

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE MOORLIFE 2020 PROJECT

A SUMMARY

MoorLIFE 2020



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The socio-economic impact of the MoorLIFE 2020 project – A summary

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Background

The MoorLIFE 2020 project was a €16 million programme running from 2015 to 2022 that aimed to protect and transform moorlands and blanket bog across the South Pennines and the Peak District National Park. It was funded with €12 million from the EU LIFE programme, the largest ever award to a UK nature conservation project, with additional funding from Severn Trent Water, Yorkshire Water and United Utilities, and was delivered by the Moors for the Future Partnership. The project has restored 95 km² of blanket bog using techniques such as bare peat stabilisation, raising water tables by gully blocking, and increasing the diversity and amount of Sphagnum moss.

The project also aimed to assess the potential impact of the works on visitors, the local community and the economy. Natural Capital Solutions was commissioned to assess these impacts through the delivery and analysis of surveys with local businesses, contractors, land managers and visitors to areas in and around the South Pennines and Peak District National Park. Visitors and local businesses were surveyed using a one-off questionnaire close to the start of the project. Land managers and contractors were surveyed both before and after the project to assess any impacts of the restoration work. Although the original plan was to also conduct a second survey of local businesses after the project, this was concluded to be no longer feasible due to effects of COVID-19 and Brexit overshadowing any potential impacts from the MoorLIFE 2020 (ML2020) project. Topics covered by each questionnaire are outlined below (Table 1).

Table 1. Topics covered by each questionnaire. For contractors and land managers, this includes both the pre- and post-project survey.

Businesses	Contractors	Land managers	Visitors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business information • Importance of natural environment to business • Perceived impact of restoration works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business information • Impacts of restoration work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and enterprise details • Blanket bog management details • Impact of restoration works • Attitudes to land management • Perceived importance of restoration works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and visit information • Awareness of restoration works • Actual and hypothetical spend • Psychological impact of moorland visit • Perceived importance of restoration works

Key findings

An extensive fieldwork programme was conducted, resulting in the following sample details:

- **121 businesses** from 17 towns and villages in the South Pennines and Peak District National Park were surveyed in September and October 2017.
- **531 visitors** from five different sites in and around the South Pennines and Peak District National Park were surveyed in May 2018.
- **49 contractors** were surveyed from August to October 2017, 16 of whom were then surveyed again between November 2021 and February 2022.
- **13 land managers** were surveyed in total. There were 11 surveyed before the project, from July 2018 to February 2019. Seven of these were then surveyed again after the project, as well as two more that had not been surveyed previously, from December 2021 to June 2022.

Impacts of restoration

All of the different groups were surveyed to some extent about their opinions or experience of the impact of moorland restoration, the results of which are presented below.

Businesses

Business respondents were asked what impact they would expect the ML2020 restoration works to have on a) the number of customers and b) their revenue both during the works and in the long term. On average, no impact was expected on customer numbers or revenue during the works, but a moderate increase in both was expected in the long term. Businesses from more touristy locations expected significantly less revenue during the works but greater tourist numbers in the long term. When asked about any other perceived impacts as a result of moorland restoration works, several respondents mentioned current and future traffic congestion caused by restoration works and subsequent increased visitor numbers. One respondent also suggested that revenue may increase during the works as a result of custom from the restoration workforce.

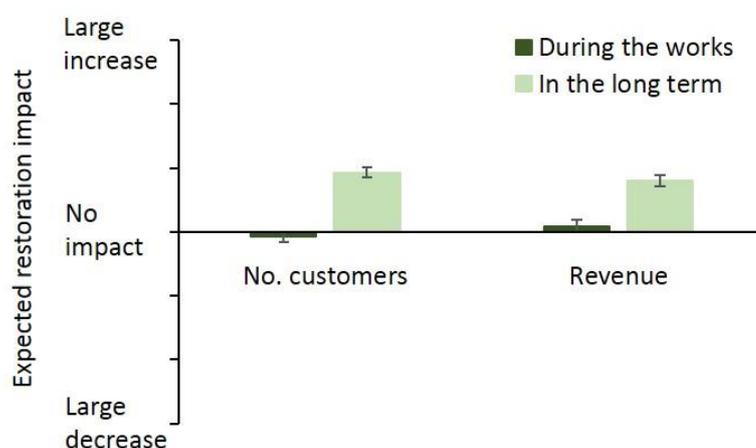


Figure 1. Expected impact of moorland restoration works on the number of customers and revenue for local businesses both during the works and in the long term. Error bars represent standard errors.

