



**North
Pennines
National
Landscape**



Creatively Connected

**EXPLORING HIGH NATURE VALUE FARMING
THROUGH ARTISTIC ENQUIRY**



Acknowledgements

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The evaluation gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the five commissioned artists: John Coburn, Matt Denham, Azadeh Fatehrad, Laura Harrington and Tim Shaw. Their work forms the creative backbone of this programme, offering new ways to connect with landscape, farming, and nature recovery.

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This evaluation was authored by Dr Alison Whelan and completed in October 2025.

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Executive Summary

Seeds, Growth, and Harvest: Key Insights at a Glance

The *Tees-Swale: Creatively Connected* programme has demonstrated the transformative power of embedding artists within rural landscapes, creating new pathways for dialogue about land use, climate change, and ecological stewardship. Through a year-long journey across Teesdale and Swaledale, five artists developed deep, trust-based relationships with farming communities, conservation organisations, and local residents, revealing the complex realities beneath surface-level environmental narratives.

The seasonal metaphor that structured the programme reminds us that this work is cyclical rather than linear - the seeds planted through creative collaboration will continue to grow, flower, and generate new possibilities long after the formal timeline. Many of the most significant impacts may not become visible for years to come.

The project's success has already generated key insights that are influencing partner organisations' community engagement strategies and challenging conventional models of environmental outreach.

Key Achievements

- **Built genuine trust and reciprocal relationships through "quiet attentiveness" and long-term engagement.**
Artists' patient presence and alignment with seasonal rhythms enabled conversations that would have been impossible through conventional consultation approaches.

- **Surfaced complex tensions around High Nature Value farming and land management policies.**

Creative processes allowed exploration of the intersections between conservation goals, economic precarity, cultural identity, and generational knowledge.

- **Created innovative artistic methodologies for place-based learning and ecological connection.**

Sound walks, textile work, and deep listening practices fostered “ecological empathy”, helping people connect emotionally and physically with the landscape, and turning abstract ideas about nature into something personal and meaningful.

- **Developed sustainable models for artist-community collaboration that respect rural rhythms and constraints.**

The programme demonstrated that inclusive engagement must align with local realities, from seasonal cycles to economic pressures.

- **Generated insights that are already influencing partner organisations' approaches to community engagement.**

Staff have begun to incorporate creative methods into their sessions, with growing interest in training, reflective practice, and institutional support for creative risk-taking.

- **Challenged institutional norms and highlighted barriers to integration.**

The programme revealed tensions between process-based artistic work and outcome-driven organisational cultures, pointing to the need for structural change in how success is evaluated and supported.

- **Raised questions about scalability and replication.**

While the depth of engagement was intensive, the programme suggests that replication may be best achieved through training, documentation, and network development rather than scaling individual projects.

Voices from the Landscape: Highlights from Participants and Artists

The trust the artists have built is what's made it possible for difficult or uncomfortable conversations to happen in a constructive way." – Northern Heartlands producer



"Different people are inspired to get involved for different reasons... art made conservation topics more accessible." – Community Engagement Officer, NPNL



"I have started to incorporate art and creativity into all of my sessions." – Youth Engagement Officer, YDNPA

"I do feel that my own creative capacity has been enhanced." – Community Engagement Officer

"People started to notice more, the names of plants, the changes in sound over the day. It's like the artists re-tuned our attention." – Community Engagement Officer, NPNL

"Art inspired a willingness to engage... it allowed people to take part without needing a lot of knowledge or skill." – Community Engagement Officer, NPNL



Top-line Outcomes and Impact

| | |
|--|--|
| Relationship Building | Deep, trust-based connections were established across four artist residencies with communities and organisations. |
| Community Engagement | Over 325 community events and workshops were delivered with over 1200 participants engaged, some of whom attended multiple events. |
| Organisational Learning | Partner organisations began to adopt new approaches to community engagement, with staff incorporating creative methods into their ongoing work. |
| Creative Outputs | A range of artistic works are created including sound installations, textile pieces, and community archives. |
| Knowledge Generation | Comprehensive documentation of effective rural engagement methodologies is collated and shared. |
| Legacy Planning | Sustainable frameworks are developed for continuing dialogue beyond the project timeline. |
| Sensory Engagement | New ways of experiencing landscape are developed through sound walks and deep listening practices. |
| Institutional Learning and Barriers | Organisations identified challenges in integrating creative approaches, including risk-averse cultures, time constraints, and outcome-driven evaluation systems |

CREATIVELY CONNECTED

Exploring high nature value farming through artistic enquiry

NORTHERN HEARTLANDS

Four artists explored Swaledale and Teesdale through the senses:

- John and Tim tuned into the land's ears with sound walks and sonic archives.
- Matt revealed its eyes through layered visual assemblages.
- Laura traced touch in wool and natural fibres.
- Azadeh gave voice to community stories and memories.



- Activities took place across Teesdale, Swaledale, Middleton-in-Teesdale, and surrounding areas.
- Events were hosted in farms, archives, visitor centres, festivals, schools, and digital spaces.
- The project fostered deep listening and connection, spotlighting nature-friendly farming and cultural heritage.

"The sound walk made me hear the landscape differently."

"It made me think more about how farming here has changed (and hasn't) in just a lifetime."



Creatively Connected showed that lasting environmental engagement grows from slow, sustained relationships. Artists embedded in communities over time, using seasonal rhythms and quiet attentiveness to spark dialogue and action that conventional outreach could never achieve.



"It shows that artists can help you connect to a place with all your senses, and therefore make the encounter truly memorable."

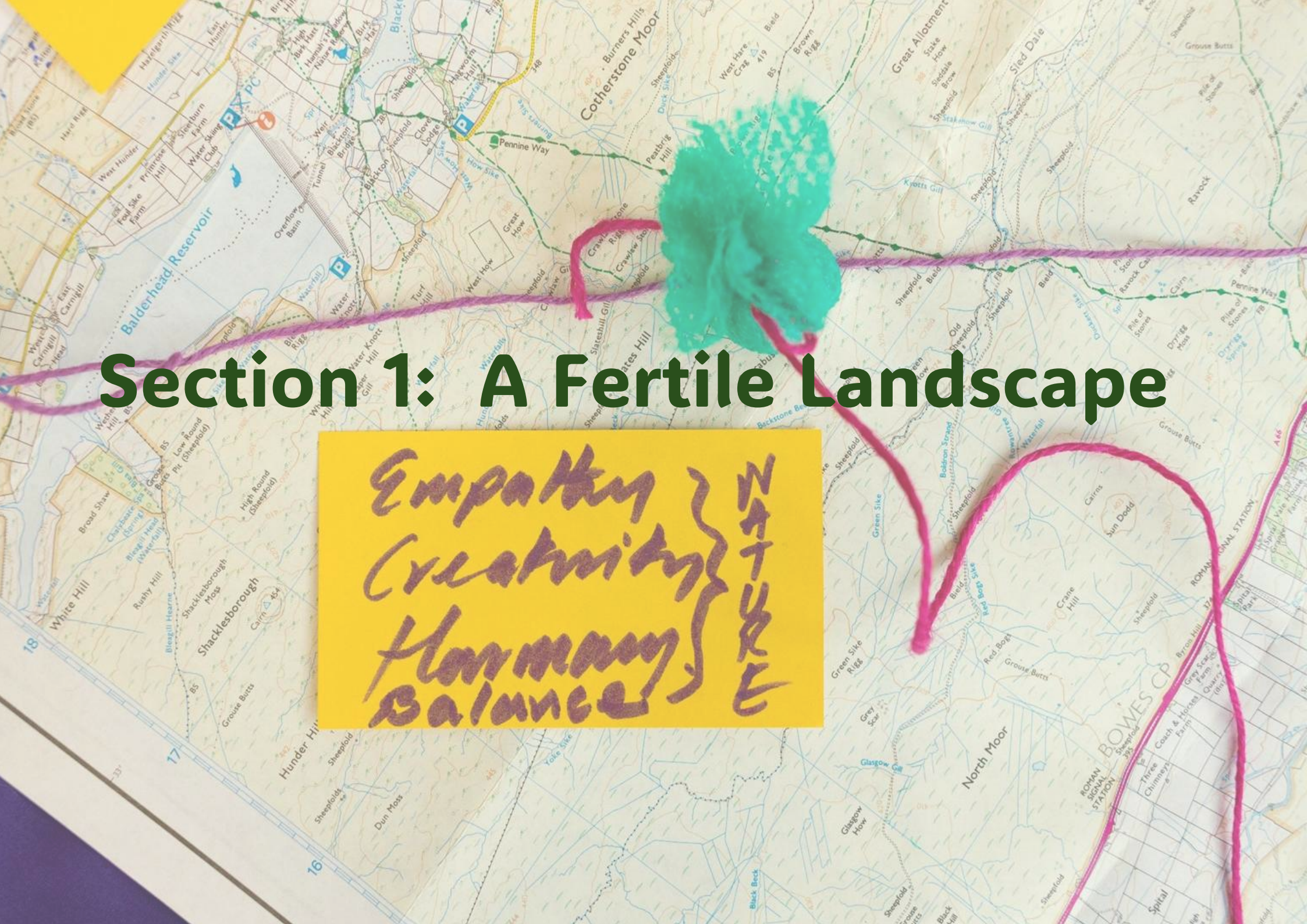
"It was amazing to see farming and art come together."

- Core participants included farmers, land managers, and volunteers.
- Wider public joined through drop-in and bookable activities.
- Children, young people and schools were reached via tailored and ranger-led sessions.
- Craft and community groups contributed through knitting, spinning, and collaborative events.

- 🌱 **A Year in Four Seasons: Creative Rhythms of Tees-Swale**
- 🍂 **Autumn – Planting Seeds** Artists and communities connect, ideas take root, and relationships begin to grow.
- ❄️ **Winter – Deep Roots** Quiet research, trust-building, and deep listening beneath the surface.
- 🌱 **Spring – First Shoots** Workshops bloom, new perspectives emerge, and creative dialogue flourishes.
- ☀️ **Summer – Full Bloom** Public events, sonic interventions, and shared celebrations bring the landscape to life.
- 🍂 **Autumn Returns – Gathering Seeds** Reflection, legacy, and seeds of future action are harvested for seasons to come.

Section 1: A Fertile Landscape

Empathy }
Creativity }
Flammarion }
Balance }
NATURE



Setting the Scene: A Fertile Landscape

The Roots of Creatively Connected

Climate change and evolving land management practices are reshaping the British countryside. High Nature Value (HNV) farming - agricultural practices that support biodiversity and ecological health - sits at the heart of these changes. Yet conversations about environmental stewardship often happen in policy chambers rather than farmhouse kitchens, missing the lived expertise and daily realities of those who work the land.

The Creatively Connected programme was developed to address this gap. As part of the Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected nature recovery initiative, Creatively Connected brings together farmers, residents, landowners, ecologists, conservationists, and artists through creative enquiry. The aim is to explore the complexities of nature recovery and high nature value farming by combining different perspectives, amplifying local voices, and fostering new forms of dialogue. Through artistic practice, such as sound walks, storytelling, and collaborative events, the programme seeks to bridge the gap between environmental ambition and rural livelihoods, between conservation goals and farming realities, and to evidence the value of arts and artists in non-arts settings.

The Landscape We Entered

The Tees-Swale area represents some of England's most distinctive upland landscapes, where centuries of human activity have shaped ecosystems of international importance. These are working landscapes where sheep farming, conservation, and community life intersect in complex ways. Yet beneath the surface beauty lie significant tensions: economic pressure on farms, contested views on rewilding and nature recovery, and communities feeling unheard in environmental decision-making.

As one farming officer observed: *"There's so much pressure on farmers right now - from every direction. It's not just about land use, it's about survival. So when you bring in new ideas, even well-meaning ones, it can hit a nerve"*. Farmers also have to contend with the challenge of diversification, bringing extra hard work and expense, such as milk vending machines for dairy farmers or lamb boxes for sheep farmers. While many people are strongly in favour of rewilding, there is a concern that doing it to the extreme can hinder ground-nesting birds like curlews and lapwings, which thrive where the land is managed.

Art as Fertile Ground

Why creativity? Because art opens dialogue in ways that policy documents and scientific reports cannot. Art creates space for complexity, ambiguity, and multiple truths to coexist. It invites people to experience place through new senses – sight, sound, touch, story - and to discover connections they might not have noticed before. In rural and landscape-based programmes across the UK, this ethos has been central to a growing movement of artistic interventions that seek not to instruct, but to listen, provoke, and co-create.

The programme positioned artists not as experts delivering messages, but as curious listeners creating platforms for shared inquiry. This approach acknowledged that rural communities hold deep knowledge about their landscapes, and that meaningful change emerges through collaboration rather than instruction. One farmer noted the value of talking to someone who has a passion for wool from a different angle, as a farmer might not necessarily know why a sheep has a good fleece, but someone from outside farming who has taken the time to research it does. A farmer often simply does not have time to wade through information from the government and other agencies.

This kind of exchange, between lived experience and artistic curiosity, has proven transformative. In the *Nature Calling* programme led by National Landscapes¹, artists embedded themselves in communities, walking footpaths, attending livestock auctions, and sharing cups of tea in farmhouse kitchens. The resulting artworks ranged from soundscapes of hedgerow biodiversity to participatory performances in village halls. Success was measured not in gallery attendance, but in the depth of local engagement: children drawing their favourite trees, older members of the community recounting stories of seasonal change, and farmers seeing their land through new eyes.

Yet the path was not without challenge. Some communities were initially wary of what art could offer, especially when it arrived under the banner of environmentalism - a term that can feel abstract or even accusatory in places where livelihoods depend on the land. Artists had to earn trust, often slowly, by showing up consistently and listening carefully. There were tensions too around language: terms like “climate crisis” or “biodiversity loss” did not always resonate, whereas stories of resilience, stewardship, and memory did.

In Wales, Miranda Whall’s *When Earth Speaks*² used soil sensors to translate microbial activity into sound, creating an immersive experience that reframed the earth as a living, speaking entity. Some locals found it strange, even alienating at first. But over time, the work sparked conversations about soil health, farming practices, and the unseen life beneath our feet. It was not about delivering facts, it was about opening a door.

Art, in these contexts, becomes a kind of compost: messy, rich, generative. It does not offer easy answers, but it cultivates the conditions for new growth: of ideas, relationships, and shared understanding.

¹ National Landscapes Association (2024) *Nature Calling*. Available at: <https://national-landscapes.org.uk/themes/nature-calling>

² Whall, M. (2024). *When Earth Speaks*. [online] Miranda Whall. Available at: <https://www.mirandawhall.space/when-earth-speaks/>

Framing the Seasons with Analytical Rigour



This report draws on principles from arts-based and practice-led research, recognising creative activity as a valid and generative form of inquiry. Workshops, field visits, and reflective processes were designed to foreground lived experience, emotional resonance, and sensory engagement, aligning with methodologies that prioritise meaning-making through creative practice. Such approaches allow participants to explore environmental and social themes not only intellectually, but through embodied, relational, and imaginative modes of understanding.

The Creatively Connected programme is structured around the metaphor of seasonal change, with each phase - Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter - marking a distinct rhythm in the project's evolution. This seasonal arc provides a narrative framework for the report, allowing us to trace the emergence of ideas, the growth of relationships, the reflection on challenges, and the legacy of creative interventions.

Crucially, this structure is underpinned by robust thematic analysis. Seven major themes, drawn from artist reflections, stakeholder interviews, and community feedback, shape the seasonal journey. These themes are not only descriptive but analytical, offering insight into how creative practice intersects with farming, climate, and community life in Teesdale and Swaledale.

While the seasonal framing evokes the cyclical nature of rural life and ecological processes, it also serves as a scaffold for evidencing impact. Each phase is mapped against the project's evaluation framework, ensuring that the emotional texture of the work is balanced by clarity of purpose and analytical rigour. The outcomes and pathways underpinning this framework are detailed in a visual representation of the Theory of Change included in the appendix.

Developing the Theory of Change

A central component of the Creatively Connected methodology was the development of a Theory of Change (ToC) to guide the project's design, implementation, and evaluation. This framework was co-developed by the creative producers, artists, and programme partners, including Northern Heartlands, the North Pennines National Landscape (NPNL), and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), to articulate the intended outcomes of the programme and the pathways through which artistic engagement might support nature recovery, community connection, and climate awareness.

The ToC was shaped through iterative dialogue, drawing on early artist visits, stakeholder interviews, and reflective logs. It was informed by the lived experiences of farmers, conservationists and community members across Teesdale and Swaledale, as well as by the artists' own thematic explorations and interdisciplinary fieldwork. The planned outcomes at *Community level*, *Artist level* and *Organisation level* are listed below, along with long-term legacy outcomes that could be achieved following programme completion.

