges of including these types of members in an RLUP process provides useful horizon scanning for both establishing future RLUPs as well as their involvement as contributing members.

One final risk of including board members who hold a democratic mandate within another governance structure is that it quickly becomes difficult to balance representation, political and otherwise:

“How is the democratic mandate to be expressed? Is it because you have people who are elected onto it? Is it because you have political representatives who were elected in or is it because you have community representation? I’d say it’s an unknown. We were probably initially tilted towards saying, “Well, if you’ve got councillors on the board, they are elected representatives,” [...] You can’t easily have the right balance of councillors across the [...] local authority regions without packing the board already, without any space for anybody else.”

This ties into wider issues around representation:

“Should [a board member] be a farmer or should it be somebody that represents farmers? And we’ve kind of decided that it should be somebody that represents farmers because I think it’s tough enough being a representative, as a councillor representing a whole area and having to work and deal with your colleagues in bringing that wider regional element, because you can’t have everybody sitting round the table.”

iii. Challenges of inclusivity

The above ideas all point to a central conundrum: drawing together a board with all relevant stakeholders to make land use decisions at regional scale is both the central function of RLUPs as well as their greatest challenge. The pilot regions are extremely varied in their sizes, landscape characteristics, economies, and communities (see [Appendix A: Pilot region overviews](#)). The pilots have been established in line with five of the indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) areas. Pilots recognise the advantages of following these same boundaries, similar to those of aligning with existing regional governance, including reducing duplication and linking up with regional work on economy, growth deals and transport. These regions are still large and diverse, with land areas ranging from 1,800 to 25,600 km² and with populations from 15,000 to 489,000 people. Providing a strategic overview for such

vast areas and groups, or even channelling input from stakeholders over these large areas, seems an insurmountable task for a board sufficiently small to be nimble and make decisions (most pilots are aiming for ten to fifteen individuals, in line with SLC advice).

Pilots are taking a diversity of approaches to address this conundrum. To be tractable, some type of narrowing, breaking efforts down to smaller scales, is inevitable. Some pilots reference taking a place-based approach:

“We’re wanting to meet the challenge of setting up the structure to assess and evaluate and provide that strategic overview for the whole of the [pilot region]. [...] We’re introducing the place-based approach [...] We want to make sure that that’s embedded in our approach and that means that we will seek to capture, across that huge geographic area, the priorities around land use for the delivery against the twin emergencies.”

Embracing this place-based approach is one way for RLUPs to take a local approach to decision-making. To achieve this in practice, some pilots are proposing to sample local landscapes within the larger region, undertaking in-depth engagement in targeted areas and linking their thinking with national policy targets:

“The communities of interest place that resonance with their sub-catchment or local landscape area and therefore it’s the equivalent of trying to do that and sample across the region to make sure we try and capture those main land use issues [...] that can help us strategically guide what are going to be our priority set of actions.”

The aspiration is for RLUPs to carry out comprehensive engagement with as many communities as possible across their regions and the place-based approach seems a promising place to start. The 2013-15 LUS pilots had success with this approach as well.

One solution pioneered by pilots was to form specialist advisory groups which feed into and inform the RLUP board. These less formal committees of experts and stakeholders (some pre-existing and some assembled specifically for the RLUP) can deliver advice on key issues and decisions without being directly involved in decision-making. Different pilots plan to draw together different groupings and call them by different names (e.g. ‘working group,’ ‘specialist advisory panel,’ ‘technical advisory group’). Some of these groups are also committees of community members, drawn together to focus stakeholder engagement and thus separate local knowledge from other types of input such as expert advice. Instead of trying to include a token member from each group of land use stakeholders on a single board, directing certain workstreams to these specialist groups will lessen the burden on everyone involved. Furthermore, this approach may serve to put a necessary check on the influence of certain interest groups. This approach has appeared in multiple

pilots and there will be key lessons to be learned from observing how these different groups operate in practice.

b. Stakeholder engagement

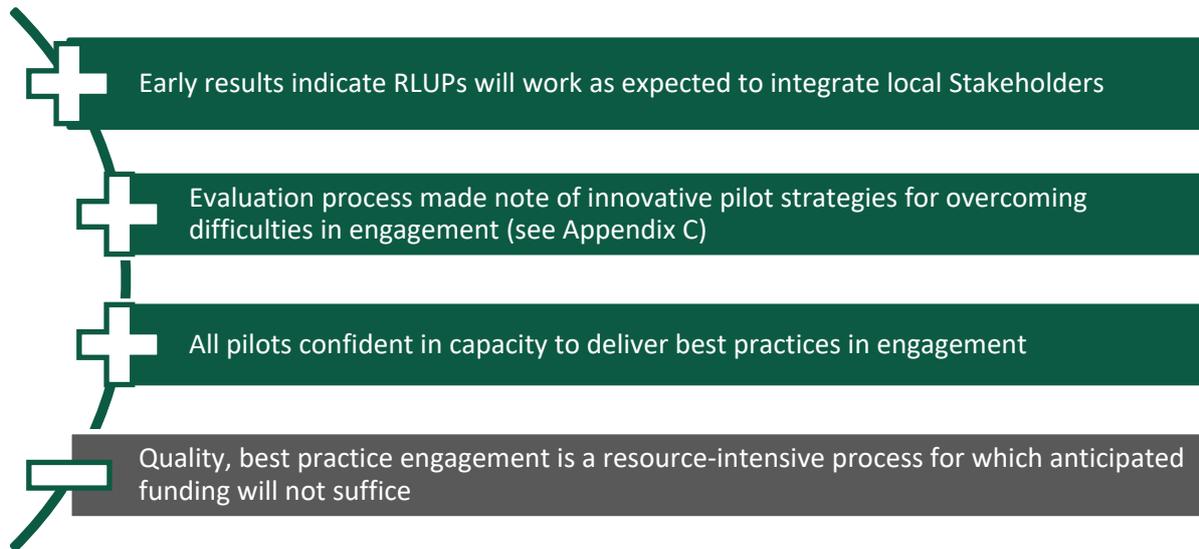
The following objectives were set for pilots regarding stakeholder engagement within Phase 1:

- Determine who the relevant stakeholders are in the region and build relationships with them.
- Develop a suitable stakeholder engagement plan to enable collective and integrated working.

Stakeholder engagement is a key function of RLUPs and permeates throughout the other themes. As the previous section makes clear, RLUP governance structures are designed in the first instance to enable RLUPs to act as a channel to connect local priorities with national targets. This section will focus on some key lessons learned by pilots in their engagement activities, both from previous experience and their work within the RLUP pilots thus far.

Overall, pilots are progressing well towards their stakeholder engagement outcomes. There is excellent capacity within the pilot regions for state-of-the-art engagement methods, both within pilot teams and wider networks from which board members will be drawn. While only one of the pilots had managed to produce new, purpose-built RLUP engagement plans by the time of this evaluation, all have experience producing and executing these types of plans and have access to all necessary resources, often including previously written and completed regional engagement plans. At this stage, all pilots have had conversations with their key players and are progressing strategies to broaden that engagement to include all relevant stakeholders.

List 4b: Stakeholder engagement headline findings



i. Using existing networks and methods

Consistent with their purpose and confirmed by the anticipation surrounding their development, RLUPs are well-placed as a channel to facilitate local involvement. Stakeholder engagement is already a priority workstream and key foundation of ongoing work in these regions. Some of these best practices relevant to anticipated challenges within future RLUP engagement are summarised in **Appendix C: Additional lessons learned**. A key strength that previous experience provides is that pilots feel they already know their stakeholders to some degree, which gives them a considerable head start in engaging with stakeholders over the issues involved in land use:

“Somebody starting completely from scratch, coming into maybe a situation where there wasn’t [an existing, experienced group] might not be aware of that and it would take quite a lot of consultation time to get to a position where they realised that they’ve got some very polarised groups with very different ideas and then they’ll be scratching their head about what to do about it. Whereas we already know that, so we already know we’ve got this massive problem that we need to try and deal with.”

However, it is clear to see how this strength and depth of experience could potentially work against the pilots and the desired outcomes of an RLUP. Assuming knowledge of stakeholders’ entrenched positions may produce blind spots that new engagement would fill. Therefore, while the stakeholder networks of existing regional groups are a key asset which should be leveraged by RLUPs, it is also essential to engage with these stakeholders again, asking them the relevant questions and seeking their input to open new pathways forward as well as fully horizon scan for barriers:

“It needs to be more open about what do we want out of the land and then you work backwards to how you might achieve that [...] You ask people for the blue-sky thinking and say, ‘Well what do they want?’”

Renewed stakeholder mapping and engagement will hopefully also capture input from different groups, beyond the key players known to RLUPs, and avoid narrow input from a group of the ‘usual suspects.’