Visitors

Only around a fifth of respondents who visited areas where ML2020 restoration activities were taking place mentioned observing these when asked about them. This indicates a generally low visual impact of restoration work. The most frequently commented on activities included seeing the big white bags of material to be used in restoring areas, fencing erected to protect some of the restoration works, helicopter activities and gully/grip blocking.

When asked about psychological wellbeing, participants who had noticed ML2020 restoration activities generally reported lower levels of attachment to the moorland area, assessed by scoring statements such as “I look forward to coming here in the future” and “I am not satisfied with this part of the moorland”. However, noticing restoration activities did not impact on scores for reflection (e.g. “I feel peaceful when I am here”) or continuity with the past (e.g. “I’ve had a lot of memorable experiences along this part of the moorlands”). Indeed, participants who were aware of the ML2020 project reported higher levels of continuity with the past. Spending time in moorland areas where restoration activities have taken place as part of ML2020 did not appear to influence levels of wellbeing.

Contractors

Only one contractor surveyed said that the project had no discernible impact on their business. The most common benefit mentioned was an ability to employ additional staff, followed by creation of additional work hours/days. Several responses mentioned that the work also helped to contribute to the local economy, through employment of local people and use of other local businesses, both suppliers and accommodation, for longer periods of work.

Other benefits mentioned included being able to invest in new equipment and staff training, as well as providing work at quieter times of year for businesses that tend to be seasonal. One contractor commented that the project helped to establish their new business, and another said that the project work provided around a quarter of their company’s turnover. Note however, that there may be some bias in these results, as only a small, self-selected sample of contractors returned the follow-up survey, so they should be interpreted with some caution.

