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Making the transition work: The hidden labour of nature-recovery farming

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ABSTRACT

Globally, agricultural policies addressing the biodiversity and climate crises are increasingly characterised by diversified funding landscapes that combine public and private models. Existing research has examined diverse agri-environment schemes and contractual arrangements but offers limited understanding of the work required to engage with multiple funding mechanisms and sustain participation for members of the farming and land management community. This paper addresses this gap by examining how diversified agri-environmental funding systems are made workable in practice.

This paper contributes to the understanding of the international challenges of transforming environmental land management and farming by highlighting the work required for effective participation in this transition, providing one of the first integrated and in-depth analyses of England's post-Brexit agri-environmental funding landscape. Drawing on a systematic funding matrix, consultation reports, and 14 interviews with farmers and land managers, this study documents the scale and diversity of emerging agri-environmental funding arrangements. We show how the resulting governance complexity is experienced and managed in everyday decision-making by the farming and land management communities. The paper advances understanding of agricultural transition, arguing that funding systems are enacted through six emerging forms of work. Our analysis identifies six forms of often unrecognised and under-resourced work involved in navigating the contemporary funding landscape. This 'hidden work' has implications for equity, participation, and the sustainability of transitions with transferability to a range of global policy areas.

By reframing the work of agri-environmental transition, this paper makes a substantive contribution to applied environmental management. The framework developed offers transferable insights for international policy-makers and practitioners designing agri-environmental interventions in other contexts characterised by funding diversification and institutional complexity.

1. Introduction

Agriculture is one of the most significant human drivers of environmental change and plays a central role in transgressing multiple planetary boundaries. Global food systems are implicated in biodiversity loss, land-system change, freshwater depletion, biogeochemical flows of nitrogen and phosphorus, and climate change [1–3]. Agricultural expansion and intensification have been identified as dominant pressures on terrestrial biodiversity, while emissions from farming and associated land-use change contribute substantially to global

greenhouse gas emissions [4,5]. As a result, agriculture sits at the centre of debates about how societies can operate within a safe operating space for humanity.

In response to planetary environmental challenges, agricultural policy is undergoing significant transition internationally, with increasing emphasis on sustainability, multifunctionality, supporting nature recovery and the delivery of agri-environmental public goods [6, 7]. Agri-environmental schemes (AES) have been central to this shift, yet despite their considerable promise, evidence shows they have been unsuccessful in delivering the environmental outcomes anticipated,

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including halting biodiversity loss and declines in ecosystem services [8–11]. These concerns have prompted further policy experimentation, including greater emphasis on public good delivery, the diversification of funding mechanisms and increased interest in private and blended finance complementing public schemes [12].

England represents a particularly significant case within this global shift. Following the UK's exit from the European Union, the agricultural policy narrative in England is being rapidly reconfigured, moving away from area-based direct payments towards a “public money for public goods” approach. This has involved introducing a diverse mix of agri-environment schemes alongside growing engagement with private and blended finance [12–14]. These changes make England an important empirical setting for examining how contemporary agricultural transitions are unfolding in practice.

Existing research acknowledges the increasing complexity in agri-environment policy and funding [12,15] but primarily examines policy through individual or a small number of agri-environment schemes [16–18]. There is limited understanding of how agricultural transitions are enacted across multiple funding mechanisms specifically in relation to the engagement required to navigate them by the farming and land management community. The aim of this paper is to address this gap by examining diversified agri-environmental and wider cross-sector funding opportunities, and how these are navigated and made operational in practice by upland farmers and the land managers working with them.

Drawing on England as a case study, this paper makes two core contributions of global significance. Empirically, it documents the growing diversity of agri-environmental funding schemes in England and demonstrates how this diversity produces complexity that farmers, land managers, and advisors aspiring to achieve nature recovery farming must actively navigate with clear messages for international policy-makers facing similar challenges. Conceptually, it advances a way of understanding sustainability transitions in agriculture by foregrounding the forms of everyday work through which these transitions are enacted, coordinated, and made operable. Using institutional ethnography (IE), the paper reframes agricultural transition not simply as a matter of policy design or behavioural change, but as an ongoing process of *work*. Examining England as a case study generates internationally relevant insights for countries undergoing or seeking to initiate similar transitions towards sustainable agriculture or fostering aspirations to do so. We first outline how existing literature has positioned agricultural transitions and then document our approach inspired by IE.

1.1. Global transitioning agricultural policy

Across a wide range of agricultural contexts, sustainability-oriented policy reforms have resulted in increasingly complex and diversified agri-environmental funding landscapes [15]. Existing research shows that transitions away from uniform income support towards environmental and climate objectives are typically characterised by the layering of multiple policy instruments, rather than the replacement of existing schemes [19]. As a result, farmers in many countries now engage simultaneously with agri-environment payments, regulatory requirements, private finance mechanisms, and market-based incentives, each operating with distinct governance arrangements, accountability structures, and timescales [12].

Evidence from Europe, North America, Latin America and China, for example, suggests that this diversification is frequently associated with challenges of coordination, uncertainty, and uneven participation. Studies of agri-environmental governance in the European Union highlight how overlapping schemes and evolving conditionalities generate administrative burden and strategic uncertainty for farmers which can decrease the probability of enrolling [20,21]. In the United States, research on conservation programmes shows that engagement often depends on farmers' ability to navigate multiple federal and state instruments alongside private and voluntary initiatives [22,23]. Similarly, studies of payments for ecosystem services and ecological

compensation schemes in Latin America [24] and China [25] suggest funding arrangements place substantial coordination demands on land managers. Across the world, there is an increasing diversity of schemes for payments for ecosystem services [26] and carbon farming [27].

