

RESONANCE – the Big Dig Day ‘Take Outs’

“It served as a reminder of the reality of the things we discuss in meetings and are modelling day to day. Real places, with real people, with real stories.”

[The Big Dig Day](#) launched the Resonance project. It was a chance to encounter Bolton Fell Moss and learn about peat and peatland restoration, collect trees for the creation of a living sculpture, and then gather in the village hall for food and conversations about land use and land use change.

During the day, there were animated discussions around challenges and opportunities for change, including and extending beyond peatland restoration, forestry, woodland conservation, farming practices and tree planting. People shared reasons for optimism (or lack of optimism), levers for change, working in collaboration, links between practice, research and policy ... and plenty more.

Here's a precis of the main take-outs from the day. It's a numbered list but they are all as relevant as each other. The quotes come from participants' feedback.



1 Outdoor events help with connection: people-to-people and people-to-place

Meeting out of doors and having the chance to walk and talk, and to hear about landscape change and see it for real was something everyone was keen to do (in this case restoration of a lowland raised mire). The opportunity to participate in a team activity and set an arts project in motion added to the appeal, and the day had a buzz of enthusiasm. Building connections this way can help to foster a stronger sense of shared purpose. The energy of the time together on the bog fed into the rest of the day.

“Spending time on the land together changes the conversation to be more open, reciprocal and embedded. Thank you for the inspiration!”

2 Transdisciplinary ways of working are needed if we are to address issues in ways that work for individual locations, specific habitat types, local communities and at scale: and with recognition of urgency.

“One of my main takeaways was how despite coming from different organisations and backgrounds, a lot of perspectives are aligned towards common goals for the region and for land use and nature.”

The scale and complexity of the challenge of changing land use, particularly around peatlands, bogs, farming and the carbon cycle, was underscored. Participants emphasised the value of collaboration, flexibility, and communication across disciplines - blending arts and sciences, for example, or initiating conversations between foresters and peat specialists.

Calls for action were directed equally to scientists, practitioners and policy makers – to integrate knowledge from fields such as ecology, agriculture, and economics in thinking about approaches to land use that support climate resilience, biodiversity, and net zero goals. The event revealed a strong desire to collaborate across sectors to ensure that all aspects of the land are considered, including wildlife habitats, water quality, farming, and local cultures and community needs.

3 Narrative Matters. Language Matters. Talking about nature restoration and ‘net carbon gain’ may be more empowering than focusing on challenges and ‘net zero’.

Discussing successful projects contributed to a sense of optimism that taking action *can* make a difference. And being OK with imperfection, to stay engaged rather than retreating into pessimism, is key: recognising that progress (even small steps) is better than inaction.

Several people suggested that positioning carbon sequestration as a byproduct of holistic land stewardship, biodiversity restoration, ecosystem health, and nurturing social/community resilience, may be a useful way to go (rather than talking only about greenhouse gases). This approach aligns with broader environmental and biodiversity objectives.

It's not just the narrative that matters, but the language that is used – for example, talking about ‘net zero’ or being ‘carbon negative’ may not generate action; some alternatives may be to talk about ‘net carbon gain’, or being ‘carbon positive’.

“My main take out? The power of nature connection, landscape restoration and an in-person gathering to facilitate hope, ideas and conversations.”

4 People are at the heart of the landscape: people and cultures must not be overlooked

“I’m struck by the fact that peat can accumulate at just 1mm per year! And shocked by how quickly years and years of progress can be destroyed. Cultural heritage can be impacted in the same way.”

It’s clear that change cannot happen at pace or at scale without people, in partnership and collaboration: for win-win solutions and adaptability, people need to feel respected and included. This isn’t a new insight but it’s important to underline it: acknowledging this is a vital component of change, alongside scientific evidence and models of possible change.

There were conversations about the importance of a balance of land restoration with protection of cultural heritage, while keeping an open mind about future cultural heritages. There was enthusiasm for increasing understanding of, and support for, practices such as woodland management, animal husbandry, hedging and stone walling; all of which can be part of habitat restoration, boosting biodiversity, flood management and carbon sequestration. When it comes to policy, this needs to recognise and reward good practices that support pathways to net zero and sustains and empowers rural communities, which are integral to resilience.

“People and place are important in any policy or direction. Restore nature but take culture with it, not at expense of it.”

5 Calls for system change ... and thoughts on radical actions

“Requires system change. Individuals operate in a system that pushes them to take actions that are counter to combatting climate change and nature restoration.”

Systemic transformation is a huge challenge – but many people discussed the need for major system changes, particularly around economic models and values, and persistent inequalities, to address the root causes of climate and ecological crises. There were also calls for better government policy continuity, and long-term funding to ensure sustainability of restorative land use practices.