The evaluation framework was structured around seasonal phases each associated with specific Theory of Change outcomes: Spring (emergence), Summer (growth), Autumn (reflection), and Winter (legacy). These included:

- **Deepened relationships between artists and communities**, evidenced through co-creative activities and sustained engagement.
- **Increased visibility of nature recovery efforts**, through artistic documentation and public storytelling.
- **Expanded understanding of climate and farming challenges**, captured via interviews, questionnaires, and creative outputs.
- **Enhanced capacity for cross-sector collaboration**, reflected in joint events, shared resources, and embedded practices.
- **Creation of lasting artefacts and legacy materials**, including sound archives, films, maps, and installations.

| | |
|--|--|
|  Community Level Outcomes |  Artist Level Outcomes |
| Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues | Stronger local networks and capacity to work with communities and environmental organisations |
| Positive changes in attitudes to sustainability and future arts activity | Artists produced work offering a lasting legacy in socially engaged practice |
| Better valuing of sustainable arts practice | Increased understanding & opportunity to engage in future arts projects tackling environmental themes |
| Stronger collaborations between local businesses, not-for-profit organisations, and community members | Stronger local networks and capacity to work with communities and environmental organisations |
|  Organisation Level Outcomes |  Potential Long-Term Legacy Outcomes |
| Increased capability to integrate arts and artists into planning and delivery | Creative interventions influence community engagement with sustainability and future arts activity |
| Development of sustainable frameworks to incorporate arts into long-term strategies | Local businesses and landowners adopt new and/or better value existing arts-driven, climate-conscious practices |
|  | Strengthened relationships between cultural organisations, local businesses, and rural communities |

The ToC also served as a touchstone for evaluation, helping to identify which outcomes were emerging organically and where further support or adaptation might be needed. It provided a flexible yet rigorous framework for assessing impact across artistic, environmental, and social dimensions.

A visual representation of the Theory of Change is included in Appendix A.

How We Gathered the Seeds: Evaluation Approach



Both the programme and the evaluation followed the rhythms of the seasons, building gradually and in step with the communities it engaged. A mixed-methods approach was used, gathering insights through interviews, observations, and reflective conversations with participants, farmers, artists, and staff from NPNL and YDNPA.

Alongside these in-person reflections, online questionnaires offered space for asynchronous feedback via the Culture Counts platform. Data was collected across the full programme year, ensuring that seasonal shifts in perception, engagement, and impact were captured.

This layered approach, combining deep listening with structured reflection, allowed the evaluation to explore not just what happened, but how it felt, what it meant, and what it might grow into next. This approach draws on principles of phenomenology³, a method that foregrounds lived experience and meaning-making through attentive observation and reflection.

³ van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Tracing the Roots: How Themes Emerged

The themes that underpin this report were not predefined and were identified through a process of thematic coding and analysis of transcripts from interviews, field notes, questionnaires, and artist reflections⁴. Patterns began to surface: recurring metaphors, shared concerns, emotional responses, and moments of insight. These were grouped, refined, and mapped against the programme's Theory of Change, ensuring that each theme was both grounded in lived experience and aligned with intended outcomes.

Summary Table: Themes Mapped to Seasonal Structure and Theory of Change

This summary table maps the seven core themes of the Creatively Connected programme across seasonal phases and links them to the intended outcomes from the Theory of Change. It shows how artistic and community-led activities unfolded over time and how each theme contributed to shifts in environmental awareness, farming practice, social connection, and organisational learning. The table can be seen in full in Appendix B.

| Theme | Sub-Themes | Seasonal Evidence | Theory of Change Outcome |
|--|---|--|--|
| 1. Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement | 1.1 Acoustic Revelation 1.2 Microscopic Discovery | Autumn: Artists introduced deep listening and sensory prompts Spring: Sound walks, microscope sessions, botanical drawing | Community: Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues |
| 2. Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation | 2.1 Intergenerational Transfer 2.2 Place-Based Learning | Winter: Archival research, oral histories Spring: Conversations with farmers, youth engagement | Community: Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues |
| 3. Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding | 3.1 Regenerative Agriculture 3.2 Ecological Impact Awareness | Winter: Reflections on soil health, farming pressures Summer: Public events showcasing sustainable practices | Community: Positive changes in perceptions/attitudes/adoption of sustainable practices |
| 4. Creative Practice as Environmental Connector | 4.1 Arts as Sensory Bridge 4.2 Expanded Understanding | Autumn: Artists positioned as listeners Spring/Summer: Artworks and soundscapes deepen connection | Artist: Artworks offer lasting legacy in socially engaged practice |
| 5. Community Building and Collaborative Engagement | 5.1 Social Connections 5.2 Artist-Community Integration | Autumn: Informal gatherings and rapport building Summer: Events and shared celebrations | Community: Stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members |
| 6. Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement | – | Spring: Neurodiverse-friendly activities Summer: Broader audience reach | Artist: Increased opportunity to engage equitably in future arts projects |
| 7. Organisational Learning and Future Application | – | Winter: Staff reflection and skill-sharing Summer: Adoption of creative methods | Organisation: Increased capability to integrate arts and artists into planning and delivery |

⁴ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

Section 2: The Seasonal Journey

A wide-angle landscape photograph showing a dirt path leading through a valley. The path is made of gravel and dirt, winding through a field of dry, brownish grass and some green patches. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a heavy, grey, overcast sky. The overall scene is desolate and atmospheric.

The Seasonal Journey

AUTUMN: Planting Seeds (Planning & Preparation)

Every great harvest begins with careful planting.

Autumn marked the beginning of the Creatively Connected programme, with the artists - Matt Denham, Azadeh Fatehrad, Laura Harrington, and the collaborative duo John Coburn and Tim Shaw - embarking on residencies across Teesdale and Swaledale. This initial season was characterised by careful relationship building, active listening, and the gradual development of trust within communities sometimes wary of outside interventions.

This phase laid the groundwork for several key themes that would unfold across the year. Most notably, it initiated **Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement**, through early sound-based and tactile practices; **Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector**, as artists positioned themselves as facilitators of sensory and emotional connection to place; and **Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement**, with informal social encounters beginning to foster meaningful relationships.

Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement

From their first visits, John and Tim emphasised sound as a way into place. Their **Acoustic Revelation and Deep Listening** practice invited locals to share both natural and overlooked noises. “We’re interested in how sounds we hear today... can speak to the story of what’s changed,” they said, reflecting on layers of history now hidden: “It’s sitting on top of something that’s not in anyone’s

consciousness now.” Rather than formal interviews, they volunteered at events and joined village gatherings so that listening itself became the artistic medium. *“You don’t want to come in and say, ‘We’re here to observe you,’”* they explained.

Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation

Laura’s wool-centred projects and Azadeh’s embedded farm-life observations wove a rich tapestry of local heritage. By engaging with the evolving process from fleece to textile, allowing each phase to emerge and inform the next, Laura connected participants to centuries of land-based practices. Azadeh’s documentation of invisible labour, cataloguing gestures, echoes of childhood stories and patterns of daily life, made tangible the memories embedded in the landscape. *“I am documenting the invisible traces of labour, loss, and resilience,”* she reflected. Azadeh’s psychogeographic approach meant documenting *“the emotional and historical imprints these spaces hold”* through sustained presence rather than structured interviews - a powerful example of **Place-Based Learning and Local Expertise**.

Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding

Conversations soon revealed tensions between conservation ambitions and economic realities. Farmers voiced anxiety about planting trees when survival through winter was uncertain. *“You can’t ask someone to plant trees when they’re not sure if they’ll make it through winter,”* one Farming Officer observed. Yet alongside precarity, artists uncovered deep ecological knowledge passed down through generations. These exchanges surfaced an acute **Ecological Impact Awareness** and underscored the importance of **Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer** in shaping sustainable practices.

Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector



All four artists positioned their work as a bridge between people and place. Each approached initial engagement differently, yet all shared a commitment to learning about the landscape and its residents, both human and more-than-human. Matt described his method as “*quiet attentiveness*,” preferring car-shares and volunteering at community days to formal introductions. “*I try to talk about myself as little as possible, approaching any situation with a curiosity about others. Then maybe tell them about what you’re doing, you know, two days later.*” Laura sought out informal, quieter spaces - village halls, craft sessions, cafés - where conversations could unfold freely and relationships could take root. As a multidisciplinary artist whose medium responds to context, she

approached these gatherings not as formal introductions but as mechanisms through which to listen, connect, and allow process to guide practice. Working with wool was a means for her thinking about **Art as a Sensory Bridge**. “*The wool is connected to the land*,” she noted, later adding, “*The sheep or the idea of wool is a way of connecting all these things... metaphorically these fibres connect everything together.*” Azadeh’s psychogeographic explorations unfolded through daily farm routines, including night lambing, darts tournaments and coffee mornings, documenting “*the emotional and historical imprints these spaces hold*” through sustained presence. John and Tim further deepened the connective thread by focusing on key community members. “*It’s better to find the right people who will open up some doors to us*,” they said, using these relationships to seed wider conversations.

Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement

Early on, every artist discovered that genuine trust in rural communities blossoms through informal, everyday interactions. Formal workshops had their place, yet it was helping with farm tasks, attending local talks and sharing meals that created warmth, creating **Meaningful Social Connections**. One NPNL Farming Officer reflected, *“There was a real warmth to how they [the artists] were met -it didn’t feel imposed,”* and added, *“The way artists have positioned themselves as listeners first, rather than experts, really changed the dynamic.”* Those simple, hands-on moments paved the way for stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members, and laid the foundation for the Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: Stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members.**



Stories from this Season

Matt's early encounters at community meetings revealed the importance of patience and mindful engagement. His approach, curiosity-led and relational, allowed conversations to unfold organically, often days after initial contact.

"Each new conversation threw out new ideas or made it more tangible..."

Laura discovered the power of shared activity through informal, hands-on encounters, where trust and reciprocity could grow organically - a clear example of **Meaningful Social Connections**.

"There's a lot of trust... I don't feel like I'm being watched over."

As a multidisciplinary artist, Laura allowed context to shape her approach, using materials and metaphors that emerged through process. Wool, in particular, became a way to hold and connect conversations around ecology, labour, and cultural heritage:

"The sheep or the idea of wool is a way of connecting all these things... metaphorically these fibres connect everything together."

Azadeh found that night lambing sessions and daily farm routines offered profound insights into farmers' relationships with their

land and livestock. Her psychogeographic approach revealed emotional and historical imprints embedded in the landscape.

John and Tim's collaborative sound-based practice in Swaledale brought a fresh sensory dimension to the project. Their work embraced complexity, using sound to explore the emotional, ecological, and historical layers of place.

"We're interested in how sounds we hear today... can speak to the story of what's changed."

They also challenged assumptions about the landscape's perceived timelessness, noting that what is seen as "natural" often sits atop forgotten histories.

"It's sitting on top of something that's not in anyone's consciousness now."

Once again, trust was central to their methodology. Rather than formal interviews, they opted for shared presence, volunteering, and time in local settings. Their response to scepticism was to create space for reflection, not persuasion, inviting people to hear, feel, and reconsider the landscape through sound.

❄️ WINTER: Deep Roots (Research & Development)

In quiet seasons, the most important growth happens underground.

Winter brought both challenges and opportunities for deeper engagement. While harsh weather and farming pressures limited some activities, this season allowed for intensive research, skill-sharing, and the strengthening of relationships built in autumn. Artists used this time to develop their understanding of local knowledge and traditions, while communities began to trust the process and share more vulnerable stories.

This phase strongly evidenced several key themes:

- **Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation**, through archival research, oral histories, and intergenerational dialogue
- **Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding**, as artists explored ecological pressures and regenerative approaches
- **Theme 7: Organisational Learning and Future Application**, with early reflections on how creative methods might inform future planning
- Continued development of **Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement**, as trust deepened through consistent presence

❄️ **Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation**

The winter months saw intensive research and knowledge gathering, developing their *Place-Based Learning and Local Expertise*.

Azadeh conducted archival research, drawing on BBC oral-history collections, the Dales Countryside Museum archives, and materials at Leeds University Library. By weaving personal accounts of Brexit's fallout, lost EU subsidies, and the Foot and Mouth crisis into broader historical narratives, she mapped the emotional and social landscape of local farming communities. Meanwhile, Laura forged connections with the Wool Board, Benridge Woolworks, and the Wool Library, tracing Swaledale fleece from pasture to product. A key moment was the artist-facilitated visit to the Wool Board, which brought together farmers (Paul and Linda), spinners, weavers, and staff from YDNP and NPNL - groups not often in the same room. Over the course of a day, this event enabled cross-sector dialogue and revealed the complex supply chains and cultural significance of traditional textile practices. A farmer noted that while Swaledale wool is often assumed to be used mainly for carpets, Laura created space for conversations that broadened understanding and surfaced overlooked narratives. Her facilitated discussions uncovered wool's hidden economic, cultural, and ecological value, showing how material culture can act as a conduit for care, connection, and shared learning - deepening intergenerational and inter-community knowledge transfer and reinforcing the Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues**.

❄️ **Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding**

The artists, many with long-standing practices in natural environments, engaged with the landscape not as backdrop but as a living system shaped by generations of human knowledge and care. Conversations with farmers deepened this understanding, revealing grazing patterns, seasonal rhythms, and subtle signs of land health, enriching their *Regenerative Agriculture Appreciation*.

Workshops on regenerative grazing, carbon-sequestration trials, and soil-carbon sampling highlighted discrepancies between standardised environmental policies and lived expertise. Observing subtle indicators, like the timing of lambing or the nesting habits of the local birds, revealed how farmers balance stewardship with survival, deepening the project's focus on ecological impact awareness. John and Tim used this period for deep sonic exploration, developing their understanding of how *"sounds we hear today can speak to the story of what's changed."* They began to map the acoustic landscape as a portal to understanding historical and ecological transformation, in a continuation of ***Acoustic Revelation and Deep Listening***, now layered with ***Ecological Impact Awareness***. This season revealed how local knowledge often conflicts with standardised environmental policies. Farmers' understanding of their specific microclimates, soil conditions, and ecological relationships proved far more nuanced than blanket regulations could accommodate, reinforcing the Theory of Change ***Community Level Outcome: Positive changes in perceptions/attitudes/adoption of sustainable practices.***

❁ **Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement**

Consistent presence proved pivotal in cementing trust. Whether through regular farm-yard visits, impromptu phone calls, or shared cups of tea in kitchen corners, artists reinforced relationships forged in autumn. *"Real engagement is built when you return, when you follow up. That's when people begin to trust the process,"* Azadeh observed. Laura emphasised the often-invisible labour behind genuine connection: *"It takes a lot of time to meet people, build connections."* This patient, follow-through approach not only strengthened social bonds but also laid firmer foundations for the collective work and collective impact ahead. Their emphasis on in-person visits and phone conversations reinforced the value of presence in fragile rural contexts, contributing to the Theory of Change ***Community Level Outcome: Stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members.***

Matt immersed himself in the rhythms of Teesdale, continuing his process-led, curiosity-driven engagement. Winter's slower pace allowed him to deepen relationships with farmers and conservationists, often through informal encounters and volunteering alongside local teams. He focused on gathering oral histories and personal narratives, recognising that trust and openness often grew in quieter moments - contributing to the Theory of Change **Artist Level Outcome: Stronger local networks and capacity to work with communities.**

❄️ **Theme 7: Organisational Learning and Future Application**

With fresh insights in hand, the team reflected on how creative methods might inform future planning. Matt's reflective practice included using the "Teesdale Assemblage"⁵ - an unique combination of northern and southern species growing together which occurs nowhere else in Britain - as a conceptual framework inspired by the unique botanical makeup of the area.

This framework helped him weave together stories of land use, policy, and personal experience. He also began planning participatory activities for the coming spring, ensuring that future creative work would be rooted in the insights and relationships cultivated during these winter months. Proposals drafted over winter outlined collaborative maps, co-written oral histories, and community-led exhibitions, signalling how sensory-driven practice could become embedded in long-term conservation strategies.

Across all practices, winter was a time for listening, learning, and laying the groundwork for future collaboration. Artists and communities alike used this quieter season to nurture the "deep roots" of trust, understanding, and creative possibility, preparing for the visible growth and activity of the seasons to come.

⁵ <https://www.teesdalespecialflora.uk/teesdale-assemblage>

❁ Stories from this Season

Across the landscape, artists found that presence, patience, and listening opened new pathways for trust and understanding.

Matt leaned into informal encounters, over farm gates or during shared tasks, where unexpected stories emerged.

“Some of the most meaningful exchanges happened unexpectedly.”

Azadeh found that even brief return visits built trust.

“Real engagement is built when you return, when you follow up. That’s when people begin to trust the process.”

These moments revealed the value of being present without agenda, allowing artists to identify new voices and stories to bring forward in the spring.

Laura observed how traditional knowledge surfaced in passing remarks, revealing the land as a living archive.

“It takes a lot of time to meet people, build connections.”

John and Tim found that winter’s stillness amplified subtle sounds, prompting reflection on what endures.

“Sounds we hear today can speak to the story of what’s changed.”

Their awareness sharpened as the absence of summer activity made wind through dry grass, distant sheep, and echoing footsteps more pronounced. They shifted from gathering sounds to creating shared listening moments, inviting others to notice alongside them.

“Listening together can prompt reflection on what has changed and what endures.”

Azadeh’s winter visits, though brief, laid the groundwork for more open collaboration.

“People were more willing to share when they saw I was committed to coming back - even when there was little to ‘show’ for it yet.”

She noticed that insights, like reading the weather or recalling the history of a field, were often shared casually, not through formal interviews.

The quiet work of winter - listening, noticing, and nurturing relationships - would be the foundation for the “first shoots” of creative activity in spring. The season’s stories remind us that deep roots must grow before visible change can flourish.

SPRING: First Shoots (Nurturing & Growing)

The first green shoots of possibility appear.

Spring marked a turning point in the programme, as trust built over winter months enabled the first creative workshops and collaborative activities. This season saw new connections forming across different community groups and the emergence of fresh perspectives on familiar landscapes. The artists' gentle, relationship-based approach began to bear fruit in unexpected conversations and creative breakthroughs.

