‘Connecting Conwy’
Preliminary Workshop
Summary Report

Contents

Introduction

The 'Connecting Conwy' Project is a collaborative project, led by Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and Bangor University, with funding from the Nature Networks Programme (Round 3), delivered by the Heritage Fund in partnership with the Welsh Government. The Preliminary Workshop brought together local actors with an interest in existing and future marine habitat restoration and enhancement within and surrounding the Menai Strait and Conwy Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in North Wales. It set out to improve current understanding, consolidate knowledge, and facilitate collaboration between actors .

Of those invited to take part in the workshop, 22 people attended. Participants' interests and perspectives included marine restoration and enhancement practitioners, regulators, NGOs, local authorities, management group of local mussel fishery, and researchers. The workshop was designed and facilitated by independent consultants Dialogue Matters, with input and assistance from ZSL and Bangor University.

This report summarises and reflects the workshop outputs in a narrative way, which has been drafted from the detailed workshop minutes that were recorded. If participants would like to explore any of the discussions in more detail, the project team would be happy to arrange a follow-up meeting to talk through the detailed minutes and key points.

A Shared Vision

As participants arrived for the workshop, they were asked to imagine a future where nature recovery and enhancement have made a difference around the North Wales coast. Their collected responses were displayed during the workshop and have been narratively summarised as a draft vision below.

In 2040, we will be celebrating the thriving environment and the collaborative, community-driven efforts behind it.

The coast is thriving and dynamic, with diverse habitats, abundant wildlife, and a range of species and ecosystems to explore. Self-sustaining seagrass, saltmarsh and fully functioning oyster reefs are abundant, and water quality is the best it's been, with species returning as a result. The wider ecosystem clearly shows the benefits of species recovery and habitat preservation.

There is a strong sense of achievement and a healthy, self-sustaining relationship between people and nature. Humanity recognises the importance of natural ecosystems and avoiding harmful impacts.

Projects are connected, sharing lessons and acting as a larger, more powerful conservation effort, supported by proper protections. Communities are aware, engaged and proud - taking part in improving the coast, supporting a thriving local marine economy and seafood industry, and celebrating nature with a growing diversity of people.

The Wider Context

During the opening session of the workshop, participants circulated the room and responded to several questions designed to help build understanding, including of the wider context and background to restoration and enhancement in North Wales and beyond. People could also share knowledge about current and possible future initiatives, locations, and how it relates to them and nature. The below summarises the kinds of information and knowledge shared.

What does 'Seascape' mean?

Describing a seascape, people variously saw it as the marine equivalent of a landscape: a big-picture, connected view of sea and coast, which in practice often becomes coastally grounded because that is where people experience the sea most directly. Themes mentioned include connectivity - the habitats, species and processes interacting as a network, not just individual locations; and the human systems - the communities, livelihoods and industries as part of the seascape, not separate from it. Some responses reflected local framing and values, including

references to beauty and connectivity in Welsh, and an emphasis on communicating in terms that make sense to non-specialists.

Whole-ecosystem scale approaches, management or projects already known about

A wide range of examples were captured covering research, planning and delivery, with several directly relevant to Wales and North Wales. The responses highlighted mapping and evidence work, including enhancement opportunity mapping and seascape connectivity research, plus "source to sea" and catchment programmes in Wales linking land and rivers to marine outcomes. Examples included large-scale seascape projects and regional habitat programmes such as Solent Seascape project and Transforming the Thames (England), alongside Welsh initiatives including Natur am Byth!, and seagrass and oyster initiatives (including Project Seagrass, The Wild Oysters Project: Conwy Bay and hatchery-linked work). Project Seagrass, including delivered partnership with North Wales Wildlife Trust and Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC under the Seagrass Ocean Rescue project. Place-based restoration examples being in Holyhead, Tremadog and Porthdinllaen. A recurring logic was connectivity - "all rivers lead to the sea" - with action often framed as joining up habitats, projects and partners across coast and catchments.

Driver scanning - wider trends and changes

When considering drivers with a bearing on restoration and enhancement, many participants framed it as politically and environmentally urgent, but institutionally complex. They highlighted discontinuity and fluctuating support across policy cycles, along with Welsh-specific levers and constraints such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act and other Welsh Government legislation. They also noted practical Welsh considerations, including local authority expectations and need for bilingual communication - with Welsh prioritised in some contexts. Economically, participants stressed balancing nature recovery with livelihoods (fishing, aquaculture, tourism), and the need for long-term funding, monitoring and finance models beyond existing grants. Social themes included eco-anxiety, stakeholder fatigue, and the need to rebuild connection and hope through credible, locally grounded stories and opportunities to participate.