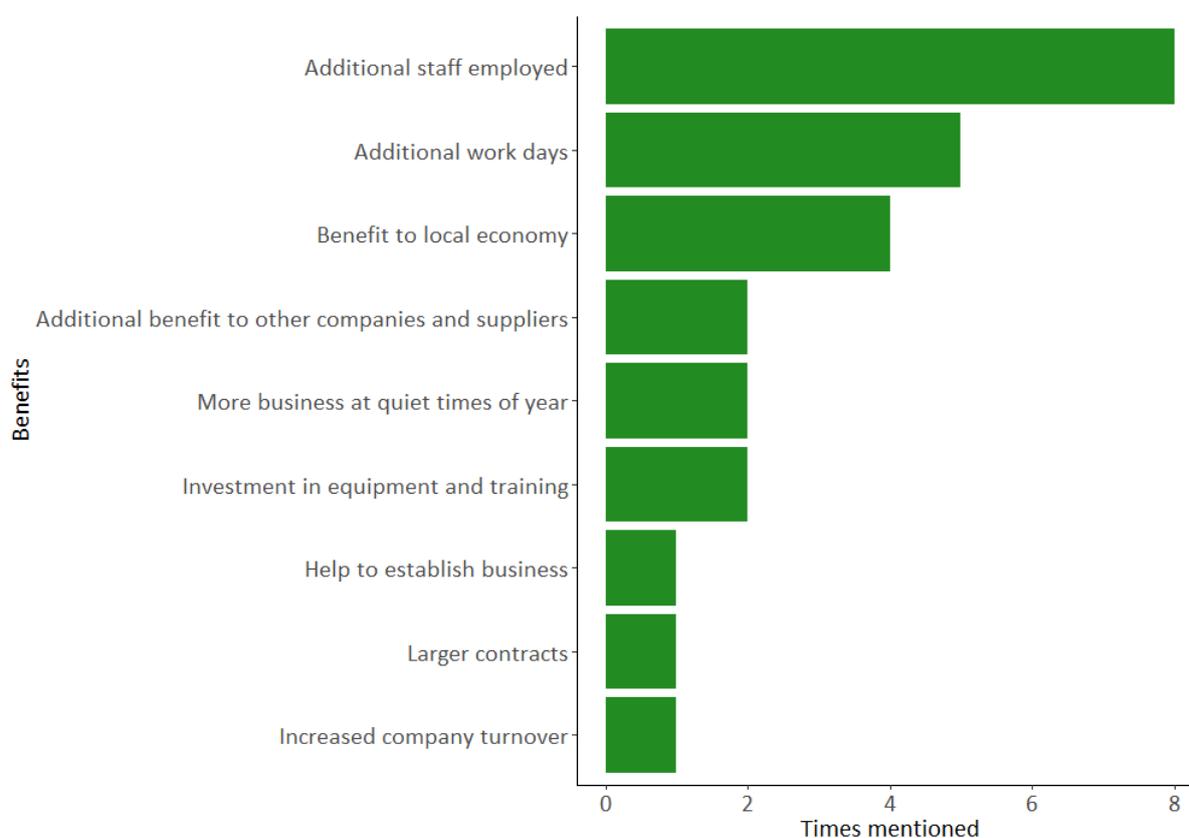


Figure 2. Reported benefits of participation in moorland restoration works for contractors.

Land managers

Land managers were asked to describe any changes they expected as a result of planned restoration works in the survey before the project. They were then asked again about any impacts that they observed after the project finished. Most respondents did not expect many or any impacts from the project. The impacts that were expected mainly involved incorporating more sustainability into management practices. Most did not anticipate an impact on output or productivity, and any impacts that were expected were positive. Again, most did not expect a change to business income, and those that did, generally anticipated an increase either directly through increased revenue or indirectly through reduced costs.

Not many impacts were observed during the project work, but several were recorded after the work was completed. On blanket bog sites there were comments about reduced stocking density and more water being retained as a result of restoration, which were generally viewed to be positive. Downstream from the site, there were several impacts attributed to the restoration works, some of which were perceived to be negative such as reduced water volume and flow in streams coming from blanket bogs as more water is being retained. Overall, it appeared that land managers have generally benefited from the moorland restoration.

Attitudes to restoration and public benefits

With the exception of contractors, all groups were surveyed on their attitudes to the moorland and benefits associated with restoration.

Businesses

Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed with 15 statements relating to the importance of the natural environment to their business, detailed in Figure 3.

