

## **Undertaking Corporate Natural Capital Accounting (CNCA)**

**Sue Cornwell, National Specialists Consultancy Manager at the National Trust tells us about her experience of trialling the innovative CNCA framework.**



*The National Trust chose to pilot CNCA on its Wimpole Estate. The CNCA framework was applied to a lowland arable farm that was managed in-hand and which had recently undergone changes in farming practices, moving from conventional arable farming, to organic cropping and Higher Level Stewardship. One of the motivations for this change was a survey showing very poor quality of arable farm soil.*

### **How has your organisation benefitted from participating in the Natural Capital Committee's CNCA pilot?**

Managing Natural Capital is part of the National Trust's core business so we were very keen to investigate a new way of recording what we have, how we manage it and the relative costs and benefits that flow from that management.

We saw the CNCA pilot as an opportunity to gain a new perspective on our natural resources which could offer three benefits: potentially offering us a new way of communicating with Trustees, staff, volunteers and our supporters about what we are doing; enabling us to review whether we are investing our financial budgets in the right place; and whether there are sustainable ways of capitalising on the costs of some of our investment.

### **What lessons has your organisation learned from undertaking the pilot study?**

The Wimpole CNCA pilot tracked the impact of a change that we had already made, so for us it was less about the pilot telling us something completely new about the Natural Capital at Wimpole and more about how using a different framework could provide a deeper understanding of some of the effects of our management decisions.

Having decided to change our land management practices, to improve for example, soil structure, soil carbon levels and soil invertebrates, the numeric information gathered for and collated in the CNCA enabled us to track the costs and benefits associated with this change. The CNCA demonstrated, to those working at the property and to those working at headquarters, that the benefits arising from the changes in farm management were greater than the costs. It particularly highlighted the societal benefits arising from the increased levels of soil carbon.

### **What resources did you use to complete the pilot?**

The National Trust put in the region of 70 person hours into this pilot. A good deal of this time was taken up in preparatory meetings to enable people to understand the concepts and the detail of the new framework. Time was also needed to gather the data needed to put into the framework. We did rely heavily on the consultants who used the data we gathered to populate the CNCA, so their time was in addition to ours. Now we know what data is required we believe it would be relatively straightforward to update the account on an annual basis.



Photos: National Trust/Simon Damant (Top left; Top Right; Bottom Right); National Trust/Richard Morris (Bottom Left).

## **What was your approach to undertaking the pilot?**

We carried out a “bottom up” approach which entailed gathering site level data in order to populate the account. The site manager at the farm was heavily involved and we drew on existing farm accounts, biological survey and visitor data. This approach involved developing all aspects of the framework, including the support schedules (asset register, physical flow account, monetary account, and maintenance cost account). This revealed the potential of the full framework to supplement the monetary values reported in the balance sheet.

## **Would you recommend others to undertake their own CNCA, and if so, what advice would you give them?**

We would recommend that others have a go at creating a CNCA and our advice would be to work with the data that you have, even if this means a partial account in the first instance. We found that we relied heavily on the NCC’s consultancy team to create this account and we are not yet confident of our ability to produce accounts unaided but would hope with a little more guidance to be able to reach this point.

## **What are your organisation’s next steps regarding corporate natural capital accounting?**

We are keen to see the Crown Estate’s “top down” model in more detail, to understand whether that approach might work better across our whole estate. We’d also like to trial the “bottom-up” approach at another property. The next step will then be to consider how this approach to reporting of our natural asset condition compares to our existing approach.

For more information on Corporate Natural Capital Accounting or other aspects of the NCC’s work, please visit our [website](#), follow us on Twitter: @Nat\_Cap\_Com, or email the [Secretariat](#).