This phase strongly evidenced several key themes:

- **Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement**, through sound walks, botanical drawing, and perceptual shifts
- **Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange** as workshops brought together a wide range of residents and visitors from different backgrounds
- **Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector**, as artistic methods deepened emotional and sensory connection to place
- **Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement**, with new networks forming across sectors
- **Theme 6: Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement**, as creative methods reached broader and more diverse audiences
- Continued development of **Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding**, through dialogue and observation.

Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement

John and Tim's participatory sound walks invited locals to listen to the land in a new way. Through field recordings of bird calls, wind in the trees, and distant livestock, they cultivated what would become *Acoustic Revelation and Deep Listening*. An Engagement Officer reflected, "*People started to notice more, the names of plants, the changes in sound over the day. It's like the artists re-tuned our attention.*"

With Teesdale School at Harewood Farm in Upper Teesdale, and later during the Meadows Festival, Laura guided botanical drawing workshops. Students sketched living hay meadows, discovering microscopic textures. Their drawings were printed for the festival, where new sketches were created and imagined as knit patterns - an early instance of ***Microscopic Discovery and Visual Revelation***, bridging observation with creative expression.



Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation

Laura's wool-focused workshops brought together farmers, crafters, conservation workers, and young people, creating new networks around shared materials and traditions. An engagement officer observed:

"People started to notice more, the names of plants, the changes in sound over the day. It's like the artists re-tuned our attention."

This heightened awareness represented exactly the kind of perceptual shift the programme hoped to achieve, evidencing Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: *Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues.***

Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding

The trust built over previous months enabled more honest conversations about land use tensions. Discussion during creative sessions surfaced the delicate balance between environmental ambition and economic survival. Artists framed their role as curious facilitators rather than experts. *“What’s been powerful is that the artists didn’t come in with a message - they came in with questions,”* noted an NPNL Engagement Officer. This approach made space for candid dialogue about regenerative grazing, soil health indicators, and the complex realities of farm life, paving the way for shifts in attitudes and the gradual adoption of sustainable practices. These dialogues often illuminated friction between environmental ambition and economic precarity, but they also revealed shared values and concerns that transcended sectoral boundaries, contributing to Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: Positive changes in perceptions/attitudes/adoption of sustainable practices.**

Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector

With relationships now established, artists could begin more structured creative activities, marking a transition from informal trust-building to active co-creation, making **Arts as Sensory Bridge**. Creative practice became a conduit for environmental connection. Laura’s botanical line drawings, paired with community knitting sessions, transformed fleeting plant forms into tangible artefacts. Matt used his “Teesdale Assemblage” concept as both metaphor and methodology, framing the area’s unique botanical mix alongside personal stories and land-management practices. This deepened emotional connection to place and exemplified **Expanded Understanding of Creative Practice.**



Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement



Spring's structured activities created new networks among farmers, crafters, conservation officers, and young people. Whether they were printing in school halls, gathering in barns, or walking field margins, participants found unexpected common ground. These co-created experiences strengthened bonds across sectors and reinforced the programme's commitment to meaningful collaboration.

One particularly resonant moment was the collaborative welcome meal at the Farmhouse Kitchen, organised collaboratively by Matt, Azadeh and Laura in May. This gathering brought together individuals met over previous months and served as a moment of convening and exchange. It offered both a sense of arrival and an informal entry point into the summer's upcoming activities, embodying the spirit of cross-sector connection and shared purpose.

Together, these events were a clear expression of **Artist-Community Integration** and Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: Stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members.**

Theme 6: Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement

By offering multiple entry points, such as seated listening stations alongside walks and hands-on tree-planting demos, the artists widened participation. Workshop designs ensured that children and young people (CYP), older people, and those with mobility challenges could all engage meaningfully, embodying the programme's goal of broad, inclusive access.

Stories from this Season

Spring marked a shift from quiet presence to active co-creation as artists and communities began to collaborate more visibly.

Laura's hay meadow drawing and knitting workshops sparked intergenerational exchange, with young people learning plant names and wider place connection from farmers and knitters.

"It was amazing to see a Year 6 pupil sketching a meadow and asking a farmer about the name of a plant."

Azadeh's lambing season visits revealed the emotional depth of farming, highlighting care practices often overlooked in policy.

"You can't understand farming without understanding care. It's not just about economics - it's about grief, pride, and responsibility."

John and Tim's sound walks helped participants attune to subtle environmental shifts.

"It's like the artists re-tuned our attention."

Laura's live-print botanicals and knitting sessions turned fleeting plant forms into shared artefacts, stitching together seasonal cycles and community creativity.

"It felt like we were stitching the seasons together - drawing, printing, knitting. Everyone had a part."

Matt's "Ecological Blueprints" blended botanical diversity with personal stories, offering a new method for place-based storytelling.

Cross-sector workshops fostered honest dialogue about land use, with artists acting as facilitators rather than experts.

"They didn't come in with a message - they came in with questions."

Inclusive formats, from seated listening stations to lino-cut printing, ensured broad participation across ages and abilities.

"I've never seen my dad do art before, but he sat and carved a leaf with me."

These stories show how spring's creative activity grew from winter's deep roots, strengthening relationships and revealing new ways to connect with land, heritage, and each other.

🌀 SUMMER: Full Bloom (Events & Activities)

When all the preparation bears fruit.

Summer represented the peak season for public engagement, with major events, activities, and celebrations bringing the artists' work to wider audiences. This was when months of relationship-building and collaborative development materialised into tangible creative outputs and community experiences. The season demonstrated how embedded artistic practice could create platforms for broader dialogue about land use, ecology, and rural futures.

This phase strongly evidenced:

- **Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement**, through sound walks, microscope sessions, and perceptual shifts
- **Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation**, via intergenerational learning and local storytelling
- **Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding**, through dialogue on regenerative agriculture and ecological impact
- **Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector**, with artworks acting as sensory bridges and legacy artefacts
- **Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement**, through inclusive events and social connection
- **Theme 6: Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement**, with activities reaching diverse audiences
- **Theme 7: Organisational Learning and Future Application**, as partners began adopting creative methods

○ Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement

John and Tim's signature sound walks wove through Muker, Keld and Crackpot Hall, inviting participants to listen deeply to bees buzzing among wildflowers, wind whispering through grass stems, and distant sheep bells. These events attracted participants from across the region, including visitors from Bradford and Leeds alongside local residents with decades of experience in the Dales. Specialist microphones revealed hidden textures of place, sparking spontaneous conversations about insect decline, habitat restoration, and the echoes of lead mining on the dales. One Engagement trainee with YDNPA discussed how the sound walks had helped him to broaden his awareness of the "whole ecosystem" around him: *"There's so much life that exists that's not visible, so it helped me to not be so ignorant to what's around and to be much more aware and appreciative of life."* His comment that *"Even the little things or the things that may not be visible, there's still life there. You just have to look for it or listen for it,"* showed how these walks shifted attention from seeing to truly hearing the land.

The walks reinforced the idea of sensory engagement as a gateway to environmental connection and that shared listening could deepen relationships with familiar places, a powerful expression of ***Acoustic Revelation and Deep Listening***.

○ Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation

In Middleton-in-Teesdale, Laura's "Knitting the Landscape" workshop brought together farmers, crafters, conservationists, and young people in an informal, circle-style gathering. Using wool and knitting as both material and metaphor, the session sparked shared making and lively conversation about the landscapes that shape us, the stories we carry, and the ecologies we seek to recover. Inviting Anne Le Brocq was central: her approach to knitting as a method of mapping geographical forces introduced new ways of thinking, with yarn standing in for land formations, vegetation, and atmosphere.

○ Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding

Across events, dialogues about regenerative grazing and soil stewardship surfaced tensions between environmental ambition and economic necessity. At a meadow microscope station, farmers and schoolchildren alike examined seed structures, linking botanical form to carbon-capture potential. These sessions made visible the layers of knowledge farmers hold about microclimates, seasonal grazing rhythms and soil health - insights often absent from standardised policy briefings.

At Muker, the use of specialist microphones to listen to bees in meadow habitats, led to spontaneous conversations about insect decline, habitat restoration, and the legacy of lead mining on local ecosystems, evidencing **Ecological Impact Awareness** and the Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues.**



○ Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector

Summer brought the programme's most visible outputs through a series of public sound walks and workshops that demonstrated the transformative power of deep listening and collaborative engagement. Laura's possible knitted garment, Matt's visual "assemblage" maps, and John and Tim's sound installations became living containers of conversation, memory and ecological awareness. Families tucked fragments of wool into their pockets and took close up photos of meadow flowers on their phones, carrying home both physical souvenirs and renewed emotional bonds to the dales.

Participants were able to pause and think, as the activities “*allowed space for reflection.*” One Engagement trainee reflected on how John and Tim managed the sound walks: “*We were walking through the landscape and seeing the nature and hearing it, they'd allow us to pause, reflect and then explain how that made us feel and I think through that opportunity of reflection, it helped me to feel much more in tune with the landscape and the nature that was around me.*”

These events successfully bridged the gap between artistic process and community participation, creating accessible entry points for broader public engagement with the landscapes and issues explored throughout the year, reinforcing Theory of Change **Artist Level Outcome: Artworks produced offer a lasting legacy.**

○ Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement

Agricultural shows, village festivals and open-air performances provided natural stages for collective celebration. Shared meals in farm barns, pop-up exhibitions in parish halls and co-curated field displays wove new networks between artists, non-arts organisations and community members. These inclusive gatherings strengthened social cohesion and demonstrated how creative methods can deepen local cooperation.



○ Theme 6: Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement



Summer's longer days and favourable weather enabled maximum community participation. The social calendar of agricultural shows, festivals, and outdoor events provided natural platforms for the artists' work to reach broader audiences while remaining rooted in local cultural traditions.

Every activity was designed for wide participation. Listening stations sat alongside level-access paths; microscope-equipped benches welcomed wheelchair users; and simple lino-cut botanical activities engaged both children and older residents. These thoughtful adaptations ensured the season's rich creative offer reached the full spectrum of community life.

○ Theme 7: Organisational Learning and Future Application

By mid-summer, partner organisations were already adopting artistic methods into their own practice. Conservation Officers planned to integrate field recordings into guided walks; heritage educators eyed botanical knitting sessions for school curricula; and local steering groups began drafting co-design frameworks for next year's residencies - evidence that creative techniques were embedding into long-term planning.

National Meadows Day

National Meadows Day was a key moment in the summer calendar, offering a joyful and reflective celebration of the region's rich grassland heritage. The event brought together artists, ecologists, farmers, and families to explore the biodiversity and cultural significance of meadows through creative and sensory experiences.

The use of microscopes to examine wildflower seeds exemplified *Microscopic Discovery and Visual Revelation*, with participants describing the experience as “*inspiring*” and “*awestruck*”. The event also fostered *Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer*, with emotional reflections on shared family time and revived memories of traditional meadows.

The social atmosphere, including live music, locally sourced refreshments served in the farmhouse, and a mixture of activities and talks, highlighted *Meaningful Social Connections*, and contributed to Theory of Change *Community Level Outcome: Stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members*. The event left a legacy of strengthened collaborations and fresh ideas for future meadows celebrations.

○ Stories from this Season

The season produced a range of creative outputs that served as what **Laura** called "*containers*" - repositories of process, conversation, and connection. These included:

- *Sound installations and recordings capturing the sonic landscape*
- *Community archives and storytelling collections*
- *Textile works embedding local materials and traditional techniques*

The events this season revealed how art and place can work together to create profound moments of connection and discovery.

Participants described how heightened sensory experiences led to deeper emotional engagement with the landscape.

"Experiencing a place for the first time through a heightened sense of hearing... completely heightening my other senses and made me connect to the place a lot more."

Others discovered sounds they had never noticed before like "*the ultrasounds or the sound under the surface of the River Swale*" while some experienced the joy of rediscovered perception:

"I can hear all these sounds more loudly, that hasn't happened in years."

Intergenerational learning flourished, with young people recognising the value of traditional crafts:

"A really nice way for older people to show us trades that we're slowly on the verge of losing."

Creative expression, such as knitting colours inspired by meadows, skies, and stone walls, became a way to translate environmental connection into tangible form.

Above all, the events fostered genuine human connection. Informal conversations in pubs and shared experiences with artists created lasting bonds.

"Artists can help you connect to a place with all your senses, and therefore make the encounter truly memorable."

AUTUMN RETURNS: Gathering Seeds (Reflection & Legacy)

Collecting the seeds of wisdom for future planting.

As the programme year came full circle, autumn brought time for reflection on impacts and transformations. This season focused on gathering insights, documenting learning, and establishing legacies that could continue beyond the formal project timeline. Artists and communities alike reflected on their journey and identified seeds of wisdom for future planting.

This phase strongly evidenced:

- **Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement**, through deep listening and emotional connection to place
- **Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation**, via intergenerational dialogue and place-based learning
- **Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding**, through reflections on regenerative agriculture and farming identity
- **Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector**, with art as a catalyst for empathy and ecological insight
- **Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement**, through shared experience and mutual support
- **Theme 7: Organisational Learning and Future Application**, as partners considered legacy and integration
- **Artist Level Outcomes**, including stronger local networks and lasting creative legacies

Theme 1: Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement

Deep listening remained at the heart of this season's work. Participants described how slowing down to hear the landscape had shifted their perception of place. *"We have a visual culture – we need to listen deeply to the world around us,"* one resident observed, capturing the programme's culmination in heightened sensory awareness and their ***Acoustic Revelation and Deep Listening***.

Theme 2: Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation

Intergenerational dialogue and place-based learning surfaced through heartfelt conversations. Cath, reflecting on her family farm, noted, *"It makes you realise that there's more value to that farmed landscape than we realise."* Linda's insights into wool and mart culture reinforced the power of providing space for farmers to talk to one another: *"Laura created space to have these conversations."*

These sensory and emotional engagements bridged divides between different groups of people, reflecting Theory of Change ***Community Level Outcome: Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues.***



Theme 3: Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding

Paul's reflections in Laura's [film](#) on his farming identity and legacy illuminated the tension between economic survival and environmental responsibility: *"We've got to make money because we're a business. But the day I retire... I lose my home."* These candid exchanges underscored the need for regenerative agriculture models that respect both livelihood and landscape.

Linda's comments on generational change and openness to innovation reflected **Regenerative Agriculture Appreciation** and the evolving nature of rural practice: *"Now younger ones coming in are open to change."*

Theme 4: Creative Practice as Environmental Connector

Throughout the autumn, a recurring theme was the power of feeling and emotion as a catalyst for change - reinforcing the concept of **"ecological empathy"**. *"Art enables us to feel things – and by feeling things we realise they matter,"* a participant remarked, highlighting how creative interventions deepened emotional bonds to place and motivated stewardship.

Theme 5: Community Building and Collaborative Engagement

Shared experience and mutual support defined the season's collaborative spirit. Return visits, harvest teas, and circle-sharing sessions cemented connections forged earlier. Cath's sense of reassurance through shared experience echoed the importance of mutual support and celebrated a collective sense of purpose and solidarity: *"You think great, we are all on that page."*

Theme 7: Organisational Learning and Future Application

The programme's impacts extended far beyond traditional artistic outputs. Trust-based relationships had been established across sectoral boundaries, new forms of dialogue had emerged around contentious environmental issues, and both artists and communities had developed new capacities for collaborative engagement, evidencing Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: Stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members.**

Partner organisations reported changes in their own approaches, contributing to **Organisation Level Outcome: Increased capability to integrate arts and artists into planning and delivery**. “We’re starting to think about legacy from the beginning, not as an afterthought,” noted one organisation lead, reflecting how creative methods have become integral to planning and delivery. This forward-looking mindset promises that the seeds of wisdom gathered this autumn will guide future initiatives, reflects the broader insight that meaningful environmental engagement requires sustained presence and relationship-building over time.

Synthesis: What the Seasons Revealed

Across the seasons, seven core themes emerged as the roots of the programme’s impact: environmental awareness; knowledge exchange; sustainable farming practices; creative practice as environmental connector; community building and collaborative engagement; accessibility and inclusion; and organisational learning. These themes were not isolated strands but interwoven threads, revealed through sound walks and wool workshops, quiet conversations and public celebrations. Together, they demonstrate that meaningful environmental engagement is not just about delivering outcomes, but cultivating relationships, embracing complexity, and creating space for emotion, memory, and shared purpose.



SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE: LESSONS LEARNED AND ONGOING LEGACIES

Key insights emerged around effective rural engagement methodologies, each rooted in the programme's seven core themes and evidenced through participant reflections, artist practice, and organisational response.

• Trust and Relational Practice

All artists emphasised the importance of informal, long-term engagement over structured interventions. Matt described how *“Each new conversation threw out new ideas or made it more tangible.”* Laura reflected that *“There is a certain sadness in bringing this stage of the project to a close. The process has involved putting down deep roots—building relationships, following ideas, and allowing new possibilities to emerge. Many further directions could be explored, but practical limitations such as time and funding inevitably create boundaries. This can be difficult, particularly when strong connections have been established with people and places.”*

This reflects the programme's broader learning: that transformative outcomes emerge through patient cultivation of trust and mutual understanding, not rapid delivery.