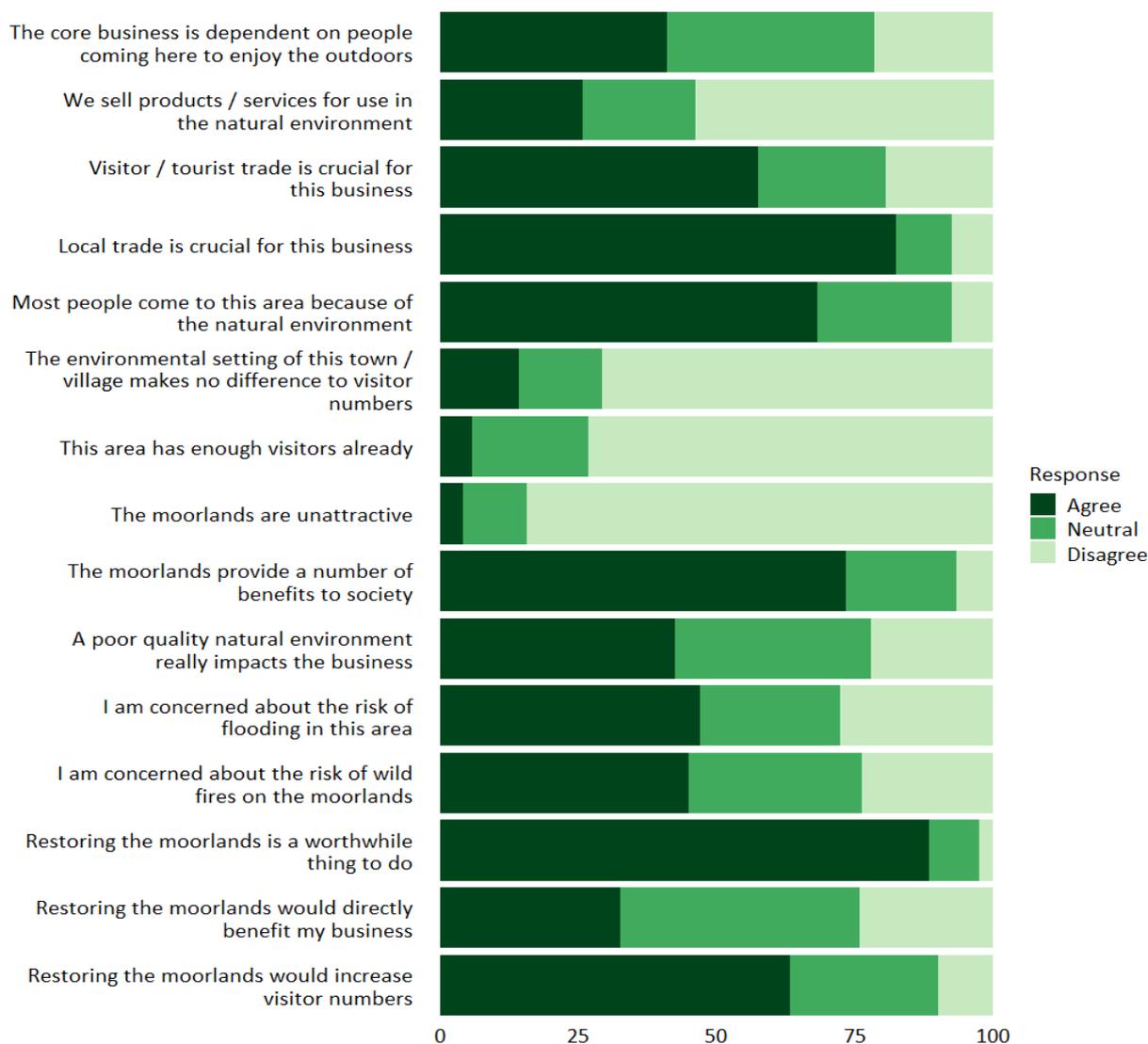


Figure 3. Businesses' responses to statements on the relative importance of the natural environment.

A small majority of respondents agreed that their core business was dependent on people coming to enjoy the outdoors, with strongest support for this statement from businesses in the accommodation sector, retail of food and drink, and outdoor pursuits. While both visitor and local trade were considered as being crucial to the businesses surveyed, local trade was seen to be of particular importance. Most businesses agreed that the environment was important for attracting visitors. A significant proportion of respondents disagreed that the area has enough visitors already. High proportions of businesses agreed that moorlands provide a number of benefits to society and there was overwhelming support for the statement that restoring the moorlands is a worthwhile thing to do. Opinions were generally neutral on whether this would directly benefit their business, but the majority agreed that it would increase visitor numbers. The majority of respondents also agreed that they were concerned about the risk of flooding and wildfires.

Land managers

Most of the potential public benefits of restoration were seen as important by land managers, as detailed in Figure 4. The highest average scores were for biodiversity benefits, improved air quality and reduced fire risk. One land manager mentioned that biodiversity improvement will lead to an increase in all other benefits. The benefit perceived to be least important was increased pest and disease control.

When asked about their agreement with statements related to land management, there was strong agreement that maintaining an attractive looking countryside should be an important goal of land managers. Opinion was neutral on whether land managers have a greater responsibility to produce food or enhance environmental quality, but there was strong agreement that they have a duty to conserve soil and water resources whatever the impact on profits. There was also strong interest in Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes and agreement that this would provide a valuable source of income. This all suggests that land managers have a positive attitude to moorland restoration.