Relating to nature

Asked to put themselves in the position of the coast and sea around North Wales, and to think about what it might tell us, participants helped give nature a voice – some matter-of-factly and others more poetically. They expressed ideas of longevity, that it existed long before people and will outlast them, but that it is not limitless and cannot keep absorbing pollution and abstraction without consequence. Many messages challenged "out of sight, out of mind" attitudes - urging people to *see the sea*, respect it, and stop treating it as invulnerable. Connectivity was central - how the sea is used affects everyone, and living well on land requires learning from the sea. Several responses carried a distinctly local note - that restoration and protection should be specific to local needs, informed by understanding how places are now and how they were. Some framing insisted on moving from talk to action or providing support for its own natural processes - ''Rhowch dwr glan ol llonydd a mi wndi edrych ar ôl y gwedill" / *Give clean water from the still pool and I will look after the rest.*

Current Focus

The next workshop session centred in on current recovery and enhancement initiatives. Here, participants worked in small, facilitated groups.

Recovery and enhancement efforts so far

Sharing efforts to date, participants talked about habitat or species-led projects, especially seagrass, saltmarsh and native oysters, often as single-habitat projects shaped by funding and communication needs. Other initiatives have focused on water quality and catchment work, including action to reduce pollution impacts, and flood risk or coastal management. Coastal enhancements have been applying eco-engineering to 'green the grey,' or reducing the impacts of boating or mooring infrastructure in places such as Pwllheli and Rhoscolyn.

Most activities were described as local, small-scale or trial sized, with some starting to link up through wider networks and plans – with outreach and education embedded across many projects. There is desire to scale up, however the ability to secure longer term funding, prove concepts and be objective about outcomes are seen as limiting factors.

Some participants pointed out that "recovery" is not only active restoration but also removing pressures. These include managing damaging activities and addressing invasive and non-native species, with work in Holyhead as an example. Further participant-mapped detail of initiatives discussed is captured in Appendix 1.

Existing success

Participants pointed to visible progress with seagrass and oysters, while noting it remains hard to judge success quickly and that action plans can still feel fragmented. Several people shared that outreach and education are strong and increasingly effective, helping to give people hope, and building ocean literacy. They discussed the relative success of current focus - very young children compared to older students - and talked about engaging across ages and families, including via pathways such as "Ocean Rescue Champions".

Building on that theme was community connection and early engagement. The ''Conwy Handbook" - involving NRW and local actors such as farmers and businesses - was described as a model for involving communities from the start. Collaboration culture was repeatedly mentioned as open with low levels of "gatekeeping.'' The contribution of universities, and other organisations through placements and internships was also noted. Volunteers and citizen science are viewed as providing practical capacity and support for hands-on restoration.

Several people talked about the favourable legislative and policy contexts in Wales, which signals commitment and helps provide resources. Government and local authority commitment and money can in turn unlock private sector and innovative funding. Aviva, Orsted, and developers (through Marine Fund Cymru) were mentioned as supportive of restoration and flood alleviation.

The connections and potential co-benefits between hatcheries, aquaculture supply chains, and industry also received attention.

Challenges and opportunities to address

Funding was a persistent challenge talked about by participants. Many called for long-term support, and described a system dominated by short calls, small pots, and quick results. These create practical barriers around staffing, capital and securing buildings or leases.

Participants also highlighted a gap between intent and delivery. Infrastructure and capacity - especially for restoration supply chains - may not be in place, and organisations can struggle to take risks without "space to fail and learn". Much work remains trial-scale and participants flagged a lack of confidence in scaling up without consistent monitoring, agreed metrics and evidence. Geography, especially when working at scale, and access also act as constraints for coordination and monitoring.

Trust and building local ownership of projects - particularly involving fishers, landowners, and those who use the coast and sea - are seen as decisive factors. Some referred to examples of apprehension linked to earlier experiences and the risks of earlier efforts prejudicing future work but recognise the opportunities for better two-way or multi-party dialogue in realising co-benefits of restoration or enhancement work.