• Place-Based Learning

Arts practices supported deeper ecological connection through embodied, sensory engagement. Professor Sir John Lawton noted that *“The arts open up a whole new way of looking at the landscape.”* At the final showcase event, Ann, a knitter, added: *“The farmers know the landscape way better than any scientist. We need to listen to them.”*

An NPNL trainee reflected on the power of sound and memory: *“We don’t often think about the sounds... like the sound of the cattle market and the auctions... in ten years’ time that might not even be a thing anymore.”*

• Navigating Complexity

Rather than simplifying environmental issues, the artists’ approach embraced and illuminated complexity, creating space for multiple perspectives and contested realities, supporting Theory of Change **Community Level Outcome: Positive changes in perceptions/attitudes/adoption of sustainable practices**. David Renwick, Regional Director North at Natural England, reflected: *“Nature and farming are sometimes pitched against each other and actually they’re the best of allies.”*

• Community and Commonality



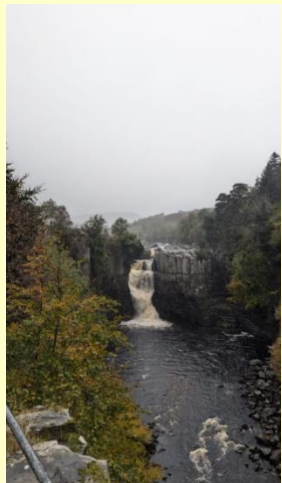
The project brought together people from diverse backgrounds, breaking down stereotypes and building a sense of shared purpose reinforcing the concept of **Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement**.

Participants at the final showcase event discussed the diverse nature of the attendees and how everyone, regardless of perspective and role, was an important *“cog in the wheel”*, in farmer Paul’s words. Ann described her revelation of moving from feeling *“just”* a knitter to realising: *“We’re all equally important cogs.”*

Angela, a participant at several events, spoke of the *“creativity, connection and understanding”* that emerged, describing the project as a *“Catalyst for discussion.”* She also highlighted the emotional dimension: *“Creativity is about emotion and empathy and feeling.”*

Angela's presence at the final event was the culmination of a year's engagement with the programme. Her reflections echo the wider themes of the project - connection, legacy, and the power of feeling - demonstrating how the arts can foster not only knowledge but also care, empathy, and a sense of shared responsibility for the landscape and its future.

• Legacy and the Next Planting Season



There was a strong sense that the work must continue, fulfilling Theory of Change **Organisation Level Outcome** and **Artist Level Outcome: Artworks offer a lasting legacy**. At Northern Heartlands, Jill hoped that *“There’s somebody or something to carry on this project.”*

There was a strong sense that participants had been changed for good through their involvement. For instance, farmer Cath described the sound project as *“Absolutely amazing.”* Farmer Paul’s reflections on legacy were grounded in the realities of farming life and the need for both hope and action: *“Hope is really important, but actually you need action as well as hope.”*

Staff from partner organisations expressed interest in embedding creative approaches into their work, with one Youth Engagement Officer reflecting, *“Sound walks: I need to do more to incorporate listening to sounds in my sessions,”* and a YDNPA Learning Officer inspired to use oral history archives in future exhibitions. However, they also noted the need for dedicated funding, supportive management structures, and frameworks that accommodate creative timescales and evaluation methods. This was a key insight for **Organisational Learning and Future Application**.

The Next Planting Season:

Recommendations and Next Steps

Looking forward, the programme identified several areas for development:

- Earlier and more comprehensive coordination with support organisations
- Greater attention to embedding creative approaches within management plans
- Sustainable models for longer-term impact
- Documentation methods that respect process-based work whilst providing transferable methodologies for replication

Above all, the autumn reflections revealed that the true legacy of the project lies in the feelings it has stirred, the relationships it has nurtured, and the seeds of empathy, understanding, and hope that have been sown for future seasons.



Section 3: The Harvest



The Harvest: Golden Threads Woven Throughout the Seasons

- **Learning Within Organisations: How Partner Perspectives Evolved**

The programme's impact extended beyond community engagement to transform how partner organisations approached their conservation and education work. Staff from both NPNL and YDNPA reported significant shifts in their own practice, with several incorporating creative methodologies into their ongoing roles. A Youth Engagement Officer from YDNPA noted: *"I have started to incorporate art and creativity into all of my sessions,"* while a Community Engagement Officer from NPNL observed: *"Working with the artists has reaffirmed and inspired me to think even more creatively and to join the community in what they are already doing".*

The most significant organisational learning centred on **accessibility and inclusion**. Staff discovered how artistic processes could create entry points for engagement that traditional conservation approaches might miss. As one engagement officer explained: *"Art inspired a willingness to engage... it allowed people to take part without needing a lot of knowledge or skill. Different people are inspired to get involved for different reasons"*. This was particularly evident in Laura's textile work, which connected local spinning groups with conservation events not because they were specifically interested in meadows, but because they connected with the landscape through wool and farming heritage. *"The women from the local spinning groups took the trouble to come to our annual Meadows Day event because they had that engagement with Laura beforehand,"* reflected one officer.

- **Sensory Awakening: The Sound of Changed Perspectives**

Perhaps the most unexpected impact was how sound-based work fundamentally shifted participants' relationships with familiar landscapes. Staff repeatedly mentioned becoming more attuned to acoustic environments, with one noting: *"People started to notice more, the names of*

plants, the changes in sound over the day. It's like the artists re-tuned our attention". Sound walks proved particularly transformative for conservation professionals themselves. A Farming and Nature trainee reflected on how listening to historical soundscapes *"got us to reflect on how the noises change over time and how human action affects this... it was a very nice reflective space"*. This led to broader questions about landscape futures: *"What will the landscape look like and sound like in the future? How will our actions influence this?"*. The programme demonstrated that sound could serve as a powerful tool for ecological education and community dialogue, prompting one engagement trainee to consider *"doing more sound walks with the groups I support at work"*, and a Learning Officer at the Yorkshire Dales Visitor Centre was inspired to incorporate recorded oral histories into future exhibitions and education offers. An Engagement trainee with YDNPA commented that sound walks *"could engage different kinds of people who have different interests, say in music, in art, in a way that is more suitable or engaging for them, because not everyone just wants to come out and walk and take in the moment or be silent, not everyone can do that."*

- **Art as Catalyst: How Creativity Opened New Conversations**

Throughout the year, artistic activities offered a powerful way to bring people together and talk about difficult topics. Unlike formal consultations or expert-led presentations, creative approaches encouraged open participation without fixed agendas. This made it easier to explore sensitive or contested issues in ways that felt safe, inclusive, and engaging. John and Tim reflected: *"We seek to create a nuanced, multi-layered exploration of landscape change,"* using sound as a medium that could capture complexity rather than reduce it to simple messages.



- **Building Bridges: Connecting Farmers, Crafters, Environmentalists, and Residents**

The programme succeeded in connecting groups that rarely interact in formal settings, fostering unexpected collaborations across farming, conservation, craft, and education. Laura's textile practice brought together farmers, crafters, scientists, and schoolchildren around shared materials and traditions, while Azadeh's embedded approach linked farming communities with environmental organisations through everyday participation - lambing, coffee mornings, and informal conversations.

These bridges were not only social but sensory. As one YDNPA Engagement trainee reflected, *"Connecting people to the sounds of the landscape helps them to acknowledge more of what's around them... say a farmer was involved and could explain, 'We're going into this part of the farm - listen to the sounds here', then describe what goes on in that area. It's just a great way for people to learn in a more fun way... it deepens the experience."* This insight captures how creative methods, especially sound-based practice, can open new pathways for learning and connection, making environmental knowledge more accessible, relational, and rooted in place.

- **Shifting Perspectives: New Ways of Seeing Land, Climate, and Community**

Artists enabled participants to experience familiar landscapes in new ways. Sound walks revealed acoustic dimensions of place, textile work connected participants bodily to land through wool, and collaborative documentation highlighted often-invisible forms of care and knowledge. One Engagement trainee with YDNPA commented that for people who *"are creative and love sound, [sound walks] can help them foster a better relationship with nature by seeing it in a different perspective."* Reflecting on his own experience, he noted that *"it has definitely changed my awareness of what's around me and encouraged me to not be as ignorant to the things that I can't see and to walk with that awareness of there's so much life and so much going on despite what I can see and hear."*

- **Challenges Weathered: Time, Representation, and Complexity**

The programme faced several challenges, including coordination across multiple organisations, seasonal constraints on engagement, and the complexity of environmental politics in rural communities. Economic pressures on farming communities limited engagement opportunities, requiring careful timing and positioning. Partner feedback revealed structural challenges that had not been fully anticipated. Communication proved particularly complex, with staff noting: *“Communication on what the artists were doing could have been better”* and *“clear communication of a programme plan, current progress, end goals etc. is always appreciated.”* The open-ended nature of artistic enquiry, while ultimately productive, created initial uncertainty among partner staff used to more structured outcomes. As one trainee noted: *“It would have been nice to have had more understanding of their work and the outcome they were aiming for.”* This highlighted the need for clearer frameworks that respect artistic process while offering partners sufficient structure. Knowledge gaps and training needs also emerged, as one Engagement Officer reflected: *“I would appreciate training on writing proposals, briefs and artist agreements.”* Organisational culture presented further barriers. One Interpretation Officer observed: *“Our organisation is quite risk-averse when it comes to communication and this would need to be addressed to take more creative approaches.”* Time pressures compounded these challenges, with staff noting: *“Most people work on projects with a deadline so there isn’t much time to take part in other projects.”* These challenges revealed important learning about sustainable arts-conservation partnerships and pointed to the need for more embedded creative approaches within organisational management plans, supported by dedicated funding and training.

- **Roots that Remain: Lasting Impacts and Ongoing Connections**

Beyond formal outputs, the programme created lasting networks and changed approaches to community engagement among partner organisations. Trust-based relationships established during the residencies continue to support ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

Collaborative Growth: What Worked, What's Needed, What's Next

For Funders: Investing in Seasonal Rhythms and Long-Term Growth

Effective rural engagement requires patience, flexibility, and sustained commitment. Funding models that support relationship-building over quick outputs enable deeper, more transformative outcomes.

For Communities: Using Seasons to Structure Dialogue and Action

Natural cycles provided familiar rhythms for unfamiliar conversations, while seasonal activities created organic opportunities for engagement.

For Artists: Working with Natural Cycles and Community Time

Artists adapted practice to rural rhythms, understanding that meaningful engagement happens on community terms rather than project timelines. The most effective approaches were responsive, process-led, and grounded in genuine reciprocity.

For Partners: Building Creative Capacity within Conservation Organisations

The programme highlighted both the promise and complexity of embedding creative approaches within conservation organisations. Partners saw how artistic methods could engage audiences in ways traditional strategies often miss, but this required shifts in communication, planning, and risk tolerance. Key lessons included valuing process over outcomes, allowing time to build relationships, and providing training for effective creative collaboration.

For the Future: How This Approach Can Be Replanted Elsewhere

The programme generated transferable methodologies for artist-community collaboration in rural contexts, emphasising trust-building, process-documentation, and embedded practice as foundations for meaningful cultural engagement with environmental challenges



Section 4: Four Seasonal Case Studies

Artist Interventions: Four Seasonal Case Studies

At the heart of Creatively Connected are the artistic interventions - four distinct yet interwoven practices that respond to the landscapes, communities, and ecological questions of Teesdale and Swaledale. Each artist or artist pair brought their own methodology, medium, and sensibility to the project, building on prior experience of working at the intersection of art and conservation to shape creative responses that reflect both personal inquiry and collaborative engagement.

To mirror the cyclical nature of the programme and the rhythms of rural life, these case studies are also presented through a seasonal lens. This framing allows us to trace the evolution of each intervention: from early emergence and exploration, through phases of growth and deepening connection, into periods of reflection and legacy. The seasonal structure also mirrors the Theory of Change, with each phase aligned to specific outcomes at the community, artist, and organisational levels.

Each case study draws on artist reflections, stakeholder interviews, and documentation of public engagement. Together, they offer insight into how creative practice can provoke dialogue, build trust, and contribute to nature recovery in complex and contested rural contexts.



Case Study: Matt - Ecological Blueprints

Introduction: Artist and Intervention Overview

Matt's residency in Upper Teesdale began with an invitation to listen, observe, and walk alongside a landscape shaped by centuries of farming, conservation, and quiet resilience. His practice centres on deep listening, relationship-building, and collaborative exploration of complex environmental questions. Rather than offering answers, Matt creates spaces for conversation, bridging knowledge systems and inviting diverse perspectives to meet on equal ground.

The setting was as distinctive as the approach. Upper Teesdale, with its rare arctic-alpine flora and marginal agricultural land, offered both ecological richness and cultural depth. The residency focused on the Moor House Upper Teesdale Nature Reserve and surrounding farmed landscapes, places where botanical significance and farming heritage coexist in delicate balance.

Spanning a full year, the intervention unfolded in seasonal rhythm. From November to April, Matt undertook an extensive research and development phase, engaging in nearly 50 individual consultations and informal encounters with around 350 people. This groundwork laid the foundation for six public events held between May and July, including collaborative walks, archive explorations, and publication development workshops.

Matt's work was shaped by a wide range of voices:

- *Experts:* Margaret Bradshaw (renowned botanist), Martin Furness (Moor House Upper Teesdale Nature Reserve Manager), Professor Sir John Lawton (strategic overview)
- *Farmers:* Jemma Clark (Bowlees Educational Farm), Richard Betton (retired farmer), Karen Scott (Low Way Farm), Paul Johnson (Herdship Farm), Paul Coppen (White Close Hill Farm), Carl Stephenson (multi-generational Teesdale farmer)
- *Community/Sector organisations:* UTASS (Upper Teesdale Agricultural Support Service), NPNL volunteers, Teesdale Botany Group, Rob Bunn (Pasture for Life network)
- *NPNL/YDNPA staff:* Four members of the Farming and Nature team

Autumn into Winter: Building Understanding Through Engagement

As autumn settled over Upper Teesdale, Matt began his research and development period with 47 individual engagements involving around 350 people. This was a season of sowing: patient, deliberate, and deeply relational.

Rather than arriving as an expert, Matt stepped into the landscape with curiosity. *“I’m wrestling with some insecurities around my level of subject-specific knowledge... it’s important to make sure conversations are adequately supported and that I position myself properly,”* he reflected early on. This vulnerability became a strength. By positioning himself not as a source of environmental knowledge but as a facilitator of others’ expertise, Matt cultivated trust and opened space for genuine dialogue.

In this autumnal phase, Matt laid the groundwork for what would follow: an ecology of relationships, rooted in shared curiosity and mutual respect. In this way, he created space for others to speak, and through that openness, began gathering perspectives that would shape the seasons ahead.



❄️ Winter into Spring: Community Events and Participant Response

As autumn turned into winter, the seeds planted during Matt's quiet months of listening were germinating. His approach was rooted in relationship-building, from recorded conversations with botanist Margaret Bradshaw and strategic meetings with Professor Sir John Lawton, to 15 volunteer sessions across conservation activities. Presentations to groups like the Teesdale Botany Group added formal structure, but it was the informal moments that proved most fertile. *"I'm learning that carpooling is a really useful - and inadvertent - feature of this project for me. The more informal and unpressured conversations happening here have been formative for my thinking."*

These quiet exchanges during shared journeys through winding roads and windswept moors became the compost from which deeper understanding grew. Matt's presence in the community was not marked by grand gestures, but by consistent, attentive engagement.

The turning point came not through a single event, but through noticing what was missing. As one UTASS member observed, there *"aren't really facilitated spaces for these conversations [about farming and nature] to happen"*: spaces where farmers, conservationists, and community members could meet on equal footing. Matt's role was focused not on delivering content, but creating these spaces: open, inclusive, and shaped by the voices within them.



Spring: Knowledge Integration and Early Impact

As the landscape began to green, so too did the connections between people, knowledge systems, and histories. Matt's early activities - collaborative walks, quiet conversations, and exploratory workshops - revealed a rich tapestry of environmental understanding already embedded within the community, waiting to be seen, shared, and celebrated.

These initial interventions emerged gently, aligned with the rhythms of the land and the lives of those who care for it. The collaborative walks, in particular, became fertile ground for unexpected dialogue. *"There's something really interesting about bringing together an unsuspecting group of quite different people... Walking is a really good vehicle for that,"* one participant reflected.

These walks were opportunities for ideas to emerge naturally and connections to take root. Thoughts unfurled like spring shoots, nurtured by shared steps and open skies.

Participants began to see the land anew through these interventions. *"The day really changed the way we literally look at the ground and plants. We learned how to look carefully at our fields and meadows,"* said one. Even seasoned scientists found themselves surprised: *"I've never seen microscopes used in this way before."* Matt's facilitation blended specialist insight with creative tools. *"It makes it much more accessible being able to have different ways of learning about hay meadows,"* another participant noted.



The Blueprints for Nature workshops sparked conceptual breakthroughs rooted in shared values. Participants named “*empathy, harmony, creativity and balance*” as guiding principles. One described the experience as “*a constellation of ideas,*” a poetic reflection of the collaborative energy beginning to flourish.

The reach of the work extended across generations and geographies, from teenagers to retirees, and from local postcodes to regional networks. These early shoots suggested something deeper: that the work was not just relevant, but resonant, across diverse rural and environmental contexts.

🌻 **Summer: From Seeds to Structures**

By summer, the work had taken root in both individual experiences and across systems and institutions. Matt’s public programming, timed to coincide with events like National Meadows Day, amplified conservation work and cultivated new pathways for sustained community engagement.

The results were striking. The Culture Counts survey revealed near-perfect scores across all measures: challenge and new thinking (0.89), personal meaning, environmental awareness, and nature connection (all 1.0). Most notably, every participant reported a shift in perspective on both art and the environment. There was universal enjoyment, and a shared sense of contribution.