Another key risk or blind spot produced by relying too much on previous methods or tacking onto previous plans is that these may have been delivered top-down, merely consulting stakeholders instead of seeking true participation. Research and practice around engagement has developed rapidly in recent years and continues to do so.⁵ Some pilots have flagged this as a concern around previous plans covering similar issues to an RLUP/RLUF.

ii. Quality engagement is a resource-intensive process

All pilots highlighted the resource-intensive nature of delivering best practice in stakeholder engagement and see this as a barrier to progress. Taking the time to explain the nature of an RLUP or its activities to stakeholders, meeting with them individually or in groups, and discussing issues specific to each, take time and therefore cost money. Pilots have gone further to indicate that the funding provided for Phase 1 and expected for Phase 2 will not be sufficient to deliver the type of engagement that RLUPs will require to deliver best practice approaches:

“My biggest experience really with things like partnership-type working is it takes quite a long time. [...] it’s also about building kind of personal relationships which requires continuity of staff which you often don’t get with project funded things like this [...] So, there’s already a mismatch there I think with the pilots and how we’re trying to do it. There just isn’t the time and resources to do justice to the way that the RLUPs ideally would operate.”

Continuity and other issues stemming from the question of resource are covered in **section E**. Some pilots noted that contentious issues, such as those involved in decisions about land use, require more resource for their stakeholder engagement to address instances of sustained opposition and stagnant conflicts.

To summarise, RLUPs have the necessary tools and expertise to achieve their ambitious aims through best practices in stakeholder engagement. This engagement would ideally follow a strategy developed from scratch to circumvent the risks of

⁵ Reed MS, Graves A, Dandy N, Posthumus H, Hubacek K, Morris J, Prell C, Quinn CH, Stringer LC (2009). Who’s in and why? A typology of stakeholder analysis methods for natural resource management.

relying on previous plans (e.g. usual suspects, echo chamber, wrong questions). However, refreshed engagement (both planning and execution) require significant resource inputs, far greater than what pilots expect to receive for Phase 2.

c. Natural capital

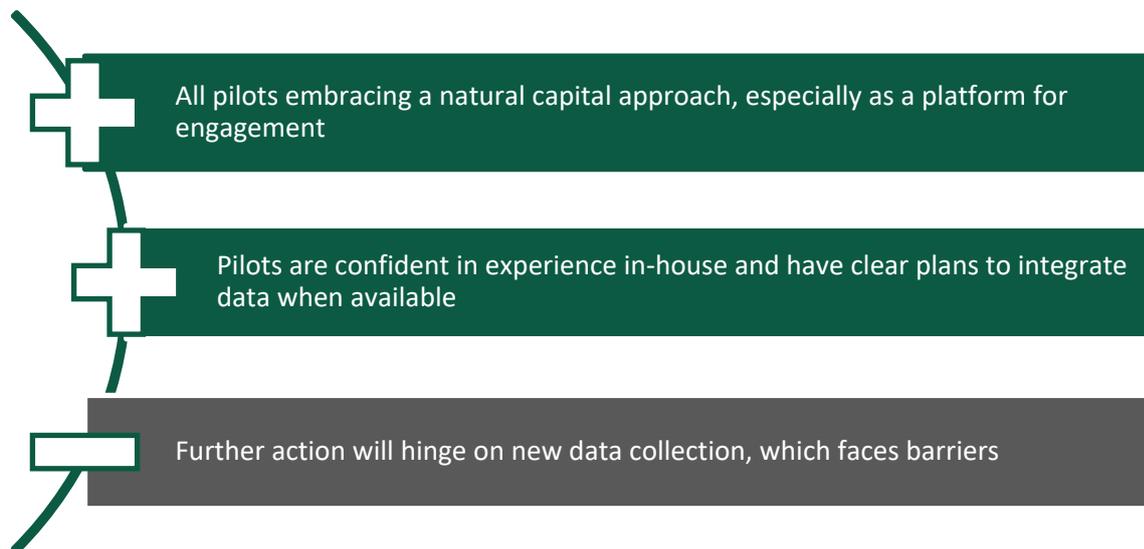
Pilots were given the following specification regarding a natural capital approach⁶:

- The pilots should adopt a broad natural capital approach, looking at our land as an asset that we need to protect and enhance so that it can continue to deliver a wide range of ecosystem service benefits such as food production, emissions reduction, carbon sequestration, climate adaptation, improved biodiversity, and support for health and wellbeing through access to nature, into the future.
- One element of this approach will be the identification of the potential for nature-based solutions for climate change within the region such as woodland expansion, peatland restoration, natural flood management and greenspaces to reduce air pollution.

It should be noted that the practical applications and opportunities within natural capital are to be delivered in later phases. Therefore, the expectations within this theme relate to how pilots integrated their governance structures and conversations with stakeholders with the principles of natural capital. The pilots employed a range of methods, with many partnerships implementing elements of a natural capital approach (see **Box 4c**). Pilots' progress diverged more on these latter themes (natural capital and data) than within the two covered above. External factors are more relevant to these themes and uneven starting points between pilots are more apparent in these somewhat more tangible work streams.

⁶ Ongoing work for Scottish Government and CXC is exploring the application of a natural capital approach for RLUPs: Reed MS, Waylen K, Glass, J, McMorrnan R, Stevens B, Rudman H, Williams A, Glendinning J (2022) Regional Land Use Partnerships and the Natural Capital Approach, Scottish Government/ClimateXChange.

List 4c: Natural capital headline findings



While these differing baseline conditions will undoubtedly make future natural capital outcomes more challenging for some RLUPs than others, all regions have solid capacity to take these objectives forward once certain barriers are overcome (chiefly, lack of data). Furthermore, those pilots who are considerably ahead within these themes will be able to transfer these lessons to others through knowledge exchange within the RLUP network. To facilitate this learning, SG are currently supporting the pilots with upskilling participants in natural capital concepts using specialist researchers.

Box 4c: Reed et al.⁷ define a natural capital approach as one which:

- Considers the biophysical, socio-cultural and policy contexts within which decisions about natural capital are made, and how these decisions might affect different stakeholders;
- Is inclusive of relevant stakeholders and their needs and goals, to ensure a balance between environmental, community and other relevant benefits from natural capital;
- Engages stakeholders at a level appropriate to the purpose and context of the assessment, managing power dynamics and empowering all participants to engage actively in decision-making;

⁷ Reed MS, Waylen K, McMorran R, Stevens B, Rudman H, Williams A, Glendinning J (2022) Regional Land Use Partnerships and the Natural Capital Approach, Scottish Government.

- Includes an assessment of both natural capital and ecosystem services, including drivers of change, synergies and trade-offs over time and space and an assessment of the consequences of changes in these assets and services on the goals and interests of different stakeholders;
- Is used to inform decision-making and action, for example by monetising ecosystem services, leading to the protection and/or enhancement of natural capital assets and ecosystem services that support the aims and interests of stakeholders; and
- Is monitored and evaluated to provide summative feedback to stakeholders and formative feedback to inform future applications of the approach.

i. Natural capital as a platform for engagement

In alignment with Phase 1 outcomes, the approach of RLUPs to natural capital thus far has provided opportunities and structure for stakeholder engagement.

Specifically, this includes identification of shared interests between partners and stakeholders in the natural environment. Structuring conversations around natural capital concepts was cited as being useful for both the current RLUP pilots as well as by those who were involved in the 2013-15 LUS pilots. Skilled facilitation and careful management of diverging perspectives and values for the ecosystem services provided by RLUPs will be required to avoid conflict:

“It’s going to be complex. It’s not going to be just about win-wins although there will be opportunities where the benefits stack up shall we say but there’s also going to be conflict where land use would potentially conflict with another land use and have an impact on natural capital stocks and the ecosystem services.”

A key step towards successful engagement driven by a natural capital approach and avoiding these conflicts was to sufficiently prepare stakeholders to receive these concepts and data, when it becomes available:

“But we’d have to take them along on that journey with us, you know. I think we can’t, what we can’t do is just sort of dump a map down in front of them [...] and say, ‘There you go, we’ve worked it out,’ because that again is a really top-down approach which is not really what the RLUPs are about.”

A final risk surrounding a natural capital approach as it relates to stakeholder engagement is that RLUPs and their members could be perceived as over-reliant on a data-driven approach and/or that the language of natural capital is seen as jargon or irrelevant. One pilot shared that while concepts such as habitats are easy enough

to grasp, it may not be practical or necessary that all stakeholders understand the concepts of natural capital in detail.

ii. Data-driven natural capital assessments and outcomes

As stated, pilots are at a variety of stages in progressing towards complete natural capital assessments of their regions. This is due to varying conditions and capacities within their regions at the start of the project. Furthermore, that these more tangible outcomes are not expectations under Phase 1. Much of this will be covered in the next section, **Data**. Several pilots have found success in co-opting natural capital work that is progressing in other organisations within the region. Many land use stakeholder groups are eager to embrace the value given by natural capital assessment, and RLUPs are doing a good job of detecting these parallel workstreams and aligning with them where possible.