Suggested focus areas

Questions that followed the sharing and exploration of initiatives prompted participants to think about how existing good work could be built on and challenges addressed. They went on to uncover more about which kinds of habitat or species recovery work people would most like to see, and at what scale.

Building on existing good work and addressing challenges

The need for long-term, secure funding and clearer sequencing was explained in order to maintain early momentum and enable organisations to plan beyond current grant cycles – important to support restoration timeframes and larger scales. Some participants proposed prioritising "right habitat in the right place," drawing on emerging mapping, and developing staged plans so delivery teams can move quickly when funding becomes available. Many contributions focused

on joined-up planning and governance. Suggestions include a partnership or host organisation to coordinate delivery, link action plans, and address shared infrastructure issues.

Community engagement and ownership was raised repeatedly. Participants stressed avoiding "parachute conservation," allowing time and budget for meaningful engagement, and being transparent about uncertainty, including the possibility that some approaches may not succeed. Holyhead was noted as an example where engagement was tailored to local circumstances, even though it took longer. The Well Being of Future Generations Act (Wales, 2015) was mentioned as an important factor and driver when considering the co-benefits and impacts of projects.

Finally, there was discussion within one group about whether efforts and funding in Wales should be consolidated into a single, seascape-scale restoration project. It was suggested that focusing resources into one flagship site could help deliver a well-evidenced demonstrator. However, this was challenged in relation to equity for local communities and the fair distribution of funding. An alternative view emphasised the value of supporting multiple project sites across Wales, enabling broader learning, more inclusive engagement, and a more representative evidence base to inform future restoration efforts.

Future habitat and species work

Several participants talked of specific species focused efforts such as oysters, seagrass, sea slugs, and fish larvae. Whilst not pinning down the scale, there was discussion around how these relate to the general health of their ecosystems, and in the case of fish larvae to other species and to the fishing industry. Oysters are valued for multiple ecosystem services and seen as relevant at seascape scale if functioning beds can be restored.

On habitats, saltmarsh, sand dunes and river restoration were discussed and linked to wider ecosystem function. Saltmarsh restoration was associated with managed coastal realignment, but participants noted it can be challenging in Wales due to space constraints. Catchment scale or 'source to sea' river restoration is seen as desirable, whilst acknowledging the need for better modelling, data, and understanding across both freshwater and marine specialisms.

Several comments were explicitly place-based, including interest in water-quality-linked indicators in the Menai Strait. Others considered historical baselines, for example, what was present 100 years ago, and whether current designations miss something.

Further discussion considered how linking up habitats at landscape scale can deliver greater results. Others suggested focusing on species in combination with habitats - for example saltmarsh and seagrass - to create positive effects for fish stock.

Across responses, some participants returned to the idea of "right thing, right place." Choosing the appropriate scale and sequencing for restoration and enhancement, whilst also factoring in human dimensions, pressures and perceptions to decisions-making. Please refer to Appendix 2 for participant-mapped detail of the places and types of restoration they hope to see in future.

Working together at Seascape scale

Participants see collaboration as a route to efficiency, shared learning (including from failures), improved sequencing, and seascape-scale coverage. They also linked collaboration to credibility – creating a stronger united voice for communities and funders - less duplication, and potentially less competition for short-term funding.

Challenges centre on time and complexity: more meetings, slower sign-off, heavier admin or data, and risks around governance, continuity and drifting from objectives. Power dynamics and representation are a major concern, alongside the difficulty of agreeing common terminology, branding and messaging.

Proposed fixes include setting out clear goals, roles, and understanding mutual benefits and values; plain-language governance in the form of Terms of Reference or agreements; communications plans, independent chairing for fairness, and resourcing participation costs.

Not all invited parties could make this workshop, meaning voices from local business, fisheries, community and Welsh Government were absent – this was noted both by organisers and

participants. Several actors who were invited but were unable to attend the preliminary workshop, have since been contacted by the organisers separately. To continue these discussions with a broader knowledge base, local actor mapping would help identify people and sequence involvement and communication – important in planning the future process of engagement and ensuring people's contributions are worthwhile.