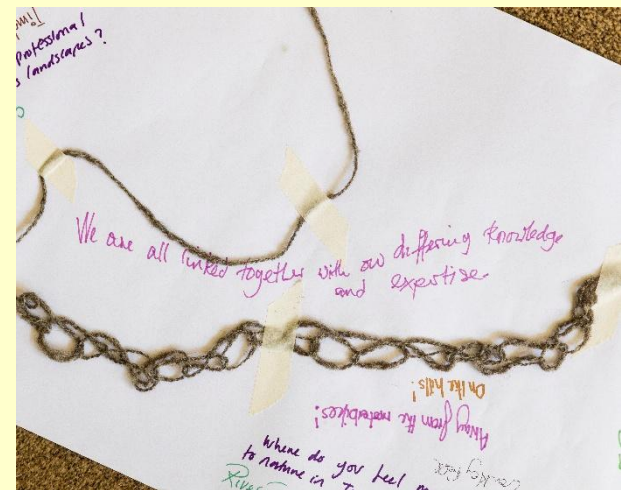


One of the most meaningful public engagements was the archive workshop at Raby Castle, which brought together farmers and community members to explore historical materials and landscape change. This archive collaboration with Raby Estate marked a turning point. As Joseph Reed noted, it was “*the first farmer-engaged session*” during his tenure - a significant shift toward participatory heritage practices and an indication that historical understanding has the potential to inform and enrich contemporary environmental action across landscapes.

The intervention also seeded professional development. Scientists discovered creative applications of familiar tools, botanists formed new collaborative relationships with land managers, and community members honed techniques for observing and documenting the land. These were not just new skills - they were new ways of seeing.

Cross-pollination between artist residencies strengthened ties between community organisations, farming networks, and conservation groups, creating a resilient ecosystem of collaboration. These relationships, nurtured over time, now offer a foundation for continued growth beyond the formal programme period.

The collaborative creation of photographic documentation and values-based blueprints provided lasting resources - artefacts of shared learning and tools for future engagement. Each of the participants and contributors have been gifted a copy of the ‘blueprint’ and the project materials have been donated to the local library archive as a longer-term resource.



Spotlight Event: Raby Castle Archive Workshop

Date & Location: 11th July 2025, Raby Castle Archive

Participants: Farmers, historians, artists, and community members

Themes: Landscape change, historical farming practices, participatory heritage, creative interpretation

Held in the historic setting of Raby Castle, this archive workshop marked a pivotal moment in Matt's residency, bringing together farmers and community members to explore documents, maps, and artefacts tracing the evolution of Upper Teesdale's landscapes and farming practices. Participants engaged with a wide selection of materials, interpreting details and sharing insights from lived experience. The event fostered dialogue between academic, artistic, and practical knowledge, showing how historical understanding can inform contemporary environmental action.

"Very well organised... interesting discussions interpreting the detail in the items, and input from participants with different knowledge bases."

The workshop also prompted reflections on accessibility. While it successfully reached local participants, feedback highlighted the need to broaden engagement beyond familiar networks.

"Art may reach a different audience... although effort needs to be made to involve people in other areas or with different backgrounds."

Themes of historic enclosure, vegetation change, and shifting farming practices emerged, connecting archival evidence to lived memory. The session was particularly significant for the Raby Archive, marking its first farmer-engaged event during Joseph Reed's tenure in a shift toward participatory heritage practice. This spotlight event exemplified Matt's approach: creating spaces where diverse knowledge systems meet, and where creative practice bridges past and present, policy and place.

Autumn Returns: Reflection, Challenges and Adaptations

As the cycle returned to autumn, Matt's work entered a phase of reflection: gathering the fruits of a year's engagement, while acknowledging the challenges that shaped its course. The residency had grown organically, navigating the delicate balance between artistic programming and ecological rhythms with constant adaptation.

The brief flowering seasons of rare plants created pressure to time activities precisely, when both ecological conditions and community availability aligned. External factors added further complexity: lambing season brought UTASS operations to a near standstill, unpredictable weather disrupted outdoor plans, and Teesdale's remoteness demanded careful logistical support for participants.

Matt's reflective documentation reveals how these constraints became opportunities for learning. His response was to move with rather than push against the seasons. Winter landscapes, once seen as barren, revealed "*poetic encounters*" and unexpected richness. Walk routes were adjusted when introductions ran long. Conversations were reshaped in real time, guided by the needs and energies of those present.



Balancing accessibility with depth was a consistent challenge. Participants came with vastly different levels of specialist knowledge, and Matt's adaptive strategies, like providing cameras and microscopes, enabled inclusive dialogue without diluting complexity. These tools became bridges, allowing people to engage with the landscape in ways that felt personal and empowering.

The geographic and cultural specificity of Teesdale offered both intimacy and limitation. The tight-knit community enabled deep relationship-building, but Matt wondered if participation often reflected "*those already engaged in high nature value farming*" rather than the full diversity of the agricultural sector.

Throughout, Matt's approach remained responsive. By integrating multiple data sources, including his own reflective diary, participant feedback, and survey responses, he adjusted course thoughtfully and transparently. The creative work offered a space for expression and for making sense of wider systemic pressures, such as uncertainty around agricultural policy.

The value of Matt's intervention wasn't only in what it achieved, but in how it responded to the realities on the ground. Challenges were not detours, but part of the journey. Matt's careful approach helped lay a path that others could build on and adapt.

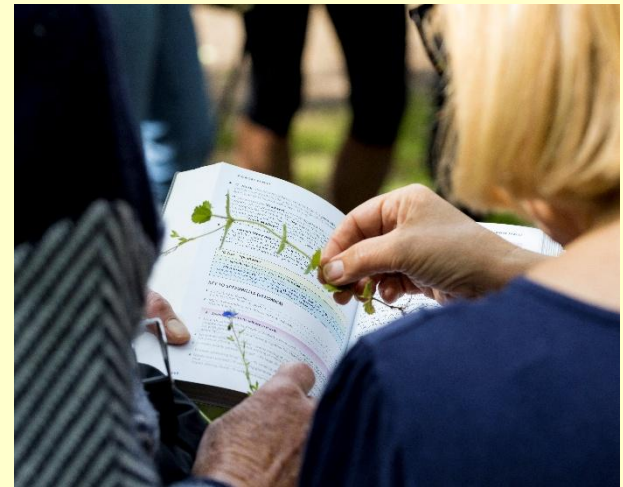


Evidence and Validation:

During this final season of reflection, the evidence of Matt's impact came into full view: not just in stories and impressions, but in a robust, multi-layered body of data. The integration of reflective documentation, participant feedback, and quantitative survey results created a rich and reliable foundation for understanding the depth and breadth of the intervention.

Cross-referencing these sources revealed consistent themes. Diary entries about unprecedented collaborations were echoed in participant testimonials and confirmed by perfect scores for environmental awareness and nature connection. The Culture Counts survey showed universal satisfaction, but the real nuance came from Matt's own reflections, documenting the active facilitation required to create inclusive, meaningful dialogue.

This multi-source approach allowed for a more textured understanding of the work. It celebrated outcomes while acknowledging the uncertainties and adaptations that shaped the journey. The process was not linear: it was iterative, responsive, and deeply respectful of the human and more-than-human.



Case Study: Laura - Wearing the Uplands

Introduction: Artist and Intervention Overview

Laura Harrington's work began in the spaces between sheep and soil, stitch and story, ecology and craft. Her practice is rooted in process-led inquiry, where outputs are not endpoints but vessels: *"containers for gestures, conversations, scales, and shared processes."* Through this approach, Laura invited us to reconsider the relationship between farming and nature as entangled systems, shaped by negotiation, care, and co-existence.

Over the past year, *Wearing the Uplands* unfolded across Teesdale's upland landscapes, where people, sheep, weather, and terrain are inseparably connected. The project grew from conversations about upland wool, often undervalued since the 1950s, and the role of sheep in shaping ecological rhythms, from overgrazing to biodiversity loss and nature recovery. Wool became more than a material; it became a messenger. Each fleece carried the imprint of place, climate, soil, and terrain woven into its fibres.

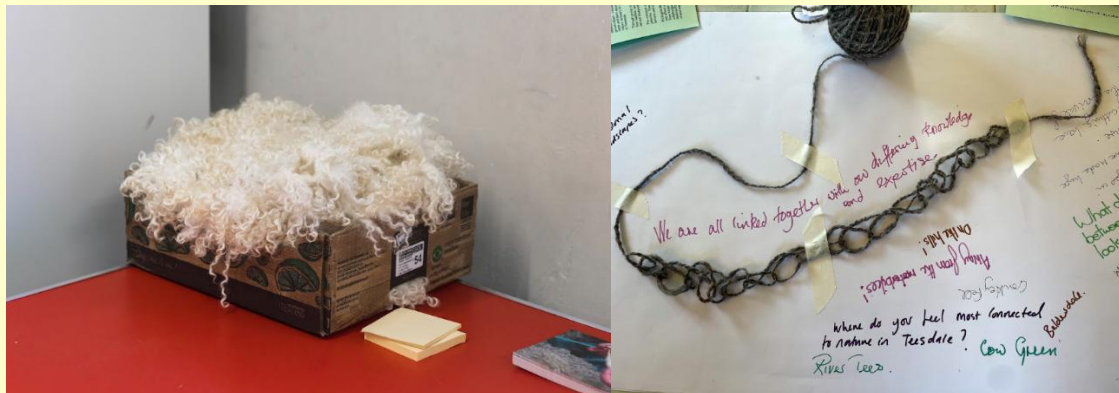
Laura spent time with farmers, young people, conservationists, ecologists and spinners listening to the interconnections between human and more-than-human worlds. Wool acted as a conduit for shared and unfolding conversations around farming, ecology, and change.



The project had two interwoven strands:

- A series of group events, workshops, and gatherings inspired by the spirit of spinning, knitting, and weaving circles, culminating in a film that wove together voices, places, and processes encountered along the way.
- The conceptual journey of a **knitted Sphagnum Bog Jumper**, not as a fixed outcome, but as a co-creative process. This garment, crafted to echo the textures and resilience of upland peatlands, would become an anchor for dialogue and imagination, bringing together farmers, wool processors, spinners, knitters, weavers, and activists advocating for regenerative textile systems.

The jumper, when completed, will embody the project's ethos: a living landscape inviting reflection on ecological entanglement and the quiet power of making.



👤 Laura's work was shaped by many voices:

- **Farmers:**
Linda (Howgill Grange), Paul (Harewood farm), Karen (Low Way farm), Val (knitter at Carlbeck)
- **Community Groups:**
Wensleydale Youth Rangers, Teesdale School students, Carlbeck Spinners and Weavers Group, UTASS Craft and Chat.
- **Specialists:**
Naomi Richardson (Microscopic analysis of wool fibre, Northumbria University); Martin Furness (Natural England); Margaret Bradshaw (renowned botanist); Emmy Hoyes (Yorkshire Wild Wool); Becca Losh (natural dyer); Lucinda Bird (Benridge Woolworks, Hartlepool); Zoe Fletcher (Wool Library); Rob Smith (drawing/pattern design); Anne Le Brocq (scientist/knitter and geographer).
- **YDNPA and NPNL Staff, Trainees and Volunteers**

🍁❄️ Autumn into Winter: Building Bridges Through Wool

As the uplands turned golden and the air grew colder, Laura's work began in muddy fields and warm community rooms. The project's power lay in its ability to reveal wool not just as a material, but as a thread that binds landscapes, livelihoods, and lives.

The collaboration began through a chance encounter: Laura met Linda during a hedge planting volunteer session, boots heavy with mud, conversation light but meaningful. Talk turned to wool tree guards - an innovative, practical use of fleece - and from there, a deeper dialogue emerged. Wool, they agreed, *"links everything together"*, from the land that feeds sheep to the hands that spin, knit, and weave its fibres into garments that carry the imprint of place.

Through the colder months, Laura spent time with community groups, including knitters, spinners, and UTASS participants, listening, learning, and gently stitching together a network of relationships. Her approach created spaces where conversations could stretch beyond transactions and tasks. Linda reflected, *"You go to a mart and you go in there for a specific reason... And you're not necessarily stood there having the conversations about wool. But it's not just wool - it's like everything that wool represents."*

Laura's work offered a different kind of space, where the act of making became an opportunity to reflect, connect, and imagine. In these rooms and fields, wool became a bridge: between farming and craft, between past and future, between the human and more-than-human world.



Spring into Summer: Knitting the Landscape

As spring unfolded across Teesdale, Laura's work began to bloom into public view. The flagship **Knitting the Landscape** event at UTASS in Middleton-in-Teesdale marked a turning point, drawing participants from across the region to engage in conversations that wove together farming, craft, ecology, and imagination.

Co-facilitated with Anne Le Brocq, a geographer and knitter, the event brought together farmers, makers, dyers, and academics in what Laura described as “*significant*” conversations, offering “*much room for further reflection.*” The gathering echoed the spirit of spinning circles - gentle, grounded, and generative.

Participants arrived with a shared interest in the intersections between craft, community, and the natural environment. Many were local knitters and spinners, drawn by the chance to meet like-minded people and explore how wool, sheep, and landscape are connected. One participant hoped to “*get [their] own sheep,*” while another had previously worked at Moor House, illustrating the diversity of perspectives and lived experience in the room.

The event sparked new ways of seeing. Participants spoke of the “*micro scale of diversity in the local environment,*” recognised sheep as “*carbon sinks,*” and reflected on the importance of working “*efficiently and respectfully, each valuing the other's experience and knowledge.*” For some, the impact was immediate and practical. One was encouraged to



process more of their own wool, while another described a realisation of how art can enrich and build on the environment.

The event was well more attended than anticipated, which created more voices in the room but left less space for those voices to contribute. One participant noted that while there was *“an enormous amount of expertise in the room,”* extra time was therefore needed to create balanced spaces for dialogue, where every thread of knowledge can be woven in.



🌞 **Summer: Knowledge Exchange and Environmental Awareness**

As summer deepened, the project revealed the sophisticated environmental knowledge already embedded within farming and craft communities. The Carlbeck Spinning, Knitting and Weaving Group demonstrated a deep understanding of wool varieties, seasonal shifts, and climate impacts. Their work is rooted in place, inspired by Teesdale’s communities, moors and skies.

Farmer Linda’s insights were particularly striking. Through conversations with ecologist Margaret, she made connections between weather patterns and plant variations, identifying micro-climate phenomena that even heritage society members *“hadn't actually noticed.”* Her farm supports significant biodiversity, with bird counts



revealing “40 odd different species... And a lot of them are your red listed birds, such as your lapwings, your black grouse, your curlews.”

Perhaps most powerfully, participants understood wool as carrying complete ecological and emotional histories. One postcard reflection captured this beautifully:

“When I hold a lock of raw fleece in my hands I'm connecting with the ewe. If she's lambed, if she's been stressed. Where she has laid. What she's eaten. What she's scratched up against. I hold a year of her life.”

This quiet reverence for wool, as memory, material, and metaphor, lay at the heart of the project. It invited participants to see the landscape not just as backdrop, but as collaborator. And in doing so, it stitched together a deeper understanding of how human and more-than-human lives are interwoven.

🌻 🌿 **Late Summer: Bridging Knowledge Systems**

As summer matured, the project began to reveal its deeper layers, not just in events and outputs, but in the quiet weaving together of knowledge systems that rarely meet.

Laura’s work created space for conversations that bridged practical farming expertise with the nuanced understanding of craft communities.



Farmer Linda captured this beautifully:

“Thinking of a farmer's welfare perspective and how that fleece works for the sheep and keeps it insulated over winter,” she explained, contrasts with how crafters assess “the crimp, the length, the staple strength.” Laura’s research and facilitation helped connect these perspectives, revealing wool as both a biological necessity and a cultural material.

The project also addressed structural challenges. Linda noted:

“A farmer hasn't got the time available... They don't physically have that time to sit down and read through it and decide what makes a good fleece and what doesn't.”

Laura’s time and research capacity filled a genuine gap, bringing external knowledge about wool’s craft potential to farmers who held deep practical expertise but lacked access to end-use markets.

Perhaps most powerfully, the collaboration sparked unexpected conversations within farming communities themselves. *“By meeting up with [Laura], I've then gone to other events and talked to other people that I wouldn't normally connect with,”* Linda shared. After the final event, Linda contacted Laura to reflect that: *“The work [done by] you and everyone involved in the projects is invaluable in not only creating the initial connections but also in allowing them time to flourish and grow in a safe space where people can express their views and ideas but also have discussions and even challenge preconceptions of ideas (their own and others’).”*



Autumn Returns: Impact, Learning and Legacy

As the landscape began to turn once more, the project entered a phase of reflection and quiet consolidation. The impact was felt not only in individual learning, but in the strengthening of relationships and the emergence of new ways of thinking.

Participants developed deeper environmental awareness through material connection to place. Within craft groups, technical skills were passed across generations, and traditional practices were linked to contemporary ecological concerns. Laura's collaboration with Anne Le Brocq demonstrated the power of interdisciplinary facilitation, while connections to the Wool Board in Bradford and Northern Heartlands programming showed how local actions could ripple outward into regional and national networks.

The project's process-led approach laid foundations for sustained engagement. Linda reflected:

"I think it's cemented the fact that we still need to have conversations with fellow farmers, neighbours, those further afield, but it's also important to keep reading and hearing what is available."

Laura's decision to work intensively with core groups in Teesdale, while maintaining Swaledale connections, proved effective. Rather than spreading thinly, she focused on depth, building trust, listening carefully, and amplifying existing expertise.