However, a challenge within this approach is the fact that there is a lack of standardisation across these natural capital assessments, including methods, scope, inputs, and outputs, meaning that: 1) not all of these are fit for RLUP purpose; and 2) any changes to make them fit an RLUP may disqualify them from the funding they currently receive. Nonetheless, RLUPs will undoubtedly be the beneficiaries of the 'buzz' surrounding these topics at the moment.

Notwithstanding these challenges, RLUPs are well positioned to both identify funding opportunities across their regions, including both public and private funding sources. Private funding typically comes from voluntary domestic carbon markets, like the Peatland Code and Woodland Carbon Code, often blended with public funding (up to 85% of project costs). As such, RLUPs could have the potential to play a key role in coordinating multiple payments from several future ecosystem markets to targeted land areas as schemes are developed for non-peat soil carbon, hedgerows and saltmarsh, among other habitats and land uses:

“Where we could potentially get more involved is where there is a market developing in a more holistic range of ... it's not just carbon credits that it's dealing with. It's dealing with biodiversity net gain, habitat enhancement, it's a broader range of stuff [...] Linking that up to investors or to whoever, I think is the missing step. [...] It might literally map things out, we may end up with these hot spots where there's potential for peatland restoration, catchment restoration, woodland expansion, all within one defined area.”

RLUPs may also be able to play a role in convening place-based trading spaces, such as Landscape Enterprise Networks, given their connections to local businesses that might benefit from interventions to protect or enhance ecosystem services or reduce risk to their supply chains or infrastructure. As trusted brokers, RLUPs may be able to convene landowners and managers to create landscape scale propositions to investors, whilst reducing the transaction costs of creating multiple

individual contracts. In addition to facilitating ecosystem markets, this role may in future be able to extend to the generation of community benefits from land acquisition programmes, where RLUPs can enable landowners and communities to collectively negotiate with investors.⁸

There are a couple key barriers standing in the way of RLUPs achieving these desirable roles. Firstly, several pilots indicated that the emerging market for carbon credits and the changes that it is producing move too quickly for an RLUP to play a role. Land managers are being cautioned against speculative behaviour and this turbulent space, but pilots feel it is unlikely that RLUPs will be able to put any check on these commercial drivers:

“There’s imperative now in terms of the market shifts, and so we need to almost protect as well. We’re being looked to as an area of net carbon and, you know, what’s going to happen next? How do we support our communities to be best equipped to respond? [...] We have an awareness that we don’t really know right now how best to respond to the threats as well as the opportunities.”

Finally, a well-known barrier to land use change in Scotland is that ‘*the biggest factor in deciding what happens with a piece of land is who owns it*’ (interview quote). Land tenure can be a barrier or an enabler to these natural capital outcomes based on the attitudes of the individual or organisation in control. For this reason, several pilots highlighted land tenure as an essential missing data category (see **Data coverage**, below). One pilot took this a step further to suggest this be mapped as its own data layer, called ‘permission potential’:

“We can do that assessment of natural capital and say where we think things should be done but we don’t have decision making power [...] Where are we likely to get permission? That comes into the framework.”

d. Data

The pilots were given the following specifications regarding data:

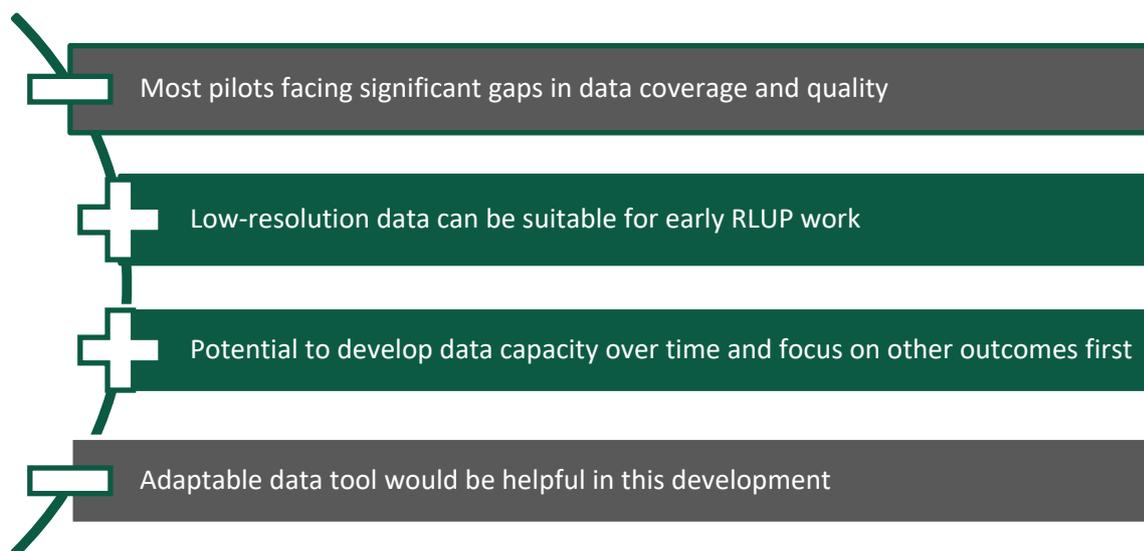
- The Scottish Government is currently assessing existing data sources against the future data needs for land use policy, including RLUPs and the LUS. We intend to work with the pilots to develop a toolkit that will include land use data highlighting potential areas for land use change that are beneficial for the climate and other relevant objectives, such as biodiversity or water management.

⁸ McMorran R, Reed MS, Glass J, Rudman H, Macaulay R, McKee A, Bauer A, Peskett L (2022) Large scale land acquisition for carbon: evidence review. SEFARI, Scottish Government.

- In addition, the SG and pilot regions will work together to establish if there are wider data or evidence needs, for example for Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping. As part of the project development SG will explore the need and potential for additional support to be provided either for individual pilots or at national level.

No collection, analysis or translation of data was expected for Phase 1. Instead, the main objective of this phase is better understood as a gap analysis of pilots' data assets and capabilities and where they will require support going forward.

List 4d: Data headline findings



i. Data coverage

Almost all pilots expressed that their data coverage within their regions could be better. There is much variation in the data availability between the pilot regions, ranging from very little (e.g. only national-level resolution for the whole region, with more detailed data for only small areas) to fairly comprehensive (e.g. woodland expansion mapping, peatland mapping, stream data, habitats and species etc.) (documents provided by pilots). Some pilots were drawn to lead with a data-driven approach, stressing that this data would be essential to the work of creating an RLUF. Within this, several specific, missing data categories were highlighted as being important:

- Habitats surveys - *We only have habitat survey information up to minimum phase one, for a third of the area of [the region], and getting those data sets together and having to do it quickly, and the different way data is actually managed already and how we can actually try and plug gaps.*
- Land tenure / 'permission potential' - *This is how important the mapping is, and I suspect that'll be something that will transfer across to other areas in the [region]. Knowing who owns the bit of land you're looking at, knowing whether*

it's somebody who's an ENGO or it's somebody who's local, or a community, or if it's somebody that's in a shell company somewhere or a family charitable trust offshore. We need to map all of that.

- Historic payments which incentivise against current goals - *We should have a map that shows all the areas that have received drainage grants right up to the present day [...] Those drainage activities would never have occurred was it not for the grants available for them to do it, because it wouldn't make economic sense.* Flooding events are rarely extensive but they can be very detrimental to the communities involved.

ii. Data quality

Data quality is similarly inconsistent, with all pilots referencing datasets which are out of date, incompatible, and falling far short of what is envisioned as necessary to deliver the outcomes of an RLUF:

"Land use is changing at a huge pace at the moment, especially with forestry, we feel that we need up to date data that is updated on a regular basis and enables people to make decisions on real time data and not things that are vastly out of date but also to be able to understand that data and that process and engage with it."

A key realisation within the topic of data and its quality is that often, low-resolution data can serve the purposes of an RLUP quite well, especially in early phases. Perhaps ironically, this idea came from one of the pilots which is furthest progressed regarding data and natural capital. In their experience, although they enjoy a relative wealth of regional data coverage and categories, they have found that lower-resolution, 'broad-brush' datasets are most useful for prioritising their interventions in space:

"...the other problem with data is it's easy to get sucked into the very fine detail but we're trying to do things at a regional scale here [...] You're looking at quality and quantity, where are the big areas that are in good condition, where are the big areas that are in rubbish condition."

Data quantity and quality is a challenging issue and several pilots shared their experience with the fact that patching data gaps is very resource intensive. This strategy (to deprioritise new data collection and analysis, diverting limited resource instead towards robust governance and stakeholder engagement in the first instance) is compelling, especially as preparing stakeholders to understand and use this data was also flagged by pilots as essential. However, pilots insist that certain minimum data coverage and quality is crucial to all stages of RLUP workstreams and that these require resource and attention in early phases of establishment as well.