Those at the workshop suggested a range of actors to involve in future stages of the project. These suggestions will help inform the project's actor mapping exercise and future engagement activities. Many of the groups identified are already included within the current actor map and will be included in the primary workshop. Examples include the Welsh Government, local or community councils, fishers, recreational groups, harbour and navigation authorities, Stena Line (Holyhead), The Crown Estate, Dŵr Cymru, River Dee partners, other NGOs, business and tourism, education/young people, creatives and funders. As future workshops develop, the actor map will naturally populate as involvement is cross-checked with participants.

Possible Next Steps

The workshop's final session gave participants the chance to reflect on their discussions, then consider what more they would like to see happen, and what kinds of resources or skills they could potentially offer to support continuation of efforts at Seascape scale.

Maintaining momentum

In general, participants want to maintain momentum on joined up and collaborative approaches to restoration and enhancement at scale. There was a consistent call to move from discussion to action: building and sharing the evidence bases for habitat and species restoration, creating shared theory of change, prioritising realistically and clearly, and acting on what is already known from the research and evidence.

Many see greater join-up as important, including connecting habitat action plans, improving monitoring of connectivity between projects, and using "seascape" as a coherent framing with funders. The need for long-term monitoring was raised, alongside uncertainty about what data already exists.

Funding remains central - with calls for more flexible and adequate support over a longer timeframe. The capacity and capability needed to deliver projects is also fundamental. Participants also highlighted the importance of a political will which prioritises healthy seas.

Offers of resources and support

In order to help maintain momentum, participants offered a practical mix of support which could be available to help move seascape-scale work from discussion to delivery. These included additional capacity for monitoring and staffing, access to venues and, where feasible, land to support on-site activity. Several participants noted opportunities for shared data and monitoring, including volunteer water-quality testing, citizen science networks, and emerging plans for seagrass and saltmarsh monitoring, and there is a willingness to help development of monitoring metrics.

Others offered technical expertise on habitat suitability, modelling, and methods (notably for seagrass, saltmarsh and oysters), including lessons from existing programmes and local Anglesey restoration sites, and hatchery development.

Some proposed planning and coordination, including access to strategic tools such as the Marine Delivery Route map, support through coastal coordinator roles, and routes into wider stakeholder networks and committees. Several offers related to funding and policy navigation, such as support to develop bids (including via LNRS), help with Welsh Government funding applications, and early legal or statutory advice to reduce downstream consenting risks. Communications support to tailor engagement and involve communities at appropriate stages could also be made available.

In general, participants found value in the idea of work at seascape scale in North Wales, and would like to see collaborative conversations continue.

In Summary

The preliminary 'Connecting Conwy' workshop helped to lay the ground for future seascape scale restoration and enhancement work in North Wales. The discussions blended both imaginative and practical thought and demonstrate existing strengths whilst acknowledging areas to improve.

Participants described seascape scale restoration as working within a connected system - habitats, species and human activity – which is most visible along the coast where communities live, and livelihoods depend on the sea. They recognised existing foundations in North Wales such as outreach and ocean literacy, volunteer energy, and a desire for collaboration. Furthermore, both previous and ongoing active restoration efforts across seagrass, oysters and saltmarsh are beginning to generate and share early monitoring results, alongside valuable learnings from initial trials and pilots. This growing evidence base is helping to inform and refine future work.

Place-based context matters. A common thread from participants was the need to involve a broad range of perspectives and interests benefitting from or impacted by restoration or enhancement efforts at scale. These include local communities, local authorities, utilities, landowners and managers, other NGOs, and Welsh Government departments. At the same time, participants highlighted Wales-specific realities shaping delivery, including Welsh policy framing, persistent issues of funding continuity, licensing complexity and water quality pressures.

Overall, this preliminary workshop allowed a shared understanding to be built and produced inciteful data which can form the basis of future conversations. Seascape scale collaboration for nature in North Wales is something that participants would like to see and be involved in.

Appendix 1.

A map was annotated during the workshop to answer question 2.4. '*Where are current recovery, management, research and/or monitoring activities t*aking place in North Wales now, and who is doing what?'