Most significantly, the project demonstrated how artistic practice can create spaces for conversations that wouldn't otherwise occur. By treating participants as knowledge holders, not subjects, Laura enabled mutual exchange. Farmers gained insight into craft markets; crafters deepened their understanding of animal welfare and land stewardship.

Wool, once seen as a byproduct, became a metaphor for connection. As one participant reflected: *"When I hold a lock of raw fleece in my hands I'm connecting with the ewe... I hold a year of her life."*

Laura's legacy film [Wearing the Uplands](#) (password: *TeesSwale:WearingtheUplands*) offers a contemplative, human-focused portrait of an upland landscape shaped by collaboration, climate, and craft. Through an observational lens, it documents the making of a jumper as a process deeply entwined with people, land, and animals, gathering voices and textures along the way. As a legacy artefact, the film preserves the project's ethos and exchanges. Future screenings and community dialogues will extend its impact, inviting reflection on material, place, and the conversations that making can spark.



Case Study: John and Tim - Rising and Falling: Listening through Swaledale

Introduction: Artist and Intervention Overview

John Coburn and Tim Shaw's residency as Wild Museum unfolded as a year-long sonic journey through Swaledale, where sound became both method and metaphor. Rooted in experimental sound art and collaborative storytelling, their practice invited communities to listen differently: to hear the land not just as backdrop, but as archive, witness, and voice.

Working across moorlands, rivers, farms, and ruins, they captured the sonic identities of a changing landscape. From electromagnetic recordings beneath Ivet Bridge to oral histories layered into the echoing walls of Crackpot Hall, their work traced the rhythms of farming, ecology, and weather, amplifying voices often lost in the noise of change.

John and Tim worked closely with farmers, landowners, conservationists, and the wider public, creating sonic interventions, sound walks, and 24/7 audio streams from working farms. They even installed recording equipment on Dragonfly, a Swaledale sheep, inviting listeners to experience the landscape from a non-human perspective.

Their archive, *Rising and Falling: Listening through Swaledale*, now holds a year's worth of voices, wildlife, and weather: a living memory of place, and a provocation for future conversations.



🍁❄️ Autumn into Winter: Listening Foundations and Embedded Practice

As autumn arrived in Swaledale, John and Tim began their residency with a microphone and a guiding question: *What does this landscape sound like when we take the time to listen?*

Autumn was a time of immersion; walking, listening, and tuning into the layered frequencies of place. From the echoing ruins of Crackpot Hall to the fast-flowing waters of the River Swale, they traced sonic identities shaped by farming, weather, and time. Their early site visits, guided by local contacts and supported by the Yorkshire Dales team, laid the groundwork for a residency rooted in curiosity and care.

"We were quite set that we wanted to work in Swaledale," John reflected. *"It's a got a postcard picturesque quality that can almost mask its more complex identities and histories."* Beneath the surface beauty lay histories of lead mining, shifting river courses, and changing land management practices.

They built relationships gradually, through chance conversations in cafés, introductions from rangers, speculative emails, and time spent in cattle marts, following threads and introductions from those they met. *"Once you've found the right contact, that opens doors,"* John explained. *"It was important that when we first spoke with farmers and landowners we weren't seen to objectify them. We also wanted to present this is an opportunity for a proper collaboration, for it to be something they felt had value".*



Their methodology helped build trust, especially among farmers who might be wary of arts-led projects. *“I haven’t met any really tricky farmers yet,”* John noted. *“They’ve been open to conversation, especially when it’s clear we’re not here to judge or disrupt.”* Their sound-based practice offered a neutral space where people could reflect without feeling exposed.

The River Swale became a central motif. *“It’s apparently the fastest flowing river in the UK,”* John shared. *“It fills up quickly, changes course constantly. It’s a metaphor for the landscape itself - always moving, always changing, shaping and threatening the farming that happens here.”* Farmers spoke of how flooding and land drainage had changed over time, how subsidies once encouraged draining the land, and how those choices now echo in the river’s restless flow.

Their recordings captured memories as well as sounds. Underground acoustics from industrial tunnels, electromagnetic pulses from moorlands, and oral histories from farmers and fell runners all became part of a growing archive. *“We’re interested in how sounds we hear today can speak to the story of what’s changed,”* John said. *“What’s no longer here? What might we lose next?”*

Winter deepened their inquiry. The landscape quietened, but the questions grew louder. What does it mean to farm here now? What stories lie beneath the soil, the stone, the silence? Their sonic experiments, including a 24 hour livestream from outside



Cath's farmhouse and wearable tech on a Swaledale sheep, invited listeners to inhabit the landscape from new perspectives, to hear with different ears.

Their practice remained rooted in careful observation and a respect for the complexities of place. *"We don't want to present good versus bad farming,"* John explained. *"We want to create space for conversation about abundance and loss, about what's changed and what might change still."* Their sound walks and installations invited reflection and discussion.

🌱☀️ **Spring into Summer: Sound Walks and Sonic Memory**

As Swaledale began to green and the river swelled with spring melt, John and Tim's work moved from quiet listening to shared experience. The embedded practice of autumn and winter gave way to public sound walks, sonic interventions, and spontaneous conversations - moments where the landscape spoke, and people listened.

From May to July, their sound-based events invited participants to engage with the land through headphones, horn speakers, and stream boxes. Each walk became a portal into the layered sonic identity of Swaledale: the buzz of insects in restored meadows, the hum of underground water, the distant echo of historical voices. The archive material allowed participants to hear the stories of those who had worked the land in the past: *"hearing certain farmers speak about the land or their upbringing in a particular area and describing the sounds of that area, it made me feel like I was there with them."*



One YDNPA engagement trainee who took part in the sounds walks described how John and Tim had explained the stories behind the sounds they were capturing, which *“put into perspective how important certain sounds or activities were to people... I got an insight into the importance of people's culture historically, things that meant a lot to them.”*

The sonic routes traced the River Swale from its source at Birkdale Beck to Low Row, with each intervention building upon the last. Underground recordings captured the hidden acoustics of caves and moorlands. At Crackpot Hall, a ruined farmhouse became a site for sonic storytelling, where past and present voices met in the wind.

“I've walked this path a hundred times,” one participant said, *“but I've never heard it like this.”* Another reflected, *“The sound of the river made me think about how fast it's changing - it's not just water, it's history.”*

The feedback was rich and varied. A participant who had lived in the area for over 30 years shared, *“That was amazing. I can hear all these sounds more loudly - that hasn't happened in years.”* A retired youth worker and caver spoke of mapping underground networks through sound, while a social enterprise leader saw potential for sound to support confidence-building in green spaces. One participant described being *“tricked into thinking about this place in winter, when it's dead, and then when it's full of life, birdlife and people.”*



These walks became spaces for sensory awakening and new thinking. *“Walking with others you normally talk and do not hear your surroundings so this was an unusual experience,”* one person noted. Another added, *“I just listened instead of looking.”*

Even those who spent much of their time in Teesdale were inspired to see the land in a new way. One engagement trainee with YDNPA commented: *“I had the opportunity to immerse myself within the landscape and hear what was going on in places that to the naked eye and to the ear you can't hear, it deepened my connection to the landscape and it made me feel more appreciative of what was around me.”*

The sonic archive, *Rising and Falling: Listening through Swaledale*, grew with each encounter. It became a living memory of place, holding voices, weather, and wildlife in a form that could be revisited, reimagined, and shared.

Margaret Bradshaw's reflections added botanical depth to the soundscape. She spoke of the changing meadows: *“They're working on bringing meadows back to what they were like - more colourful and appreciated. People have got to realise they need appropriate care.”* Her critique of overgrazing policies in the 1990s and her call for nuanced understanding of High Nature Value farming echoed through the walks.

Matt N, a Yorkshire Dales ranger and ultra-runner, offered a reflective account of climate change's impact on the land. *“We lost about 12 bridges and a set or two of stepping stones,”* he recalled after a storm. His observations of habitat shifts, particularly for short-eared owls, highlighted how extreme weather events are reshaping



Swaledale's ecology. *"They're a ground-nesting owl and they love this sort of long vegetation... it's a really great hunting area."*

The conversations with farmers, landowners, and community members revealed a complex and sometimes contradictory relationship with High Nature Value farming. One officer from YDNPA suggested that many Swaledale farmers follow HNV practices out of sentiment - *"to return the meadows to how they were in their childhood."* But others, like farmer Cath, emphasised economics: *"Farmers listen first and foremost to the economics of the argument."*

John and Tim's reflections show a growing awareness of the sensitivities surrounding HNV, aiming *"to avoid a polarised argument that reductively places art in the camp of environmental stewardship and by association is anti-sheep farming."* Instead, they aimed to provoke conversations through the aesthetic experience of sound - abundance, loss, and change - inviting people to ask: *What are we losing every year? What do we gain? What does this land need more of?*

As summer deepened, the legacy of these interventions began to take root. The Dales Countryside Museum expressed interest in using sound as part of a new youth engagement programme. Farmers, artists, and conservationists found common ground in the act of listening. And participants, whether local or visiting, left with a renewed sense of place, shaped not by sight, but by sound.



🌸 Autumn Returns: Reflection, Complexity and Sonic Legacy

As the year turned and the river slowed, John and Tim's residency entered its final phase of reflection and repository. The sonic archive they had built over months of walking, listening, and recording had become more than a collection of sounds - it was a living memory of Swaledale's layered identity. Their work revealed the landscape not as static, but as dynamic and constantly changing, shaped by weather, farming, biodiversity, and time. The River Swale, fast and unpredictable, became a metaphor for this change.

Listening became a way of knowing, connecting, and remembering, and the sound walks prompted deep sensory engagement. *"It ended up completely heightening my other senses and made me connect to the place a lot more,"* one participant shared. Another reflected, *"Listening to sounds more acutely and in HD made the experience very interesting... it felt like a completely new way of seeing (hearing) this place."*

And perhaps most poignantly: ***"I just listened instead of looking."*** This simple reflection summed up the residency, with its invitation to shift perception and tune in rather than pass by.

Margaret's voice echoed through the archive, calling for care and attention: *"People have got to realise [the meadows] need appropriate care"*, while Matt N's observations of the impact of extreme weather conditions on the land added urgency.



The residency also revealed the complexity of farmer perspectives, and John and Tim's reflections show a growing awareness of the sensitivities surrounding High Nature Value (HNV) farming, exploring what has changed and what might change still.

Participants were particularly moved by the oral histories they heard. One shared: *"Listening to the interviews relating past work practices was very informative, as were discussions around changes to livestock management with others on the walk."* Another noted that they *"loved listening to old sounds of the area... and thinking about how it's all changing."*

The experience also shifted perceptions of art itself, with one participant sharing that *"It shows that artists can help you connect to a place with all your senses, and therefore make the encounter truly memorable."* Another noted: *"To learn that the farm community welcome sonic researchers is great."*

The project's legacy lies not in a single artwork, but in a method: a way of listening that invites both reflection and conversation. The awe and wonder of hearing the landscape was evident in the participant feedback, with statements including: *"I had never considered the importance of sounds and listening first and foremost to the environment;"* and *"I need to listen more when I am out and about. Also, I had never thought of nature being a DJ."*



Case Study: Azadeh - Presence, Reciprocity and the Memory of Land

Introduction: Artist and Intervention Overview

Azadeh Fatehrad's residency unfolded as a year-long psychogeographical journey through Teesdale and Swaledale, exploring how landscapes are perceived, experienced, and understood by people from different backgrounds and perspectives. Her practice, rooted in participatory storytelling and collective authorship, invited farmers, residents, volunteers, and team members to become co-researchers, shaping the project through shared experience and dialogue. She noted that her approach is *"led by those I encounter - working organically, responsively, and collaboratively."*

Rather than following a fixed plan, Azadeh's work evolved through presence and reciprocity. She joined lambing, hedge planting, darts nights, and community meals, gathering stories in barns, kitchens, village halls, and under the stars at Grassholme Observatory. Her methodology prioritised deep listening and emotional geographies, recognising that meaningful engagement happens within the rhythms of daily life.

Over the course of the year, Azadeh captured 24 individual stories and mapped them as part of a growing archive - an interactive artwork that traces emotional and ecological connections across the valleys. She worked closely with YDNPA and NPNL teams, including filming with drones to document landscape perspectives from above.



Her creative outputs include a fiction documentary film, 56 collages, a poetry collection, a community zine, and a story-map - all designed to return stories to the communities who shaped them.

The residency began with focus groups and informal consultations, laying the groundwork for participatory workshops and collective authorship. Azadeh's work reframes farming not only as livelihood, but as cultural heritage, carried in tools, rituals, skies, and stories. It asks how we remember, how we belong, and how we listen to the land.

Autumn into Winter: Listening Begins in the Valleys

Azadeh's residency began as a co-researcher rather than an observer. She entered Teesdale and Swaledale "at lambing time," joining farmers in barns, kitchens, and village halls. Her practice, rooted in psychogeography, participatory storytelling, and collective authorship, was guided by reciprocity and deep listening.

Azadeh's conversations, often over mugs of tea in farmhouse kitchens, revealed the systemic pressures facing upland farmers: tenancy insecurity, policy disconnection, and cultural rupture. Early in the residency, she discovered the extent of the tension between ecological responsibility and financial survival, with one farmer saying "You can't go green when you're in the red."

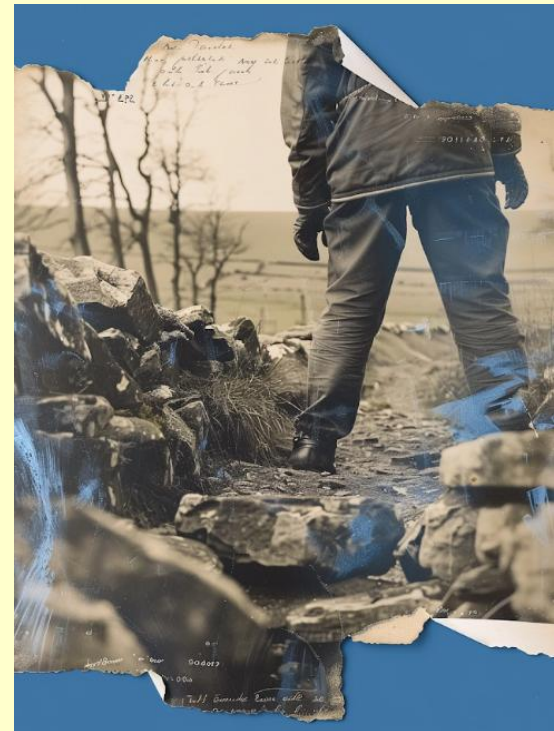


Farmers noted the differing views of policymakers and those who worked the land: *“Policies designed in offices rarely take account of the heft of a stone wall or the late coming of grass in shaded valleys.”*

Her methodology was immersive and intimate. She described these spaces as *“ordinary places that became unexpected creative hubs,”* where the rhythms of daily life shaped the contours of dialogue. Farmers shared their ecological and cultural knowledge as she worked alongside them in the fields: *“Scythe work is practical, ecological, and cultural technology... it allows wildflowers to stand and silence to return to the meadow.”*

Spring into Summer: Collective Voice and Creative Grounding

As Teesdale began to green and the lambs grew strong, Azadeh’s work shifted from quiet listening to shared authorship. The May 2025 gatherings, organised collaboratively with Matt and Laura and held at The Farmhouse Kitchen in Middleton-in-Teesdale, marked a turning point. Long tables were scattered with moss, candles, archival photographs, wool threads, and markers. The setting was both informal and ceremonial, inviting openness and reflection. Participants wrote and drew directly onto large sheets of paper. Their words were raw, immediate, and deeply rooted in place. The project evolved from listening to co-authoring, with the community itself becoming a storyteller. *“The table itself became an altar to shared memory.”*



As a result, the participants connected over their shared memories, with one noting “We are all linked together with our different knowledge and expertise.”

When asked what a good relationship between farming and nature looks like, responses spoke of balance, compromise, and care:

“Farmers understanding that their practice is vital to support nature.”

“Small changes in farming procedures have made huge improvements for nature - changes in hay cutting have greatly helped the survival of corncrakes.”

The land itself was imagined as a participant in the dialogue. When prompted, *What would the land say if it could speak?*, several wrote a single word: “**Help!**” - a stark call echoing through the candlelight and wool threads.

The reflections were rich with memories and specific references to place. People named places like Crowdy Fell, Baldersdale, and Cow Green, where they had grown up, worked, raised families, walked and played. The landscape was home to many of them, and their farms more than a livelihood, with one noting that “*Leaving the farm at the end of the tenancy is like a bereavement.*”

Drawings bloomed beside the words: hawthorn and rowan, globeflowers painted yellow, cattle heads sketched with gentle lines. One participant recalled an ecological encounter from their past: “*Memory as a student about 1970, volunteering with Margaret Bradshaw, mapping Wildbank flora.*”



There was laughter too, woven into the scrawl: *“My girlfriend fell into a pool of nitrogen moss - I got into trouble trying to pull her out - while she was wet and laughing, I fell into her heart.”*

The wool threads stretched across the papers became a visual metaphor, linking thoughts and lived experiences. Participants spoke of timeless roots, places of peace, and the importance of passing on respect and knowledge to the next generation.

“That there are places of peace; a guide if you explore a bit.”