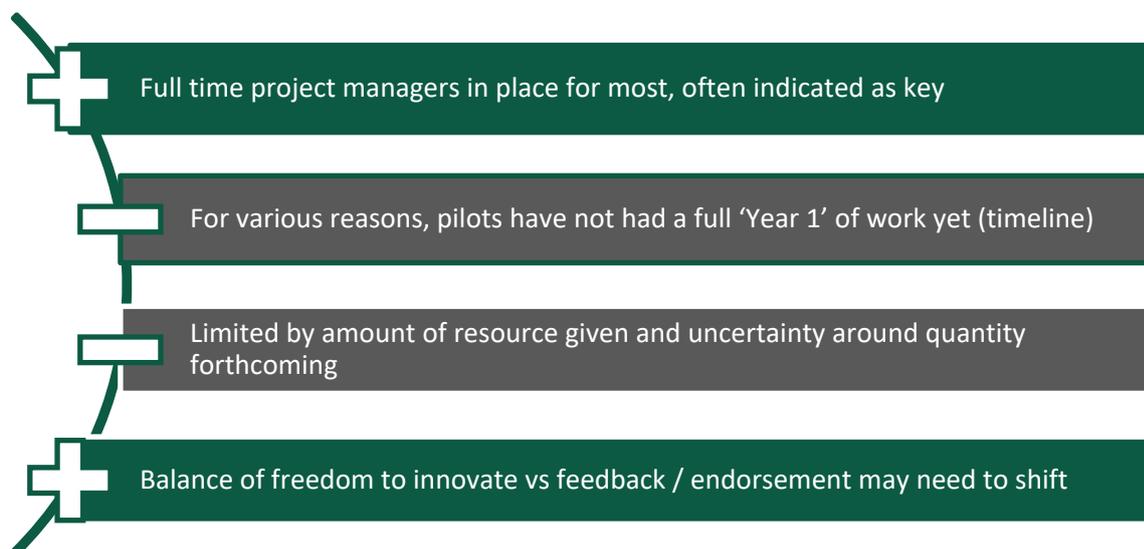
iii. Upskilling and regional capacity

As mentioned in the natural capital section, preparing and upskilling board members and wider RLUP stakeholders will be key to avoiding conflict and maximising the opportunity presented by a natural capital approach. Indeed, ongoing work for SG and ClimateXChange has found that a clear that a true natural capital approach only works where all relevant stakeholders are involved. The pilots have arrived at this same conclusion, *“because if it’s there but people can’t really use it or don’t think about using it or don’t engage with it then that’s no use.”* One key missing piece of support towards realising this outcome is a data tool capable of being adapted to suit the different RLUP regions. This was referenced by many pilots as being crucial, both for building internal capabilities within data and natural capital, as well as communicating these to stakeholders. A tool is being progressed by SG teams at present.

e. Pilot process

As stated in the overview of this chapter, a fifth ‘pilot process’ theme was added to this evaluation to capture pilots’ experiences in the practical steps towards establishing this new policy mechanism.

List 4e: Pilot process headline findings



i. Practical pilot establishment

For a variety of reasons, none of the pilots have had a full year to work on their objectives. In most cases and as discussed in the governance section, start-up times required to navigate administrative processes among the various organisations involved were not accounted for in the overall project timeline. Pilots would like it noted that, in light of these realities, the deadlines to deliver outcomes should have been shifted:

“We have an initial timetable but it’s clear, given the starting point for most of the pilots, that that timetable needs to be adjusted [...] It’s inevitable that there is only so much you can do in a five-month period compared to a twelve-month period and notwithstanding the uncertainties that have been thrown into the mix as well.”

As has been referenced throughout this report, pilots state that they are unable to deliver pilot outcomes to best practice standards for Phases 1 and 2 with the resource given and anticipated to cover these periods. This has impacts on all aspects of pilot delivery, but in particular resource-intensive workstreams such as stakeholder engagement. In addition to the absolute level of funding received, pilots have been impeded by not knowing the amount that was forthcoming. Uncertainties around resources available to deliver outputs has understandably proven to be a major barrier:

Specifically, funding RLUPs on an annual basis is incompatible with their strategic, long-term functions. Time that a partnership board needs to use to find or leverage funding is time taken away from delivery. For example, natural capital and data are capacities which will need to be built in a stepwise and cumulative fashion. One pilot gave the example that they needed to be creative in how they funded these longer term workstreams because an indefinite annual sum would not suit. This pilot went further to posit that pilots could also trial different ways to fund RLUP activities:

“There’s an appetite to explore that [...] the financial management and the financial investment. Why shouldn’t that be being piloted as part of this process as much as any of the other aspects that we’re being asked to address?”

All pilots’ contributors have diverted considerable time and resources to supplement the resource allocated and further their RLUP pilot. While the activities and inputs involved in establishing an RLUP pilot are closely aligned with the work of some pilot delivery partners, it should be noted that there is diversity among the organisations and partnerships that came forward to deliver these pilots and some relied more heavily on volunteer contributions than others. These indirect contributions must be accounted for in quantifying the true ‘cost’ of an RLUP (paraphrasing correspondence with pilots) and should inform further development (see **Appendix A: Pilot region overviews**).

ii. Steer and top-down direction

Some of the most impactful barriers that stand in the way of the RLUP pilots at present relate to the practicalities of taking a pilot approach to trailing this policy mechanism. It has been the wish of SG and Ministers that these pilots innovate within their regions, integrating local wishes to inform their decisions, such as their governance structures and membership. To this end, parts of the specification quoted throughout this report were left fairly open-ended. Some pilots responded

well to this approach, embracing the opportunity to innovate given the lowered stakes. Other pilots disagree with this assumption that stakes are low. As was seen in **Using existing democratic structures**, some pilots feel that the stakes are indeed very high and that they only have one chance to get a governance structure right. There is therefore a tension between the need for pilots to have freedom to take a local approach and their hesitancy to commit to any pathway that might be a dead end and cost them the trust of their stakeholders.

The uncertainties around what is being asked of pilots and where to look for examples compound to create a serious barrier for their forward motion. Combined with lack of resource and uncertainty as to how much more to expect in the future, may explain why pilots have struggled with parts of this process. As alluded to above, the potential consequences of introducing stakeholders to RLUPs' aspirations and failing to deliver are very real and include potential conflicts, loss of trust and threats to future engagement on land use and more generally.

The interview process uncovered several clear paths forward to alleviate these critical process barriers. Certain pilots feel that they can progress confidently with the approaches they are piloting, that if the actions of an RLUP are driven by the needs of stakeholders, then there is no way that they could go wrong. Pilots commented that a firmer steer, or an endorsement of the approach they are taking, would go a long way to bolster pilots' confidence and drive progress forward. This is secondary, though, to the confidence that would come from guaranteeing these pilots will have the necessary time and resource to wield the extensive experience they have to engage their stakeholders and deliver what all agree is a promising and fit-for-purpose policy mechanism.

5. Conclusions

a. Early RLUP outcomes

What have been the key value added by the RLUP pilots to date? Almost all pilots reported that they have already benefitted from the new connections formed within and between organisations in the process of drawing these pilots together. Creating a new space to address these high-level goals and consider the region's biggest issues and their relevant stakeholders has had knock-on effects for many individuals and organisations inputting to the pilots:

“I feel that we had nothing before this. [...] Over time we've had less openness. We have less exchange of information. We have had less reason between ... about the arguments. We've had more fear about who has more power and we've had people are taking more established positions and taking stands, and I think that that's not the way to go forward because you just get bogged down [...] The RLUP has been an opportunity for us all to kind of get together, people who normally I wouldn't be seeing.”

Taking this idea further, a new grouping of stakeholders chosen specifically to input to these (heretofore intractable) land use issues can drive changes up the decision-making chain as well as down to the ground. By drawing a group together, connected to all scales of governance and charged with providing a strategic overview of land use incompatibilities, these will quickly detect where different policy levers are working in opposition, for example through historic payments referenced in **Section I**. By connecting relevant stakeholders, these partnerships will drive alignment and close the loop on easy wins, something appreciated by the pilots:

“These people with the vision talking to us, they want that direct route from us to local to make sure there's that empowerment, and so, ergo it needs to happen back up the tree as well. [...] We are welcoming all forms of input and dialogue at every level and that's about democracy that they want to happen.”