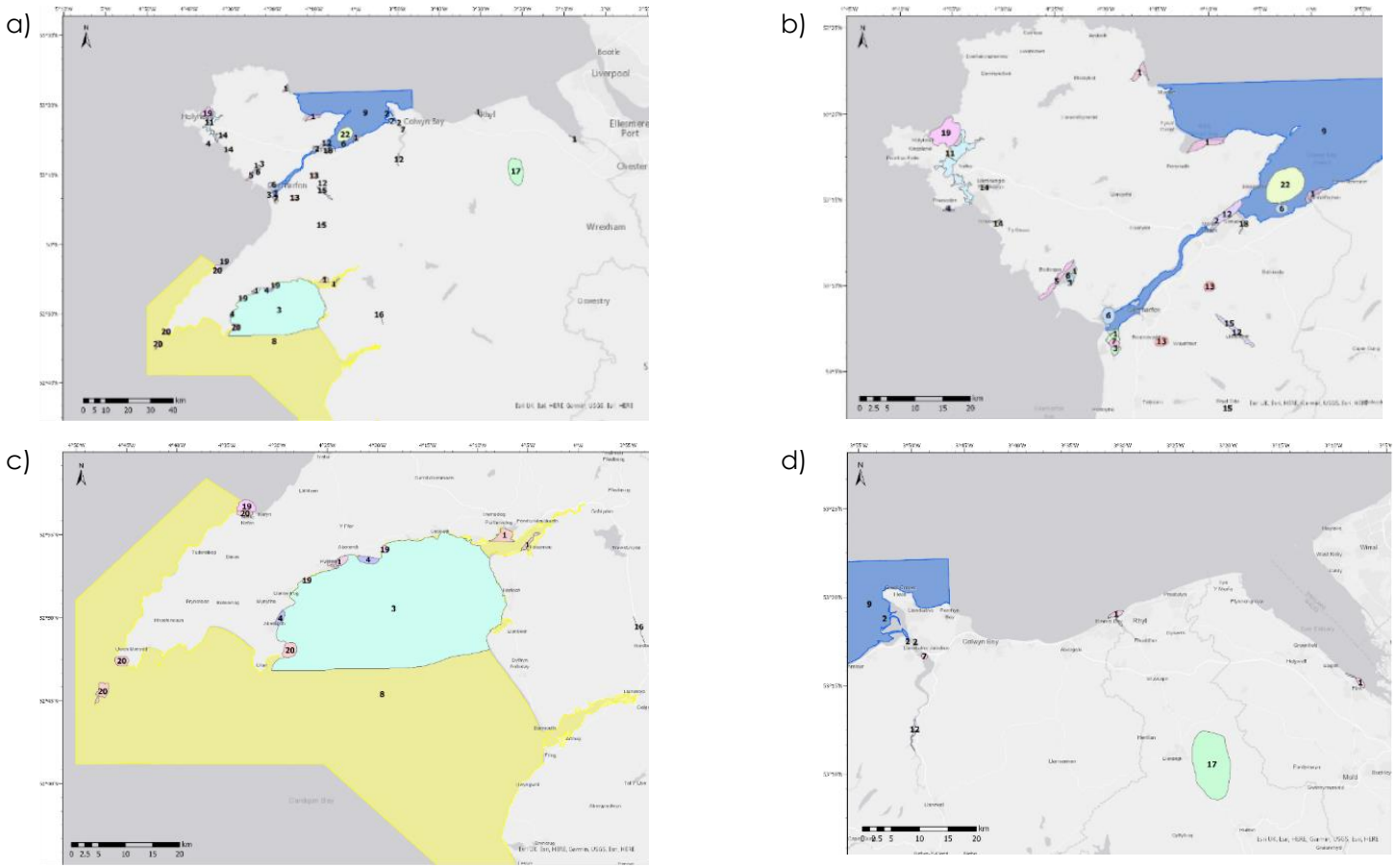

Figure 1. Digital map outputs of locations annotated on map during workshop relating to question 2.4: a) full map extent of North Wales and regions b) Anglesey c) Llŷn Peninsula and North Cardigan Bay, d) Great Orme to the River Dee. The numbers correspond to the comments collated in the Table 1.

Table 1. Comments provided alongside map annotations relating to question 2.4 during the workshop, corresponding with Figure 1.