Attitudes post-project were broadly similar compared to pre-project, except that there was a much stronger agreement that payments from PES schemes would be a valuable source of income post project, indication that participants thought that the moors were in an improved condition (perhaps thanks to the restoration works), and stronger agreement that a successful land management sector is important for the vitality of rural communities. Comments suggested that uncertainty over government funding for agriculture (withdrawal of the Basic Payment Scheme and lack of clarity about the Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs)) may be driving these changing attitudes, as well as engagement with the ML2020 Project.

Visitors

The potential benefits delivered by the ML2020 project were considered important by the majority of visitors (Figure 4). Biodiversity benefits were seen as most important, closely followed by reducing wildfire risk, with almost all remaining benefits considered to be at least of moderate-high importance. Improvements to water colour were, on average, considered of least importance with many respondents commenting that the colour of the water did not bother them provided it was safe, with some suggesting it was more natural when coloured. Enhanced cover or food for game birds was considered second least important with comments suggesting people did not support the game industry and others saying they thought improving cover was important to help protect the birds against shooting.

The top two benefits perceived to be most important were the same between land managers and visitors (biodiversity benefits and reducing wildfire risk). This suggests that they may be the benefits with the most universal appreciation. There may also be greater public awareness of the risks of wildfire and biodiversity loss due to awareness campaigns. On average, visitors scored benefits slightly higher overall than land managers did.

A large proportion of visitors were willing to pay additional parking fees to contribute to management and restoration that helps prevent moorland degradation. In addition, the greater the importance the potential benefits of restoration were considered by a respondent, the more they were willing to pay to protect moorland environments (though cause and effect cannot be established here).