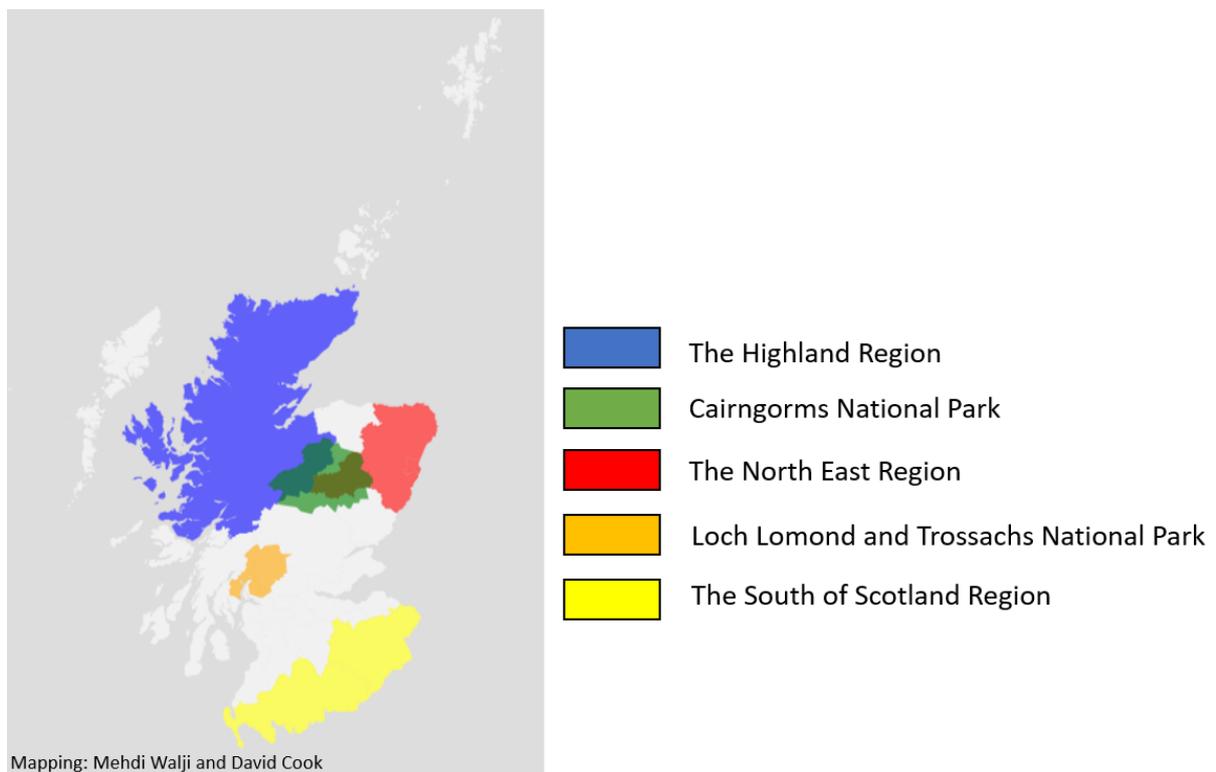
“It's about the optimism that comes with change [...] I'm just heartened that we can actually bring together people from such diverse backgrounds and find commonality.”

Even in their first few months of delivery and despite several systematic barriers, the current RLUP pilots have been successful in adding significant value to untangling the twin crises. They have also all demonstrated substantive progress towards their Phase 1 outcomes and if these practical barriers are addressed, there is nothing to suggest that they will not prove a useful policy tool across integrated land use and the many silos it intersects.

Appendix A: Pilot region overviews

This section gives some further context on the five pilot regions that are currently running, 2020-2023. While the body of this report focused on the pilot process overall and aggregated the results of the individual pilots to draw out common issues and potential solutions, this section gives some insight into the wide differences between these regions.

Figure A1: Map of the pilot regions. These five regions cover a large part of Scotland's land area and encompass a wide diversity of Scottish landscapes, land uses and human lifeways. Provided by SG RLUP policy team via Knowledge Hub.



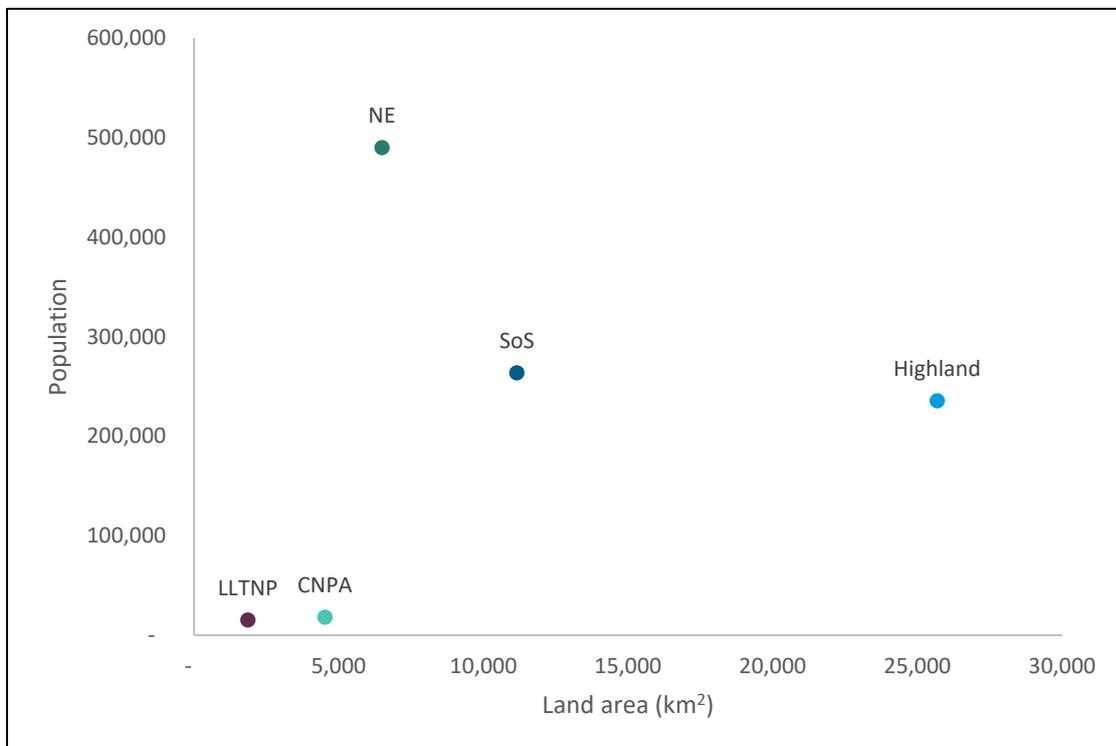
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These five regions each expressed an interest in being an RLUP pilot and were accepted. These regions contain a diversity of landscapes and land uses, including urban, peri-urban, arable, upland, peatland and forestry⁹ (see **Figure A1**). Each region also has a different composition of social groupings and institutions including communities, enterprises, and partnerships across Scotland (see **Figure A2**). This diversity is an essential asset to the pilot process, as the unique barriers and

⁹ Project specification: Cairngorms, 19 April 2021. Supplied by SG RLUPs Policy Team.

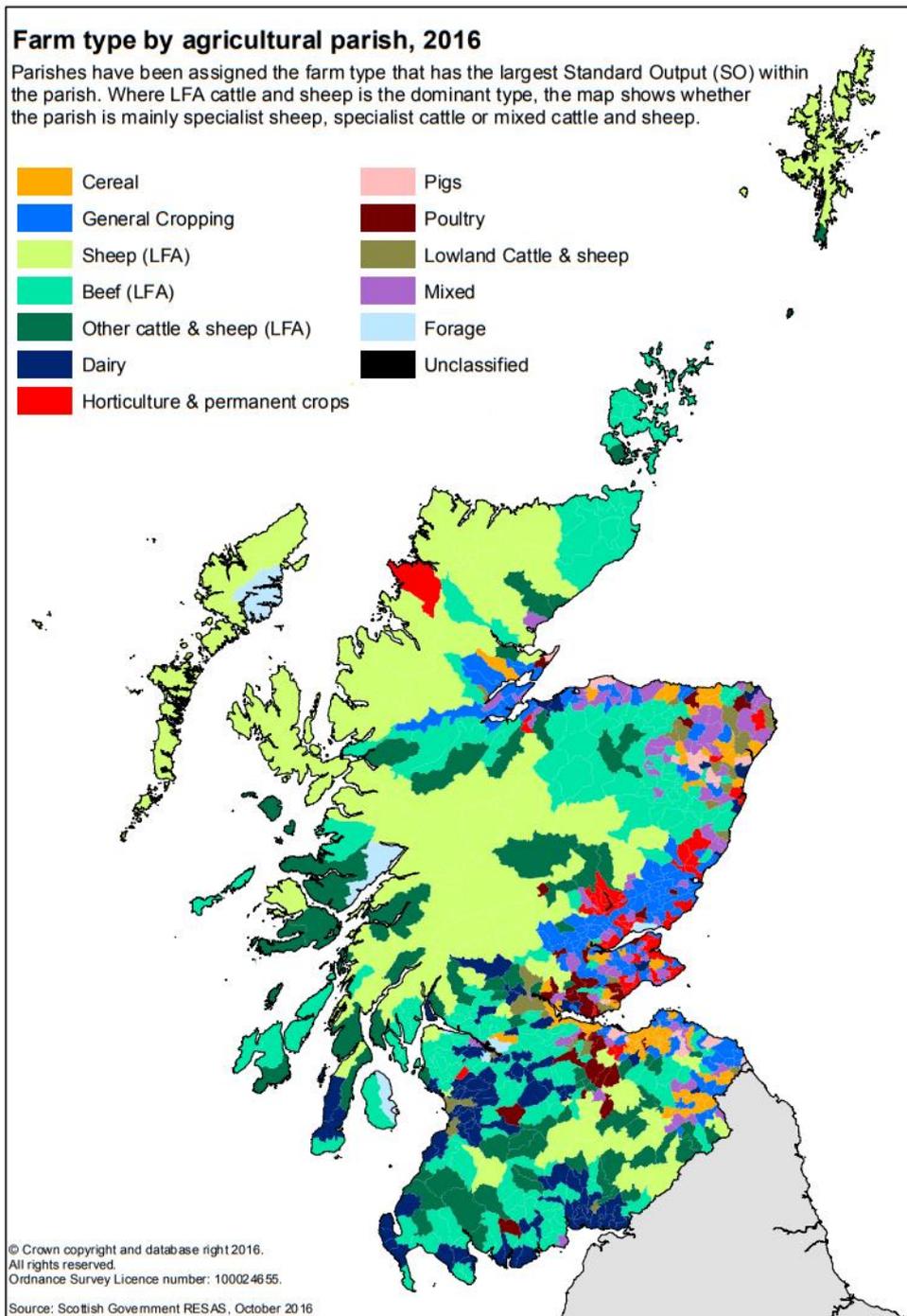
enablers encountered within each landscape should drive innovative solutions which offer insights for the future of the RLUP policy.