No.	Location	Comment
1	All over the North coast of Wales from the Dee to the Dyfi	North Wales Saltmarsh Project working on saltmarsh research, mapping and monitoring
2	Conwy Bay, Bangor University research raft in the Menai Strait	Native oyster restoration monitoring assessing oyster density, bathymetry and community composition overtime, also investigating the effect of exposure on oyster survival and shell growth.
3	Cefni saltmarsh, Y Foryd	Boosting Saltmarsh Management for Fisheries Species PhD project sampling monthly for a year (Nov 2024- Oct 2025) to look at their importance for fish and shrimps and the factors influencing fisheries species abundance.
4	Rhoscolyn, Abersoch, Abererch	Inputting Advanced Mooring Systems (AMS) into locations in order to improve seabed health and consequently seabed species such as seagrass etc. Also to provide skills (upskilling) to communities, taking them with us, not replacing. Gifting the AMS to local fishers, anglers.
5	Bodorgan estate, opposite Cefni marsh	Investigating potential for *Z. noltii* restoration and water quality sampling
6	Traeth Lafan, Traeth Melynog, Malltraeth	Seasonal monitoring as part of casework advice to Welsh Government opening cockle beds
7	Y Foryd, Conwy	WFD seagrass monitoring of Y Foryd (including mapping) and Conwy (no mapping)
8	Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau Special Area of Conservation	Intertidal monitoring: Sabellaria spp., intertidal mudflat and sandflats, seagrass (Portdinllaen). Subtidal monitoring: reefs (Saint Tudwal's Islands, Bardsey Island), carbonate reefs, bays and banks (grab sampling), horse mussel (*Modiolus modiolus*)
9	Menai Strait and Conwy Bay Special Area of Conservation	Intertidal monitoring: reefs (boulder, tide swept communities), mudflats and sandflats (Traeth Lafan, Menai Strait) Subtidal monitoring: bays and banks, reefs (Menai Strait, Puffin Island, Moelfre)
10	Muddy Hollow, Tremadog Bay	Monitoring trials of volcano worm population and muddy communities

No.	Location	Comment
11	Beddmanarch	RSPB with Welsh Government and North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent are monitoring a tern colony within the inland sea. Mixed seabird colony, including terns.
12	Llyn Padarn, Menai Strait, River Conwy	Lab Dŵr water quality monitoring
13	Gwynedd	Projects on fencing schemes
14	Anglesey	Floating wetlands
15	Llyn Padarn, Llyn y Gadair	Prosiect Torgoch recovery project
16	Afon Eden	Freshwater pearl mussels
17	Afon Clwyd catchment	INNS management
18	Afon Cegin	Caru'r Afon Cegin
19	Inland sea/ Cymyran Strait, Porthdinllaen, Llanbedrog, Afon Wen	Seagrass restoration using seed from donor meadow (Portdinllaen), monitoring and community engagement.
20	Ynys Enlli, Uwchmynydd, Bwlchtocyn	WDC Shorewatch, citizen science marine mammal monitoring sites set up as part of the Bardsey Marine Mammals Project
21	Wales-wide	Ongoing citizen science projects carrying out otter surveys and water quality monitoring in North Wales following MPA network Wales-wide projects
22	Bangor	Monthly monitoring of mussel E. coli levels for Shellfish Hygiene Classification

Appendix 2

Map was annotated during workshop to answer question 2.5. '*Where would you like to see recovery, management, research and/or monitoring take place in the future?'*