Other radical acts the group suggested showed that 'radical' means different things to different people. Suggestions covered themes including more expert advice on-the-ground, removing barriers to land management, rethinking or even removing carbon offset markets so that companies cannot continue to pollute, increasing education, increasing access to nature, more joined-up thinking within government, cross-party consensus around policies impacting the environment, and ground-up action supported by top-down policies. The emphasis was on practical, actionable steps and taking responsibility for climate and biodiversity goals. Are these really radical – or is it radical to pay heed to common sense?

“I am sceptical. Many ‘solutions’ don’t address the root problem, limit carbon emissions and restore functioning ecosystems to support biodiversity.”

“Are we being radical enough?”

6 There is a need for strong leadership and policy clarity

There was agreement that change at local level and at scale both require genuine leadership, particularly from policy makers: and leadership goes hand in hand with trust.

Leaders must actively listen: to land managers in locations where an issue is being faced and/or addressed, and to evidence provided through robust scientific studies. Then there's a need to move beyond talking; and implement bold and transformative actions ... just how this happens is the task ahead of us all.

There was a strong feeling that policy clarity is essential. The complexity of systems, policies and schemes on offer to farmers and land managers can be overwhelming. Simplifying these structures - particularly in areas like environmental subsidies - would make it easier for people to understand and engage with a process of change. This is not a simple ask, however, as solutions need to be place-specific: policy needs to be clear as well as flexible, and there needs to be more access to expert advice, funding, and boots-on-the-ground support.

“The key to progress is leadership that understands the importance of nature and climate action.”

7 Creating a vision, and Raising Awareness

If it was possible to develop a comprehensive vision for uplands, including common land and protected landscapes, focusing on climate change resilience, sustainable or regenerative farming practices, and ecological restoration, this could help to shape long-term funding provision. This is more likely to enable the delivery of high-impact, area-specific solutions. It's a tough one to get right, when funding needs to be sufficient and accessible, but it's vital, to empower as many landowners as possible to take positive action – including small farms, local communities, and larger landowners.

Any vision would need to have input from many different specialists – coming back to the point about the value of transdisciplinary collaboration. And it's not just about visioning for the future: sharing current stories of change (both successful and flawed) and connecting scientific knowledge with real-world applications is essential. And this can feed into education and raising awareness at all levels, and through many different media.

“Better awareness of urgency of climate change adaptation. Nationally there's still too much complacency – we all need to be responsible.”

INCREASING OPTIMISM

Everyone was invited to mark their place on a 'scale of optimism' and reflect on what's needed to increase their optimism that actions can make a difference. Their comments can be summarised as:

- **Empowerment**, through education and clear action pathways.
- **Leadership**, from policymakers who align environmental goals with broader social needs.
- **Simplification**, in communication and action frameworks to make participation easier.
- **Urgency and raising awareness**, to motivate action in the face of climate and environmental crises.
- **Collaboration**, increasing a sense of community and shared responsibility.
- **Equity**, ensuring access to resources and opportunities for all.
- **Inspiration**, showcasing successful initiatives.

LOOKING AHEAD: RESONANCE PLANTING DAYS AND THE BIG TENT EVENT IN MARCH

The *Resonance* project allows development of thematic threads and conversations during the events when the trees will be planted – seven trees in each of the seven circles – and at the two-day LUNZ Hub event at the end of March, which is being held in partnership with the Centre for National Parks and Protected Areas. The group was asked to suggest questions they'd like to see being discussed. Their answers fell into the following broad themes:

- **Land Use and Cultural Heritage:** How to balance environmental restoration with preserving cultural traditions, including farming and forestry.
- **Public Engagement and Education:** effective ways to raise awareness and educate the public, especially farmers, on the need for change and realistic acts that are part of a wider system of change.
- **Collaborative and Inclusive Dialogue:** Inviting diverse voices and fostering cooperation across different sectors (e.g., tourism, farming, conservation).
- **Bringing data together:** Finding ways for data and methodologies to be more effectively shared and used. For instance, can we develop a unified, consistent methodology for biodiversity recording and monitoring, ensuring that data can be easily accessed, shared, and used to inform land use, policy and conservation?
- **Systemic Change and Adaptation:** Questions about the broader system of land management, climate adaptation, and the role of Net Zero.
- **Future Visioning:** Exploring the future of landscapes and cultures, and how values, actions, and cultural heritage can guide transformation

“I am actively looking for ‘resonance’ as opportunities to bring different people together, to apply/transfer knowledge from one part of a system to another.”