Figure A2: RLUP pilot regions, land area vs. population. This plot shows the wide difference in size, population, and therefore population density between the five RLUP pilots, one of the major variables requiring adaptation. The national parks are smaller than the other RSS regions and have very low populations within their boundaries. The Northeast region is not much larger than the Cairngorms, but has the highest population, about half of which is due to the inclusion of Aberdeen City Council area. South of Scotland is both large and populous. Highland Region is a massive land area with similar population to SoS, although for their RLUP pilot they narrowed to the NW2045 region, which is similar in size and population to the national parks.



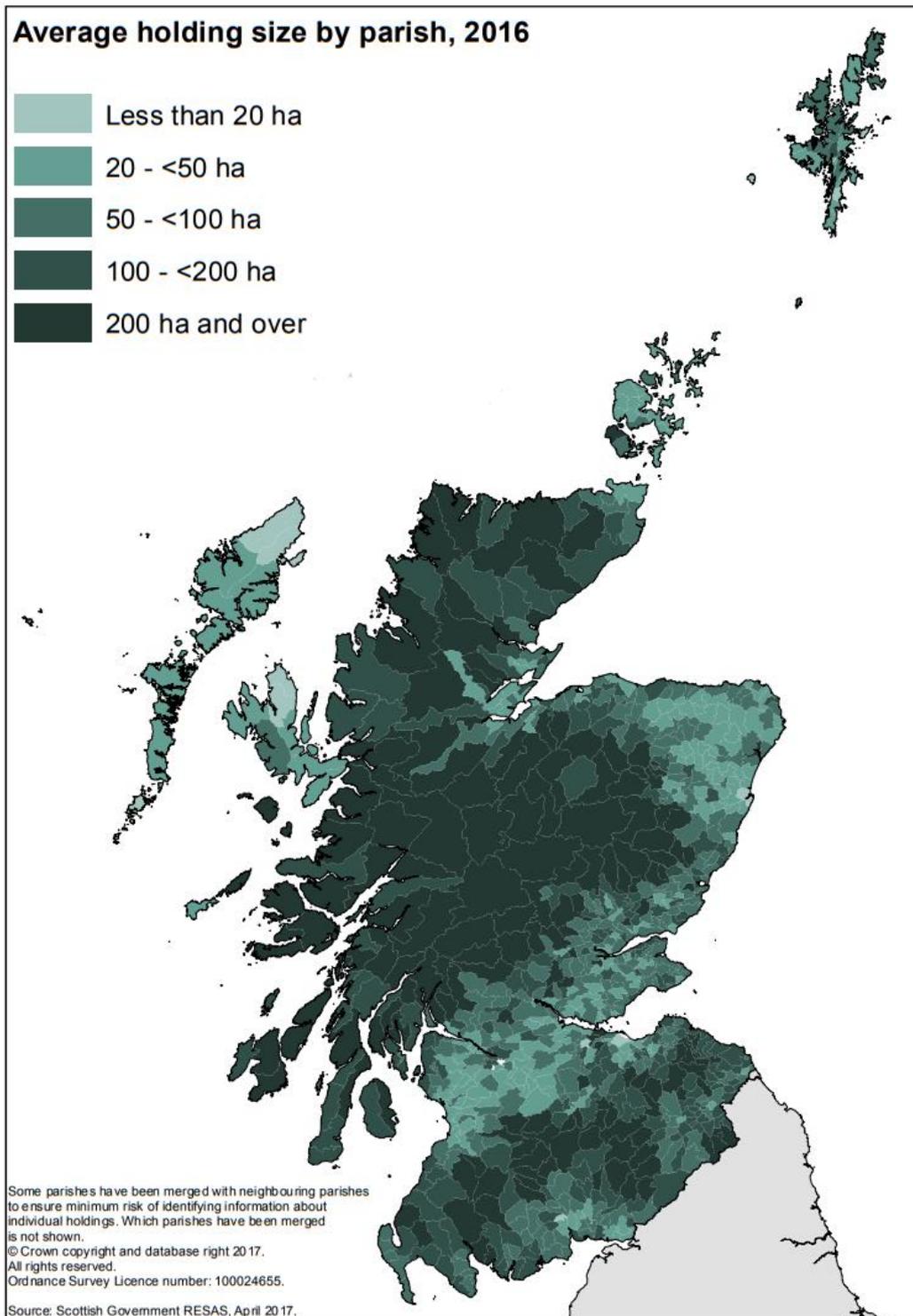
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Figure A3 & A4: Farm type and average holding size by parish, 2016, from Scottish Government.¹⁰ These maps provide further context to the differences in land use between the different pilot regions.



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¹⁰ [Agriculture maps.](#)



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Appendix B: Detail on evaluation methodology

Theory of Change model

The Theory of Change model (**Figure B1**) represents a concise proposed model for how and why a particular approach (RLUP pilots) will be effective in delivering the stated objectives for RLUPs. While the ToC represents the main components of the RLUPs process, there are a number of assumptions related to the proposed model, which include:

- The majority of relevant stakeholders will engage with the RLUPs process to some extent during the initial and longer term work of the RLUP pilots.
- That RLUPs will continue to receive government support and funding over the medium and longer term and natural capital assessment tools will continue to develop and be available and increasingly adopted by RLUPs in the medium term.
- As RLUPs develop both natural capital/ecosystem markets and related public support systems will continue to develop over time.

The relative progression and development of individual RLUP pilots over time may also be affected by their relative scale, which may have implications for resourcing and operationalising collaboration and engagement at more localised levels.

Development of method

The interview questions were developed based on the priority outcomes for RLUP pilots provided by Scottish Ministers (see **Box B1**). These outcomes were used to inform the four key themes around which we structured the evaluation: governance, stakeholder engagement, natural capital, and data. The SG RLUP Policy team developed key process evaluation questions for each of these themes. The process evaluation questions in turn informed our logic model for RLUPs (**Figure 3a**), which we used to create the full list of questions which were posed to pilots in interviews. The list of interview questions was reviewed by the SG RLUP Policy team and remained consistent across the interview process.