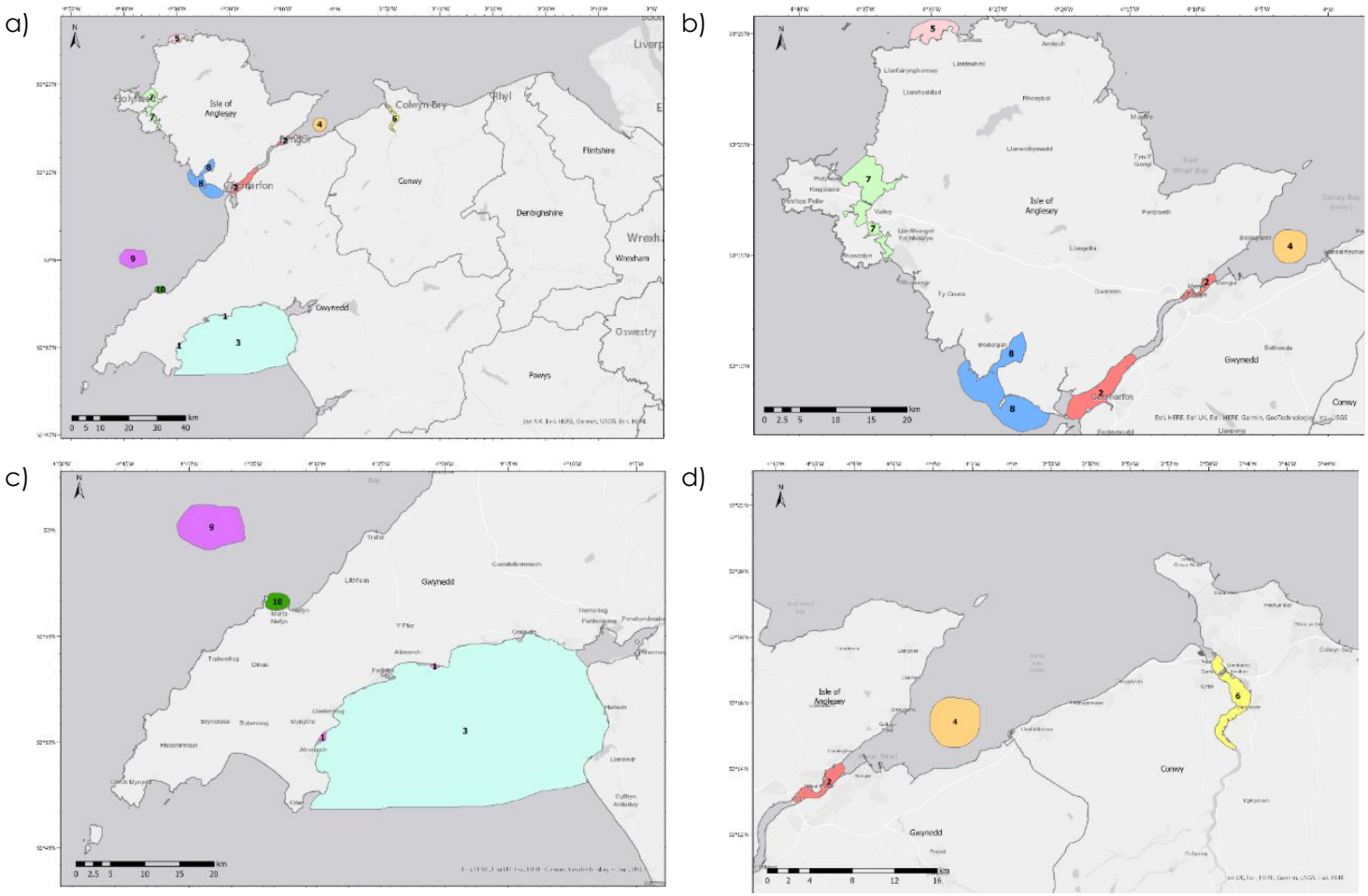

Figure 2. Digital outputs of locations annotated on map during workshop relating to question 2.5: a) full map extent of North Wales and regions b) Anglesey c) Llŷn Peninsula and North Cardigan Bay, d) Conwy Bay. The numbers correspond to the comments collated in the Table 2.

Table 2. Comments provided alongside map annotations relating to question 2.5 during the workshop, corresponding with Figure 2.

No.	Location	Comment
1	Abersoch Abererch	Many tourists during the summer, consequently high human presence on beaches, in water, causing disturbance both in presence and in physical action. Seeing as so many people use this stretch of coastline, and so many businesses here thrive, it would be nice to see more effort to reserve what is here, and restore what is/has been lost
2	Menai Strait	Habitat condition monitoring. Top of river catchment management research
3	Tremadog Bay	Potential area that could be good for 'seascape' restoration. Suitable habitat for oysters, seagrass.
4	Menai Strait	Where pressures on habitat are greatest- development, pressure, tourism, population, infrastructure
5	Cemlyn	Seeing research and monitoring efforts reach the northern-most points. Challenging areas with strong tides but wonderfully diverse habitats
6	River Conwy	Saltmarsh improvements and expansion
7	Inland sea/ Cymyran Strait	Potential seagrass and saltmarsh restoration/enhancement (connecting with RSPB for tern colony conservation)
8	Malltraeth	Potential historical sites for native oysters. Area to assess for recovery and feature management/monitoring of restoration undertaken
9	Caernarfon Bay	Potential to utilise other biogenic reef habitats for oyster restoration ie. *M. modiolus*- evidence of historic oyster presence?
10	Porthdinllaen	Building on what's been going on at Porthdinllaen for years in order to protect the seagrass meadow- link to harbour management and make sure there is no degradation