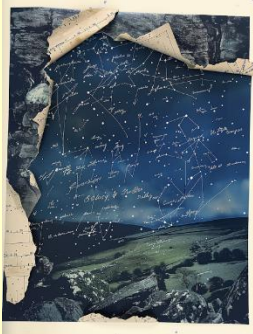
“Respect and knowledge of the importance of this place.”

“Timeless roots.”

Azadeh’s embedded presence created a foundation of trust. Her April reflections show how these everyday encounters shaped her developing creative outputs: photographs, sound recordings, object-based artworks, and a film exploring the emotional landscapes of farming life. Azadeh explained: *“I’m especially interested in how land is felt, remembered, and worked, and how art might open up new ways of recognising these deeply embedded relationships.”*



Spotlight Event: Grassholme Observatory Reflection



Date & Location: 22nd August 2025, Grassholme Observatory, Teesdale

Participants: Observatory staff, farmers, residents, artists, and community members

Themes: Cultural heritage, ecological sacrifice, memory, and belonging

As dusk settled over Teesdale, Azadeh's visit to Grassholme Observatory became a moment of quiet revelation. Guided by the observatory team, she listened to stories of constellations, farming rhythms, and the night sky as a cultural archive. The stars, older than fields and walls, offered a sense of time beyond policy and debt.

"The night sky is not a luxury of wonder; it is a cultural heritage in its own right."

But Grassholme is also a site of rupture. Built in 1914, the reservoir submerged farmland and displaced families, a valley drowned so another could drink. Bridges were raised and homes lost. Many memories lie beneath the now still waters. Azadeh reflected that *"Reservoirs are not just water but drowned valleys; heritage is not just barns on postcards but labour unpaid."*

Nearby, Kirkcarrion, a Bronze Age burial mound, stood as a counterpoint: a place of endurance, reverence, and rootedness. Locals speak of it almost as a living thing, a marker of belonging carried through generations.

"The juxtaposition of Grassholme and Kirkcarrion is striking: one a landscape of sacrifice, loss, and forced change; the other a landmark of continuity and cultural rootedness." This reflection became a central essay within Azadeh's zine, deepening the project's themes of memory, displacement, and cultural survival.

The Grassholme visit invited participants to consider what is remembered, what is lost, and what must be reclaimed. It asked not only how we see the land, but how we tell its stories.

🌻 Summer into Autumn: Cultural Landscapes and Expanding Horizons

As summer deepened across Teesdale and Swaledale, Azadeh's work expanded from local encounters to broader dialogues. The National Landscape sessions in July 2025 brought new perspectives, revealing how High Nature Value (HNV) farming is not only ecological, but cultural, social, and political.

Azadeh reflected that *"These landscapes are not only reservoirs of biodiversity; they are lived spaces, marked by memory, identity, and sometimes exclusion."*

Discussions on climate and exclusion exposed the invisible barriers that shape who feels welcome in rural spaces. One participant's words lingered:

"We actively don't have the privilege for this to be our priority."

Another participant felt that there was a sense of *"Nature is not for us"*, prompting Azadeh to reflect on how xenophobia, anti-Muslim hostility, and structural inequality create landscapes of alienation. For HNV farming to thrive, it must dismantle these barriers and become a shared cultural-ecological space.

The sessions offered practical solutions: training community ambassadors, integrating green spaces into planning, improving transport, and celebrating cultural diversity. Artistic frameworks like *Arte Útil* and *New Eyes for Nidderdale* resonated deeply, demonstrating that art can transform how communities relate to land, farming, and belonging.



Azadeh reflected that *“Art can act as a tool of transformation... helping communities unpack complex relationships with land, farming, and production.”*

Her creative outputs of film, collage, poetry, and interactive mapping continued to evolve. Each piece held the contradictions of the uplands: survival and loss, continuity and rupture, beauty and burden.

She became conscious with every conversation and every interaction that *“To lose farmers is not only to lose food production; it is to unravel memory, to sever cultural continuity, to silence voices that hold knowledge of how to live with the land.”*

The zine became the connective tissue of the commission - a shared object, not a detached document. It returned stories to the community, reframing farming as cultural heritage carried in barns, tools, skies, and rituals.

“Farming here is survival, but it is also community, belonging, and story.”

🌸 **Autumn Returns: Reflection, Continuity and Cultural Legacy**

As the year turned and the skies darkened over Teesdale and Swaledale, Azadeh’s residency entered its final phase, a season of reflection and review. The creative outputs, shaped through months of embedded presence, began to circulate back into the communities that had authored them.



The zine, nearing completion, became a shared object, woven with poetic fragments, archival textures, and community testimony. It was not a report, but a reimagining: a tactile archive of lived experience, designed to be held, read, and remembered.

The fiction documentary film, collages, and interactive map carried the resonance of place. They translated farming life into layered forms - sound, image, and story - that could speak across boundaries of policy, memory, and time.

Autumn also brought a deeper reckoning with the systemic patterns that shape rural precarity. Archival echoes from the 1990s revealed how tenancy loss, conservation policy, and cultural erosion are not new, but are part of a long, unresolved story. The creative methods of writing, drawing and arranging natural materials allowed participants to articulate relationships to land that were both personal and political.

🍁 **Legacy and Learning: Systems, Stories and Future Pathways**

Azadeh's methodology of presence, reciprocity, and collective authorship offers a replicable model for community-engaged creative practice. Her work moved between scales: from kitchen conversations to vast reservoir landscapes, from individual grief to systemic critique.

Her engagement with the National Landscape programme expanded the project's scope, revealing how ecological work must also address social and cultural



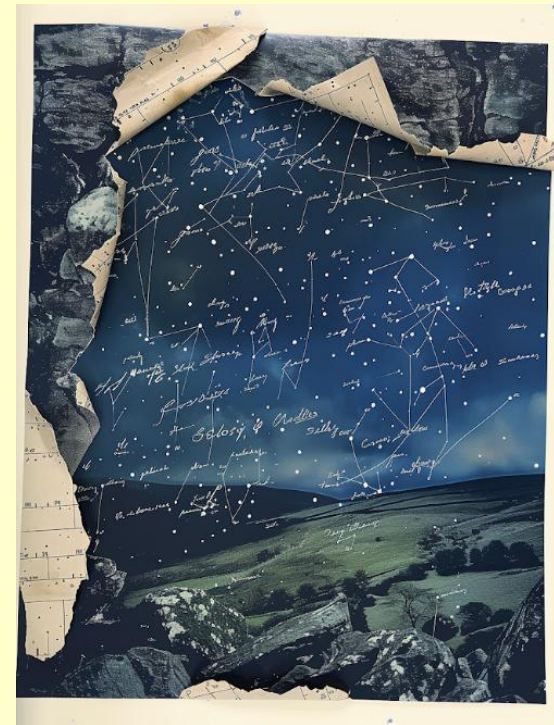
dimensions. Discussions on climate and exclusion exposed how structural barriers including xenophobia, economic inequality, and cultural disconnection shape who feels welcome in rural spaces.

Azadeh's reflections on intersectionality - how identity, memory, and access intersect - reinforced her commitment to inclusive language and shared ownership. Her work shows that High Nature Value Farming cannot be understood through biodiversity metrics alone. It must include emotional geographies, cultural heritage, and lived experience.

The creative outputs of film, collage, poetry, and zine are not just documentation. They are invitations: to listen differently, to honour continuity, and to recognise farming as a form of cultural stewardship. She noted that in Teesdale-Swaledale, *"Farming here is survival, but it is also community, belonging, and story."*

As the residency drew to a close, the question that had emerged in candlelight and wool threads continued to echo through workshops, constellations, and conversations:

"I remember you. Will you remember me?"



Section 5: Planting the Seeds for the Future



Gathering It All Together and Planting the Seeds for the Future

Reflections from the final event at Raby Castle, 19th September 2025

The final gathering of the Tees-Swale: Naturally Connected programme took place at Raby Castle acting as a conclusion to the year of work, and the beginning of its legacy.

Where “Autumn Returns” traced the rhythms of land and learning, this event brought those threads together: artists, farmers, educators, and community members converging to share stories, sow ideas, and imagine what might come next.

The conversations, creative encounters, and the seeds it planted for future collaboration were captured through conversation and observation, feedback from participants during the workshops, and online questionnaire data gathered post-event.

Participants described the event as “*inspiring,*” “*challenging,*” and “*eye-opening.*” Many left with a renewed sense of purpose and possibility:

***“This event was truly eye-opening!
I had little knowledge about the topic
before attending.
It was amazing and I talked about it
for days. You have inspired me.”***

***“Meeting new people, catching up
with those already known, listening
and learning how the project has
evolved and the positive impacts it
has had... but also the challenges still
facing the Dales areas.”***

***“I’ve gone from feeling out of my
depth – I ‘just’ knit, spin, weave – but
here I can join in and hear different
views, see their side of things, realise
how much we have in common.”***



The event sparked new ideas and commitments. Some participants spoke of wanting to volunteer, others of applying what they'd learned to their own work. One attendee shared:

"I would like to share my learning from today with colleagues and friends to help change perceptions."

Another reflected on the power of creative approaches:

"It helps identify 'new routes to unlocking fascination in our surroundings' to quote Chris Woodley-Stewart!"

The day was also praised for its atmosphere - welcoming, non-hierarchical, and rich with sensory and emotional engagement:

"Lack of judgement, free to have views, no wrong answers."

"This is a gentler way of learning, it implants in my brain more."

"[I enjoyed] The sound workshop and chats around lunch."

"Workshops were inspiring, challenging and cause for reflection."

The diverse voices and people from all backgrounds meant that conversations were rich and multi-layered, yet held a shared vision, with one participant noting:

"It's amazing to have a room with such diverse people and to find such commonality of thinking."

From sound walks to poetry, seed planting to wool handling, the event offered tactile and imaginative ways to explore landscape and sustainability.



Angela, an artist, educator, parent, and Teesdale resident, attended every activity hosted by artist Matt, accompanied by her son. She spoke of the event's layered impact:

"Creativity is about emotion and empathy and feeling... Through creativity, you can say things about the landscape that you can't describe in any other way. It's created a lot of connections between people from all walks of life... a much deeper understanding that everybody who participated would have to walk away with."

Paul, a tenant farmer, reflected on the challenges and responsibilities of upland farming, and the unexpected common ground he found with climate activists and artists:

"Some of the methods I wouldn't agree with, but what they want to achieve - respect for the land, for communities - isn't so different. This project makes you think more... there's got to be room for everybody to express the connections in how they do it."

The panel discussion echoed these themes, with speakers calling for more inclusive, creative approaches to conservation and policymaking. David Renwick, Regional Director North for Natural England, shared:

"I'm a massive advocate for how creativity can unlock the way we think, have natural conversations and listen... Culture is a catalyst to allow us to have those different types of conversations."

Jill, from Northern Heartlands, emphasised the power of the arts to influence policy and deepen engagement:

"In the creative process, you can get that feeling inside you that it does matter and it matters to you personally."

The event also raised questions about legacy, equity, and future collaboration. Angela noted the importance of opportunities for young people like her son, while others called for fair pay for artists and more diverse participation.

Janie Caldbeck, a Teesdale resident and participant in the event, shared her reflections in a blog for Agricology⁶:

***“Creativity can amplify and enrich conversations on farming and the future of our uplands...
With fascination comes care - we all have a responsibility in protecting our landscape and of
those that work within it.”***



She described how sound artists John and Tim’s 24-hour audio stream from Hazel Brow Farm gave farmer Cath “a new window into her world,” helping her notice biodiversity she hadn’t previously observed. Janie noted:

***“If a farmer is enabled to identify what can be found on their land, they are more ably equipped and more likely to want
to protect it through their farming practices.”***

In Matt’s seed workshop, Janie was struck by the magnified images of rare alpine-arctic species and the gentle act of sowing seeds:

“A simple act of raising awareness that could have powerful implications.”

Her account reinforces the event’s central message: that creative practice can unlock new ways of seeing, deepen ecological understanding, and foster collaborative stewardship of the land.

⁶ <https://agricology.co.uk/blog/farming-nature-recovery-and-creativity/>



The event also drew attention from the local press. Reporting from Raby Castle, the *Teesdale Mercury* described the culmination of Creatively Connected as “a starting point to tease out more of these really interesting questions” about landscape, nature recovery, and creative collaboration.

The article highlighted artist Laura’s work with wool fibres from hill farms, noting how “the fleece has different qualities depending on diet, grazing, or breeding.” Her “bog jumpers” concept invited participants to literally wrap themselves in the landscape - a tactile metaphor for connection and care.

Matt’s hay meadow festival was also featured, with one NPNL Communications team member praising the way it helped people “understand something from a completely new perspective.” Under the microscope, seeds became “toffee bonbons” or “extra-terrestrial” forms, sparking curiosity and conversation.


As Katy of Northern Heartlands reflected:

“Change doesn’t happen in projects... Change takes years, especially in landscape and environmental concepts.”

From sound walks to seed planting, poetry to policy, the day planted ideas and connections that may continue to grow. As Paul reminded us:

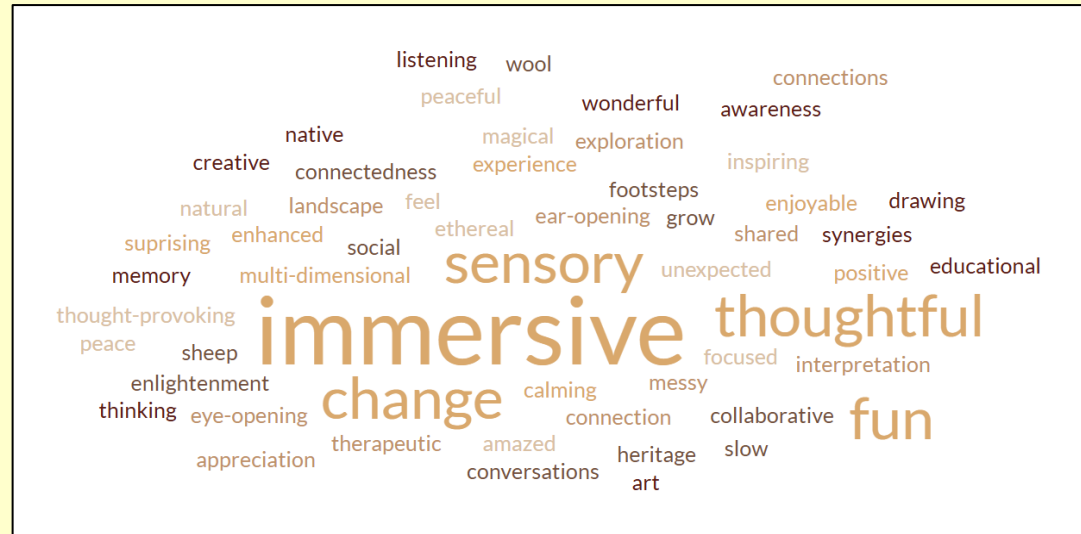
“The landscape was here long before we were. And it’ll be here long after we’ve messed it up. We should have a respect for what we’re leaving for the next generation.”




 **Laura Harrington**

Knitting the Landscape: Wool, Story, and Tangled Ecologies

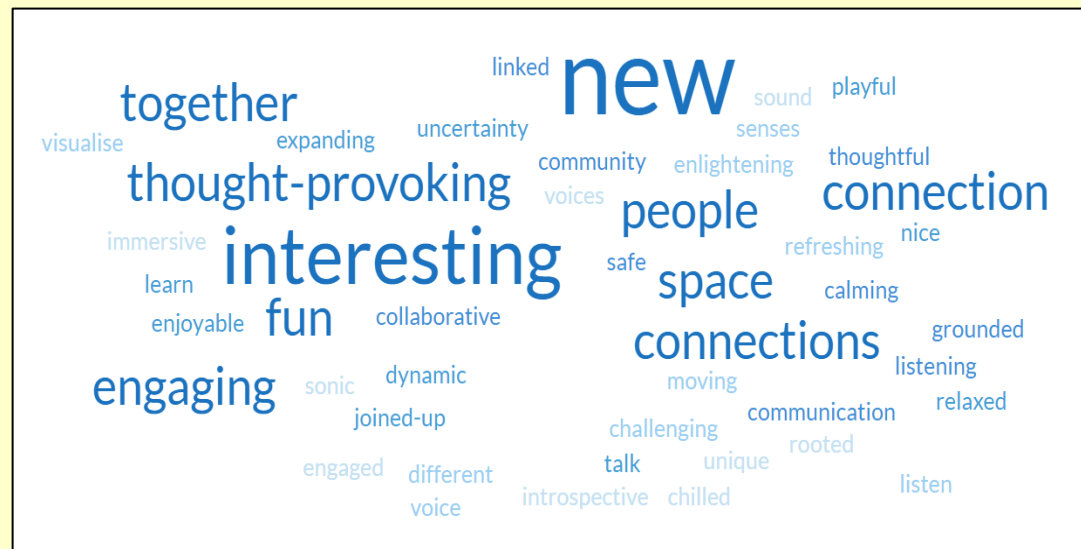
Participants passed strands of wool from hand to hand, drawing, collaging, and storytelling in a collective act of making. Wool became both material and metaphor, a thread connecting people, place, and memory.



 **John Coburn & Tim Shaw**

Sound Walk and Discussion

A sensory journey through sound and place, inviting participants to listen deeply and reflect on memory, ecology, and presence.