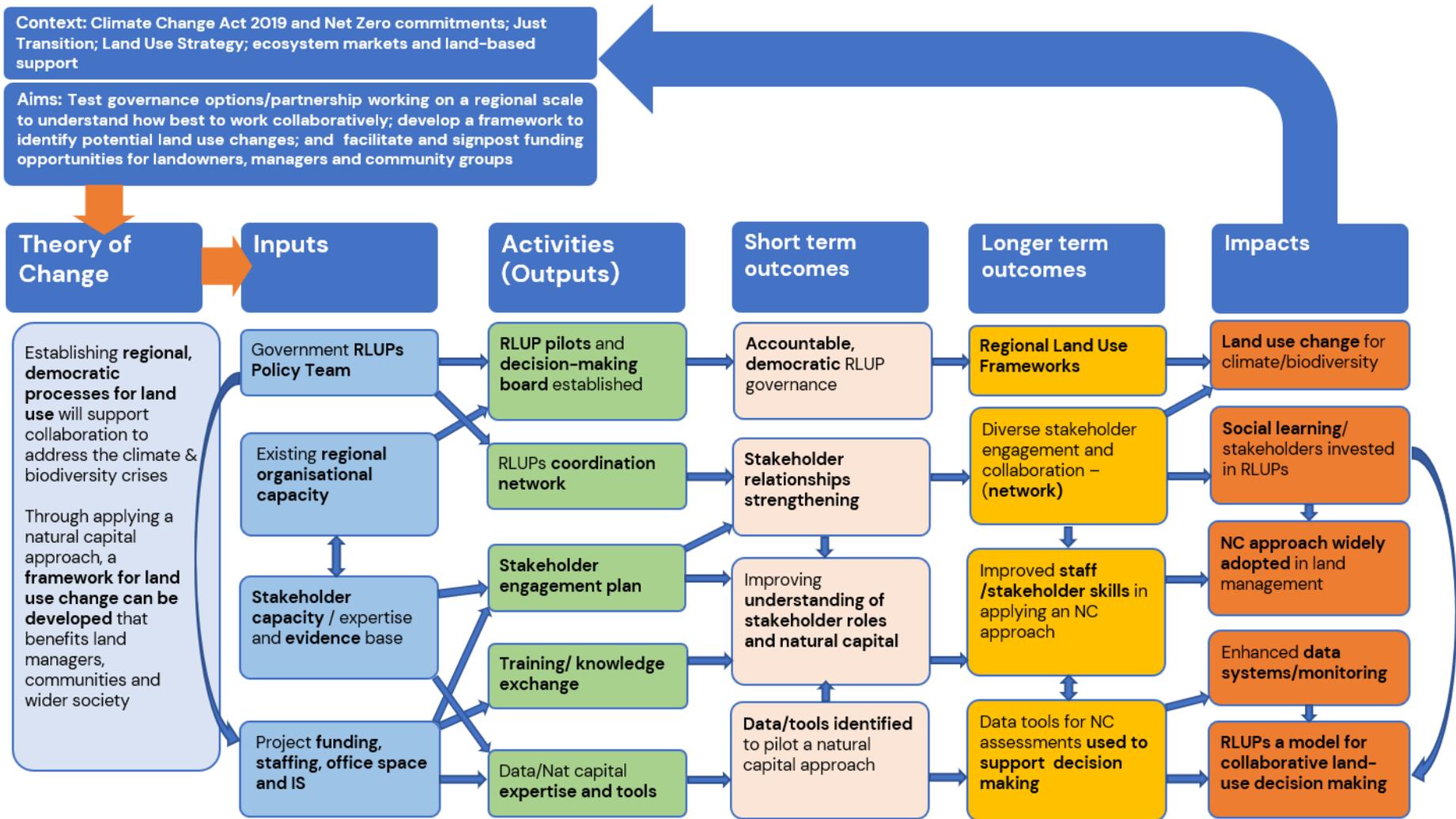
Box B1: Scottish Ministers' critical success criteria for RLUP pilots.

Measurements of Success:

The [Scottish Green Party Agreement](#) states that a second phase of RLUPs will be rolled out in 2023 if the pilot regions can show that they meet expectations relating to:

- Adoption of a natural capital approach;
- Production of RLUFs which can meet national and regional priorities;
- Maximise influence in engaging regional stakeholders;
- Taking a democratic, inclusive local approach to decision making.

Figure B1: Theory of Change model for RLUPs.



Not all questions were applicable to the pilots at their current stage of progression, however we felt we could add value to the process by generating a robust list of interview questions that completely covers Phase 1 outcomes for the pilots. While each interview used only a subset of our full complement, the full list provides a resource to inform evaluations of future RLUP phases. The full list of interview questions is included in **Appendix D**.

Appendix C: Additional lessons learned

While the body of this report is focused on capturing the experience of pilots in hindsight, certain forward-looking lessons emerged. These are included here as they represent key institutional knowledge and are the products of the collective efforts of these pilots.

Table C1: Barriers and enablers to the types of stakeholder engagement relevant to land use decision-making. These were collected throughout interview discussions on this theme and represent a key opportunity for knowledge sharing between pilots, hopefully spurred by reporting them in this evaluation. Italicised text denotes interview quotes.

Barriers	Enablers
<i>Relevant stakeholders not engaged because...</i>	<i>Key pilot innovations and experience</i>
...they have not been reached by existing methods	Tenacity is key, renewed engagement <i>There are more hard-to-reach groups that we've got to try and bring to the table. [...] It's not just the one approach and, "Well they didn't respond and therefore they're not coming," we've got to keep going at it</i>
...they feel their input will not have impact <i>I have seen so many times that something comes out from government and, as far as the locals, crofters and people around that are the land users, on a local level think, 'Oh, well, it's all sewn up. It's all been done.' [...] So, they don't engage with it.</i>	Treat all stakeholders equitably, even if some have more interest or influence <i>Everybody is, is given the information at the same time [...] From day one, the biggest landowner and the smallest landowner, are all treated equitably [...] that's been really important throughout, that everybody has the same say and the same sort of weight.</i>
	Communications, control the message <i>It's about just making sure we've got the message right because [...] any negativity, it just washes through you, it really does. And it can delay things [...] if you're trying to actually do something and you've got this sort of barrage of abuse or nay-sayers coming at you from a perspective of not actually having the full information</i>
...they lack confidence to engage with government / decision makers	Create safe spaces to channel local ideas and needs up the chain to national representatives

<p><i>People like that don't have that platform usually. They are not regular public speakers so they don't want to stand up in front of Major Scott or, Scottish Woodland Trust or whoever, because they don't have the scientific backing, but they actually have the experience of living and working every day.</i></p>	<p><i>If somebody has less experience they might be matched up with somebody who perhaps does have a bit more experience. So, all the time, we're doing that capacity building and trying to make sure we are equipping and supporting people to have that voice and to feel confident in that position and know that their value is absolutely intrinsic to this going forward.</i></p>
<p>...they feel they have input already (stakeholder fatigue) <i>Our landowners are spread quite thinly in the various meetings that we have because we want them to be so involved. And, of course, we are a planning authority, so we have many consultations from that front as well.</i></p>	<p>Do engagement in-person <i>Use people. As simple as that. You get much better engagement [...] by actually employing local people, young, local people to go out and talk, in the middle of a pandemic to their community, was just gold.</i></p>
<p>...they are sceptical of impact, lack of funding... <i>It's very difficult to get people to come along to meetings when there might not be any financial gain. And I'm not talking about just physically attending the meetings but it's the dreaded, "What's in it for me?"</i></p> <p>...or government conviction <i>There will come a point that they will question it if the political will, ergo the investment that is needed to match our ambition, is seen as a weakening or a weaker point</i></p>	<p>SG / MSPs to provide clarity (see Pilot Process) <i>Our biggest challenge is a degree of cynicism from the elected members in terms of where this is going, particularly the resources entailed er to deliver it in reality on the ground.</i> <i>There needs to be a solidity or a weight behind the RLUPs to enable us to have the credibility and the conversations we wish to have with the partners at a strategic level.</i></p>

Future of RLUPs

Looking beyond these early benefits delivered by the pilots, and even beyond the many outcomes operational RLUPs are hoped to achieve, what might the process of rolling RLUPs out across the rest of Scotland look like in practice? What other lessons have been learned around establishing an RLUP in a new place?

One of the current pilots provides a suitable case study to answer these questions. This pilot has initially reduced its boundary to a more manageable size. The SLC advice anticipated the need to do this for some regions. While an intermediate scale

(between national and local) has been shown to be useful, there are shifting balances of advantages and drawbacks to zooming in and out, increasing and decreasing scales of working. In the case of this pilot, this more geographically-targeted boundary has allowed them to progress further against Year 1 objectives (for example, engage more of their stakeholders) than if they had to try to cover their entire region. Their approach could then be transposed into surrounding areas. There is a growing body of literature around regional and landscape scale approaches, within which the drawing of (fuzzy) boundaries is a major theme. RLUPs should continue to be flexible around their scales of operation. It is likely that an optimal size will emerge, in which stakeholders' local issues are more alike to each other than to those further afield and the impact of cross-cutting solutions is optimised.

Because this pilot narrowed their geography, they had some thoughts about how to expand back out and roll other regions into an RLUP. A key value added by this pilot process is understanding how to create a functioning partnership out of what already exists:

“What are the founding principles of this RLUP? [...] Which will potentially surpass and go on to live in the existence and work beyond whatever RLUP gets called in the future. I think that’s very important and it’s that accessibility of language and the tangibility of that on the ground, that’s the most important part of this. So I’m hoping that we are working towards these sorts of founding principles which then are also useful to others going forward, but, again, it’s about what’s appropriate to those places.”