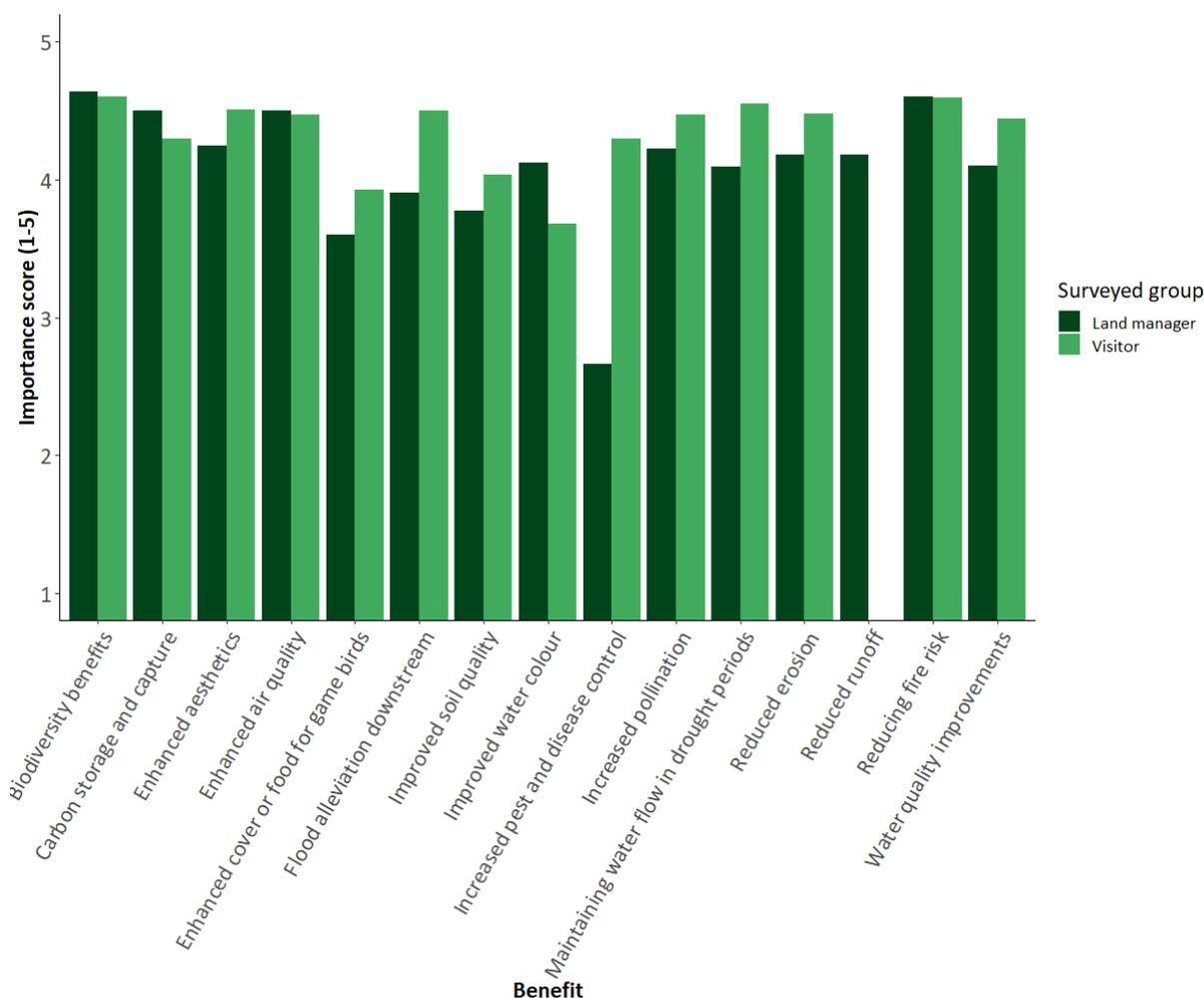


Figure 4. Average scores of perceived importance (low importance=1, high importance=5) of potential benefits of moorland and bog restoration to people. All listed potential benefits are improvements (i.e. “improved water colour”) except where stated. Visitors were not surveyed on the importance of reduced runoff.

Conclusions

As well as providing environmental benefits, which was the main goal of the restoration project, the MoorLIFE 2020 project has also delivered a number of socio-economic benefits. Attitudes to (and support for) restoration were positive across all groups surveyed. Local businesses strongly agreed that moors provide benefits to society, restoring moorlands is worthwhile, the environment is important for attracting visitors, and restoring moorland would increase visitor numbers. Land managers scored most of the potential benefits of restoration as important, with the highest being biodiversity, air quality and reduced fire risk. Similarly, visitors considered most benefits important, with the highest again being biodiversity benefits and reduced wildlife risk.

Impacts of restoration have generally been positive, exemplified by businesses predicting an increase in customers and revenue in the long term (although we could not verify this with a follow-up survey). Contractors reported benefits including additional staff employed, additional workdays and ability to invest in training and new equipment. Prior to restoration, land managers predicted little impact on their land, and the impacts that were expected were positive, such as increased income. This was confirmed post restoration, with generally small but positive impacts observed.

Please note that large changes over the last few years, particularly COVID-19 and Brexit (and associated agricultural payment scheme changes), are likely to have influenced opinions and circumstances more than the MoorLife 2020 project and it is not possible to disentangle these different influences. However, where direct impacts have been noted, these have largely been positive, and wider attitudes around access to, and restoration of, the natural environment have been strengthened during the pandemic. The MoorLife 2020 Project appears to have had a positive impact, and attitudes towards it have been widely supportive, but that this sits within the broader context of socio-economic change and agricultural policy drivers, which are having significant impact at present.

Further information

Much more detail and further analyses of the four surveys summarised above is provided in the following reports:

- Coldwell, D., Holt, A. & Rouquette, J. (2018). MoorLIFE 2020 Business and Visitor Surveys. Natural Capital Solutions.
- Johnson, N. & Rouquette, J. (2022). MoorLIFE 2020 Contractor and Land Manager Surveys. Natural Capital Solutions.

Further information about the MoorLIFE 2020 project as a whole, and project resources and reports, are provided on the website:

<https://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/moorlife2020>

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MoorLIFE 2020

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