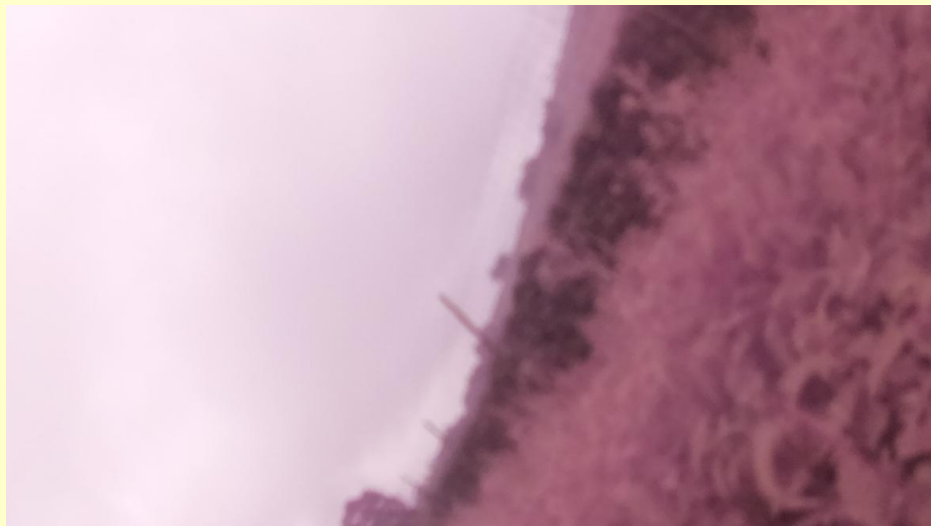


Section 6: The Legacy that Remains: Echoes and Artefacts

The Legacy that Remains: Echoes and Artefacts

The legacy of the project lives on through a constellation of artefacts - some tangible, some experiential - that reflect the diversity of artistic approaches and the collaborative spirit of the work.

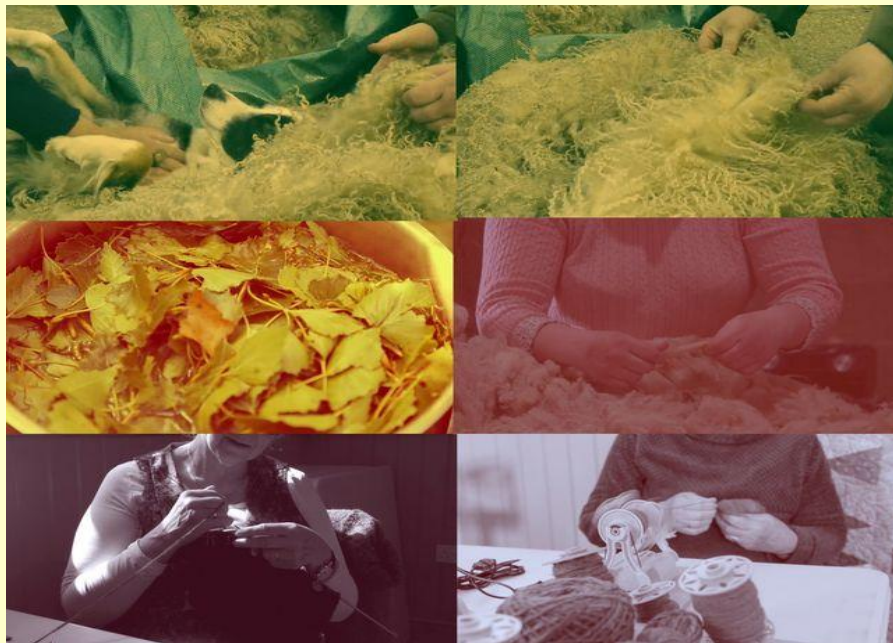
John and Tim created a public sound archive and photo collection featuring oral histories, sounds of the landscape, and images taken from the camera attached to Dragonfly the Sheep (one of which can be seen below). This freely accessible repository captures not only the final products but also the method and process, forming a coherent and living collection.



Azadeh contributed collages (including the example below), a publicly accessible Google Map, and a series of poems. A film is in development and will be screened, extending the reach of her work into new formats.



Laura gathered conversations and thoughts into a film called *Wearing the Uplands* (colour, sound, 31:38 sec) holding the important conversations and meetings which took place. It is intended that the film will be presented at future screenings and alongside the Bog jumper, which is being made over the winter months, with Becca Losh, Zoe Fletcher at the Wool Library and members of the Carlbeck Spinners and Weavers.



Matt compiled event photographs, interviews, and reflections into a book gifted to key team members and participants. One recipient of Matt's book, who attended many of his events with her husband, described it as a "*beautiful gift box*" that sensitively explores the interwoven facets of Upper Teesdale. She found it both visually and practically appealing, evoking vivid memories and a deep sense of connection, saying "*It's a delight! I feel awed and challenged at the same time, and am sure others will be affected in the same way.*" Matt's fully labelled repository has been organised into a detailed PDF document, and is intended for public viewing via donation to Fitzhugh Library in Middleton-in-Teesdale.



These artefacts are not static endpoints but active invitations for further engagement. As John reflected, *“There’s a way of capturing an archive so it lives, so it continues to live.”* Laura echoed this sentiment: *“We all did this in our own way,”* highlighting the multiplicity of voices and methods. Azadeh emphasised the importance of returning the work to the community: *“We need to bring this back to the community and share the engaging aspects of it.”*

The legacy also includes questions about future exhibition and engagement. John asked, *“How do we use the space within a museum to present the work but also work with the landscape around it?”*, suggesting a hybrid model of display and activity. Laura noted that public engagement often comes later in her process, once the work has matured. These reflections point to a legacy not only of artefacts, but of relationships, trust, and ongoing possibility.

Barriers to legacy-building were also acknowledged: the time required to gain landowner permissions, and the risk of losing trust when residencies end. As John noted, future exhibitions would require curatorial input and organisational clarity to sustain the integrity of the work and its relationships.

Reflections from Northern Heartlands: Trust, Process, and Legacy

Trust in the Artistic Process



For Jill and Katy at Northern Heartlands, the project reaffirmed the value of trusting artists and the creative process. Jill reflected, *“It was both very gratifying, reassuring, and amazing to know that that trust in the artist and the artistic process actually does bear fruit.”* Despite initial uncertainties, the outcomes exceeded expectations and Jill felt that if artists were given that trust and ownership in the process, *“they will come back with something beautiful.”*

Katy echoed this sense of confidence, noting that the artists' practices were already rooted in enquiry and responsiveness: *"Their commitment to this type of work, and the fact it was embedded in their practise... made it easier to trust."* Even when artists diverged from their original proposals, the integrity of the process held: *"The output wasn't the same, but how joyful that we could hold on to that."*

Holding Space and Creating Conditions



Both producers emphasised the importance of the conditions that enabled this trust to flourish. Katy described their role as *"helping, I hope, to create the conditions"* for a co-designed, responsive process. Jill added, *"We didn't stifle, but we did hold the space still... it was also sort of steered."*

They acknowledged that this balance between structure and openness was thoughtfully created and not accidental. *"I'm hoping some of the conditions we created... allowed that,"* Katy said. Jill agreed: *"The five [artists] we put together in the end worked extremely well... through the process, it became very distinct."*

Brokering Between Worlds

Jill and Katy saw their role as a vital bridge between the artistic and organisational spheres. Jill described Northern Heartlands as *"the interlocutor between an organisation and its agenda, and the creative process,"* a role she sees as central to future work: *"It's an area that we absolutely want to develop."*

Katy reflected on the trust placed in them by partners: *“Because [the team at NPNL] trusted us, and we trusted the artists, that kind of loop was closed.”* Without that brokering role, she suggested, *“I don’t think there would have been anybody equipped within the organisations... to have done that.”*

Strategic Potential and Replicability



The project has seeded a body of work with potential to influence beyond its immediate context. Jill noted, *“We could adapt what we’ve done here to all sorts of different sectors.”* Katy added, *“There are other bodies and partners that would understand that quite easily, because we have something that sits in their realm.”*

They also recognised the importance of seizing this moment: *“It just makes sense to ride off the back of some of this evidence or experience,”* Katy said. Jill agreed: *“It would perhaps be foolish not to use it.”*

Legacy and Relationships

While tangible legacy plans are in motion, both producers were cautious about over-defining outcomes. Jill talked about *“the body of work being available as a stimulus”* while Katy added, *“That is being talked about, like a legacy... quite a tangible thing.”*

Yet they were also attuned to the fragility of relationships formed between artists, participants, farmers and organisations: *“What happens to the relationships that have been formed now?”* Katy asked. *“I’d be so sad if it suddenly went, because they’ve invested. **But this moment has changed things.**”*

Okay.

Let's start where we agree.

Let's plant those seeds we believe in possibility.

The could be, the maybe. That there is something worth saving.

A challenge worth braving if we dare to dream of possibility.

Where are we?

When are we?

630 years ago.

The castle was formed and this land is older.

And it has had to shoulder the weight of time.

An object more than a concept.

Though no hands can hold it.

Can't pick it up and fold it.

Pocket it like paper and save it for later.

But when nostalgia pangs with hunger.

We feast upon it with greedy wonder.

So we look back into memory and myth.

Shoots from our seeds start to lift into saplings.

We see the resilience of lapwings.

If we listen, the landscape sings.

Yes, it warns of eroding, corroding.

We feel the foreboding but there is hope.

Balance.

Yin yang for plants, creatures and humans.

We look back, see time's effects on the meadows we connect with.

Where we have wandered.

We, the wanderers and wanderesses, diving into mud and messes.

We gather together to reflect.

To protect.

To connect.

And when we need to - interject.

Conversations sprout when we get the gloves out.

It takes grit sand and compost to make the most out of this beautiful place

Which can boast of the most incredible life.

The human perspective often distorts.

And the environment contorts to meet our needs.

We worry.

This world is in such a hurry to get to the end.

But we want to mend it.

To defend it.

To celebrate, create, cultivate.

She said, when she leaves, she grieves the not-so-noise that she enjoys.

The laughter that erupts when the geese interrupt.

We take sound walks because nature talks.

Embrace this place.

Bear witness to all of this.

This! Hear the loud and clear snapping sticks and crunching stones.

The waters flow.

Let's make with common threads in wool and weft.

Take a breath.

Notice your steps.

Let's entangle.

Weaving believing conceiving of new plans.

Ways to work with our hands.

No one knows these lands like the farmers can.

They have roots like the trees.

Listen to the story of each generation.

It is germination.

We do more than restore at the heart of it.

We are a part of it.

Watch how we knit.

With each needle's click clack.

We take this place back in our natural habitat.

Building habits that heal.

How does nature make us feel?

That is real.

The light in a child's eyes as they realise they have an impact with how they act and choose to interact.

Why are we here?

To recover? To discover? To find support and learn from one another.

Sometimes what we see is alarming.

Sometimes it is wonderfully calming.

Seen in shades of green. We need to follow footprints and make our own.

Look at the pieces which form our home... their home.

For it is not ours alone.

We believe in possibility.

The maybe, the could be.

The it might still be.

It will be.

When we connect creatively.

There is possibility.

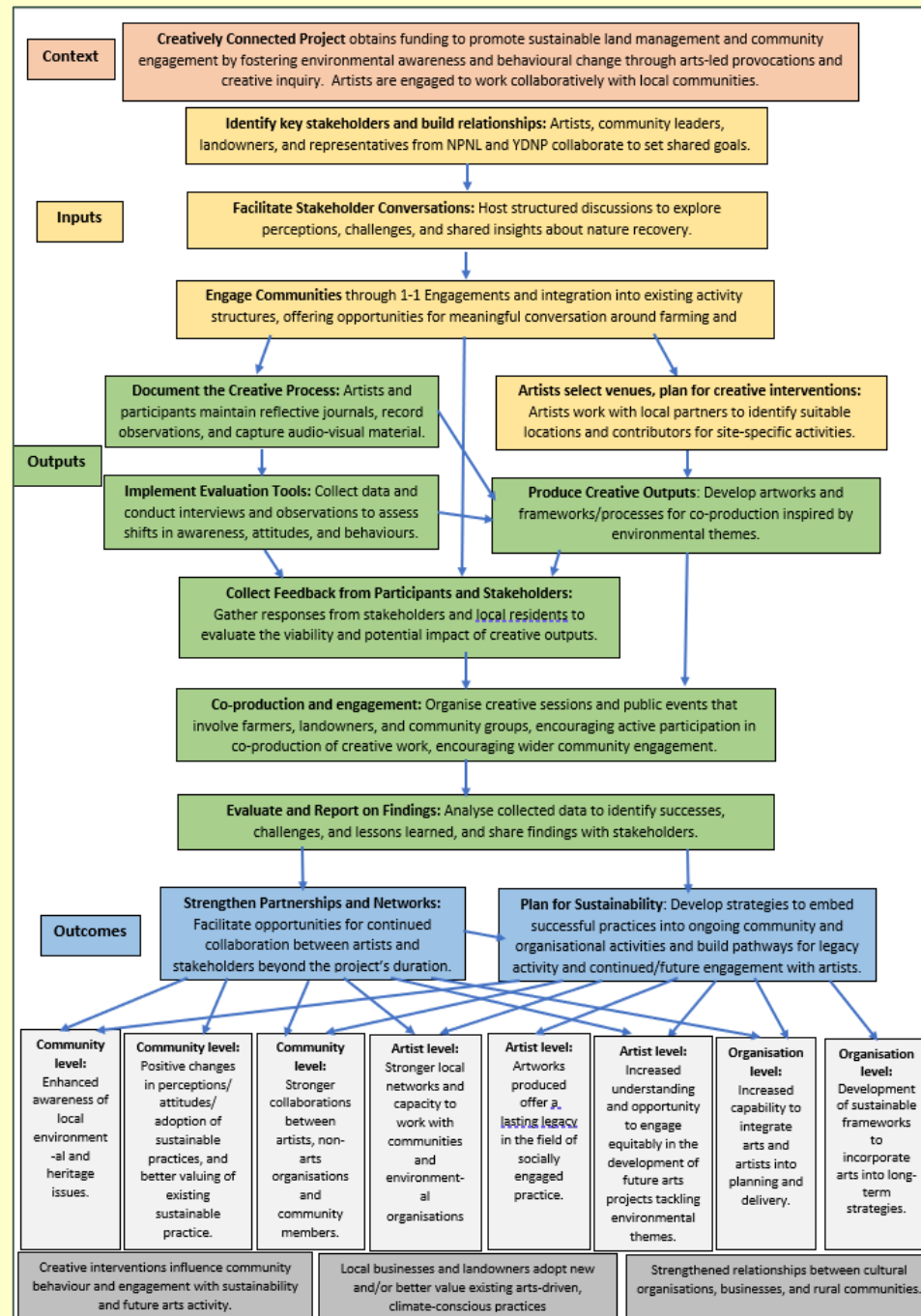
Lizzie Lovejoy

Poet in Residence

Creatively Connected

19th September 2025, Raby Castle

Appendix A Theory of Change



Appendix B

Themes extracted from Thematic Analysis, and their connection to the Theory of Change outcomes.

| Theme | Sub-Themes | Seasonal Evidence | Theory of Change Outcome |
|---|---|--|--|
| 1. Enhanced Environmental Awareness and Sensory Engagement | 1.1 Acoustic Revelation 1.2 Microscopic Discovery | Autumn: Artists introduced deep listening and sensory prompts Spring: Sound walks, microscope sessions, botanical drawing | Community: Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues |
| 2. Knowledge Exchange and Heritage Preservation | 2.1 Intergenerational Transfer 2.2 Place-Based Learning | Winter: Archival research, oral histories Spring: Conversations with farmers, youth engagement | Community: Enhanced awareness of local environmental and heritage issues |
| 3. Sustainable Farming Practices and Environmental Understanding | 3.1 Regenerative Agriculture 3.2 Ecological Impact Awareness | Winter: Reflections on soil health, farming pressures Summer: Public events showcasing sustainable practices | Community: Positive changes in perceptions/attitudes/adoption of sustainable practices |
| 4. Creative Practice as Environmental Connector | 4.1 Arts as Sensory Bridge 4.2 Expanded Understanding | Autumn: Artists positioned as listeners Spring/Summer: Artworks and soundscapes deepen connection | Artist: Artworks offer lasting legacy in socially engaged practice |
| 5. Community Building and Collaborative Engagement | 5.1 Social Connections 5.2 Artist-Community Integration | Autumn: Informal gatherings and rapport-building Summer: Events and shared celebrations | Community: Stronger collaborations between artists, non-arts organisations and community members |
| 6. Accessibility and Inclusive Engagement | — | Spring: Neurodiverse-friendly activities Summer: Broader audience reach | Artist: Increased opportunity to engage equitably in future arts projects |
| 7. Organisational Learning and Future Application | — | Winter: Staff reflection and skill-sharing Summer: Adoption of creative methods | Organisation: Increased capability to integrate arts and artists into planning and delivery |

Appendix C

Links to artists' work:

Laura's film, which can be viewed [here](#) (*password:TeesSwale:WearingtheUplands*), was central to gathering voices and weaving connections between farming, soil health, wool, and care. It documents early conversations around cultural heritage and breed loss - threads that remain embedded in the final jumper and the wider project.

Matt's project artefacts can be accessed on his website: <https://www.matttenham.co.uk/ecological-blueprints.html>

John and Tim collaborate as Wild Museum. Their audiovisual archive can be accessed on their website at <https://www.wild-museum.com/creatively-connected>

You can find out more about **Azadeh's** work on her website at <https://www.azadehfatehrad.com/work>



North Pennines National Landscape



YORKSHIRE DALES National Park Authority



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