One of these founding principles and a way to ensure the longevity of RLUP effects is to embed the institutional knowledge required to deliver an RLUP through communities:

“If there’s an opportunity where capacity can be channelled through the community organisations, there’s a win-win there [...] because it’s the people within that that are the translators and the people who will then move forward with the opportunities there.”

Appendix D: Full list of interview questions

Section / theme [interviewer's notes]
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Topics<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Questions<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Follow-ups / prompts |
|---|

General

- Housekeeping
 - Signed consent form? Any questions? OK to record?
 - Start recording
 - Introduce / reminder on evaluation project, road map
 - Reminder that this is primarily about identifying lessons learned, piloting, so flag those up as we go
- Overview of the process to date
 - Describe some of the greatest successes of your team in establishing your RLUP pilot. What was so significant about these?
 - What have been some of the greatest challenges you have faced in establishing your pilot?
 - Reflecting on these successes and challenges, what are some of the key lessons you would like future RLUPs to learn from your experience?
 - What have been your main sources / examples for how to establish your RLUP pilot?
 - What are the most important SG policies and or pieces of legislation that have influenced the development of your RLUP pilot?
 - How have these been a help / hinderance to your work?

Governance

- Checkpoints towards establishing governance.
 - How have you progressed with regard to establishing a governance structure?
 - Written terms of reference for partnership board?
 - Board members appointed? If so, how? What types of people are on the board? Who decides? And any challenges?
 - What does the process look like to become a board member? Do you have internal clearance processes in place?
- Enabling factors for governance
 - To what extent has prior experience of partnership or collaborative working within your region influenced your ability to establish a governance structure?
 - Have you found any existing examples of partnership / governance structures useful for establishing your own?
 - Scale/extent/number/function of other partnerships and players, helped or inhibited?
 - How has the lead organisation (e.g., Local or National Park authority) enabled the establishment of your RLUP? How do you see this working into the future?

- Is your lead organisation limited in any way? What support do you need / Which areas will you need to expand?
 - How has the size/diversity of your region impacted the development of your RLUP? How do you anticipate it will affect the working of your Partnership?
 - How might you manage those impacts?
 - What about the landscape characteristics of your region?
 - Does an urban / rural setting impact how an RLUP functions?
- Governance to enable stakeholder engagement
 - Have you built stakeholder engagement into the process of establishing your governance structure? If so, how?
 - Have you had to deal with conflicts of interest between different members of the partnership, and the wider stakeholder community? If so, how have you dealt with these?
 - Do you feel you have the skills/people to do this effectively?
- Lessons learned from establishing governance structure
 - Have there been any other particular challenges or successes you would like to share?

Stakeholder Engagement

- Checkpoints towards stakeholder engagement
 - How have you progressed regarding stakeholder engagement?
 - Formal written plan? (methods, prioritisation, timetable, reporting)
 - Engagement underway?
 - Formal contacts list / register / map? How many contacted? Which groups? By which methods?
- Methods
 - What methods have you used / will you use for stakeholder engagement?
 - Did you base your stakeholder engagement methods on previous work or best practices?
 - What mechanisms have been used to ensure all relevant stakeholders are engaged, including those who might be considered vulnerable or hard-to-reach?
 - How have you designed the process to ensure all stakeholders have a voice and can actively engage in decision-making processes that affect them?
 - How did you define, identify and categorise key stakeholders?
 - To what extent have stakeholders been engaged in scoping the context, framing, system boundaries and aims of the work of your RLUP?
 - To what extent have: you learned from your stakeholders, stakeholders learned from each other, and stakeholders shaped decisions in your RLUP, based on engagement?
- Enabling factors for stakeholder engagement
 - What is the level of experience with stakeholder engagement within your team? What further support / training would be helpful?

- To what degree does the stakeholder engagement necessary for your pilot map onto existing activities in this area? How much more engagement is necessary on top of business-as-usual within your region or lead organisation (e.g., Local or National Park authority)?
- What existing stakeholder networks have you been able to leverage? Have you found any gaps?
 - Which stakeholder groups or organisations have been easiest and hardest to engage and why?
- Are there any other characteristics of your region (geography, population, communities, stakeholders) that you feel are barriers or enablers to your stakeholder engagement?
- Stakeholder feedback and impact
 - How have you / do you plan to evaluate the success of your stakeholder engagement?
 - Have you had any feedback from your stakeholders on how they feel throughout the engagement process? Have they been willing to be involved?
- Lessons learned from stakeholder engagement
 - Have there been any other particular challenges or successes you would like to share?
 - How would you adapt or continue your approach in the future?

Natural Capital

- Checkpoints towards a natural capital approach
 - Have you undertaken / you plan to undertake any structured assessment of natural capital within your region? What methods have you used / might you use?
 - E.g., Mapping natural assets (location, extent);
 - Collecting evidence and information on the condition of natural assets;
 - Speaking to stakeholders and communities about which landscape features they value and why;
 - Using quantitative techniques to model physical flows of ecosystem services;
 - Valuing the benefits of ecosystem services (monetarily)
 - How did you set boundaries for any natural capital assessment, including geographical boundaries and decisions about which stocks of natural capital and ecosystem services to include, and which stakeholders to engage in the process?
- Enabling factors towards a natural capital approach
 - What is the experience with and understanding of natural capital within your team?
 - Which, if any, of these activities were already underway in your region / within your lead organisation?
 - Are there any other characteristics of your region that you feel are barriers or enablers to your developing a natural capital approach?
 - What support do you expect / do you anticipate needing from SG on natural capital?

- Opportunities in taking a natural capital approach
 - How have you considered a natural capital approach in establishing your structure and governance arrangements?
 - Have you considered the consequences of changes in these natural assets and services on the goals and interests of different stakeholders?
 - E.g., via biophysical assessments and valuations, including non-monetary methods to assess shared, cultural values, in addition to more traditional monetary valuations of natural capital impacts and dependencies?
 - How are you evaluating your application of a natural capital approach?
 - E.g., to provide summative feedback to stakeholders involved in decision-making and investors on the outcomes of the process, and provide formative feedback to inform future applications of the approach?
 - What opportunities for public and private natural capital financing have you identified?
 - E.g., agri-environment, Woodland Carbon Code / Peatland Code, philanthropic monies) and/or payments for other ecosystem services, e.g., flood risk alleviation, water quality, biodiversity and recreational benefits?
- Lessons learned from natural capital
 - Have there been any other particular challenges or successes you would like to share?
 - Are there any other delivery instruments / mechanisms have you considered or tried to access to deliver your plans? What have been the barriers preventing you accessing these?

Data

- Do the pilot regions understand what their data requirements are, or would they benefit from more SG support in regards to data needs?
 - Baseline qualitative and quantitative measurement of natural capital (carbon stocks, flows, biodiversity levels of species) and through-time measurement of same?
 - Carbon or biodiversity credits created or ecosystem services traded?
- Checkpoints towards use of data
 - Relevant expertise identified?
 - Work undertaken to verify data sources and their quality?
 - What specific data categories and are critical for effective decision making and stakeholder influence?
 - E.g., CO₂ t/e stocks and flows; Biodiversity levels of species; Water quality, flood management; Trades of ecosystem services and their value; Creation of credits and their potential value
 - What training do you anticipate will be necessary (from SG) to achieve your outcomes for integrating a data-driven, natural capital approach?

Other feedback

- Pilot progression

- How do you feel your progress to date compares to the Phase 1 specification?
- What will be your most immediate next steps?
- What difference do you think being an RLUP pilot has made compared to business-as-usual? What have been the main benefits / advantages?
 - Has being a pilot helped you to innovate?
- What are the main barriers keeping you from achieving more? Were there instances in which you were limited by something in achieving these outcomes?
- Specific feedback for SG team
 - Have you received adequate support from the RLUP Policy Team? How could they better support you?
 - Are there parts of the project specification or RLUP ask generally that you would like more license / freedom on? Or a firmer steer?
 - Have you found Coordination Network meetings helpful? How could they be made more useful?

Influence at scale [If time; speculative, looking ahead to *later phases*]

- From your experience during this pilot, how do you think partnerships can have influence when they have limited financial or regulatory power?
- From your experience, how do you think RLUPs might have influence through the planning system? How could they integrate with an RSS in practice?
- How is meaningful engagement achieved at the regional scale

Version history

	<i>Date shared</i>	<i>Changes</i>
Version 1	N/A	(SAC internal draft)
Version 2	16 March 2022	J Glass (internal) comments implemented
Version 3	21 March 2022	SG RLUPs Policy Team comments implemented
Version 4	29 March 2022	Pilots comments implemented
Version 5	31 March 2022	Final SG RLUPs Policy Team comments implemented
Version 6	31 August 2022	Visual accessibility amendments for publishing



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