Across these diverse contexts, a consistent finding is that the success of agri-environmental policy reform depends not only on scheme design, but on farmers' capacity to engage with complex and shifting funding environments. However, while policy complexity is frequently identified as a barrier to uptake, it is often treated as a background condition rather than an object of analysis. Much of the literature continues to focus on participation decisions, behavioural drivers, or compliance within individual schemes [16–18], with limited attention to how farmers navigate multiple schemes over time or how diversification reshapes the practical demands of engagement.

1.2. English uplands as a case study for policy transition

These dynamics are particularly pronounced in upland farming contexts, where reliance on public support is high and opportunities for income diversification are structurally constrained. Here, we use the Less Favoured Area (LFA, under EC Directive 75/276) designation to define the uplands. LFAs are areas where farming is less productive and less profitable because of difficult physical conditions such as harsh climate, short growing seasons, poor soils and drainage, steep slopes, and high altitude [28]. Upland farmers have long played a central role in shaping upland landscapes, contributing not only to food production but also to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of rural communities [29,30]. At the same time, upland farming viability is shaped by intersecting socio-political, economic, and environmental pressures, requiring continual adaptation to exogenous change [28,31,32].

Research consistently shows that upland farming encompasses a wide range of often hidden, relational, and affective labour that sustain farms over time. Core practices such as stockwork and shepherding rely on long-term, embodied knowledge of animals, weather, and terrain rather than formal instruction [33,34]. This labour is culturally valorised through “good farmer” identities [35]. However, much of the work remains unseen, including anticipatory decision-making, emotional labour during periods of loss, and constant vigilance under environmental uncertainty [36]. Similarly, highly visible land-management activities, such as walling, drainage, and boundary repair, depend on continuous, routine maintenance work [36]. Household and care work, often undertaken by women, further absorbs economic shocks and temporal pressures, yet remains systematically undervalued [37]. Informal practices of mutual aid and knowledge-sharing are likewise invisible, despite their importance in sustaining farming in marginal environments [38]. Importantly farmers are fundamentally challenged by alternative approaches to farming work that change both the practices of farm work and the farmland aesthetics [39].

In England, upland farming is changing rapidly due to post-Brexit reconfiguration of agricultural policy. The majority of upland LFA farms would have been commercially unviable in their 2019 form without public payments [40]. Following the shift towards “public money for public goods” [13], agri-environment schemes have become central to both environmental delivery and farm viability. Yet uptake of earlier schemes, such as Countryside Stewardship, has been uneven, and evidence suggests that upland farms may face substantial income gaps following the removal of direct payments [41,42]. Engagement with diverse funding schemes is therefore both economically critical and practically demanding.

The agri-environment literature identifies multiple factors shaping uptake, including farmer identities [35,43], age [44], farm structure and type [45], peer influence [46], and scheme design features such as flexibility and administrative burden [16,17,47]. In upland areas, place-based identities and stewardship values are particularly influential, with extensive practices often understood as already delivering environmental benefits [48,49]. Qualitative studies further highlight

how inflexible regulations, stacking constraints, and long-term commitments can deter participation, especially for tenant farmers and those facing future uncertainty [50–52].

Together, this literature demonstrates that barriers to agri-environment engagement are not simply attitudinal, but embedded in the practical organisation of farming. However, there remains limited understanding of how farmers and other actors working in these landscapes navigate increasingly diversified funding landscapes in practice, particularly where exposure to risk is high and margins for error are low. While the importance of advice, trust, and prior experience is well recognised [38,48], engagement is rarely examined as an ongoing form of work unfolding across multiple schemes, institutions, and time horizons.

2. Methodology

2.1. Case study rationale and analytical approach

This study focuses on upland farming in England examining the work involved in transitioning towards nature recovery farming under changing policy and funding arrangements. The conditions described in the previous section (1.2) make the work of adapting to new governance expectations especially important. Empirically, the study is focused on a diverse group of upland farmers and farming representatives working broadly across a northern upland English context, while also drawing on policy documents, funding texts, and institutional materials relevant to upland England more widely. The dataset comprises 14 interviews, 13 documents, and analysis of 41 funding types and schemes. This design allows the study to remain grounded in the experiences of those navigating transitions in practice, while also examining the wider institutional arrangements shaping upland farming across England. Upland farming in England is therefore treated not as a statistically representative case, but as a critical and revealing case in which broader dynamics of sustainability-oriented agricultural reform are especially visible due to the speed and scale of recent policy change [53]. Although many accounts in the interviews and consultation reports refer to how the work of accessing funding has changed following the UK's exit from CAP, we do not claim to provide a quantitative comparison of levels of work from 'before and after' the funding change as our research commenced after the transitional process had started.

With a relatively small and diverse range of participants, we make no claim of having reached data saturation. By triangulating our interview data with consultation report data we have ensured that our findings are robust whilst acknowledging that there is plenty of scope to expand this research going forward. Institutional ethnography (IE) provides a powerful research strategy for addressing this gap in knowledge regarding the work involved in transitioning to nature recovery farming through policy and funding changes. By tracing how everyday activities are organised through policies, texts, and institutional relationships, institutional ethnography makes visible the forms of work that underpin policy enactment but often remain hidden [54]. For the purposes of our analysis, we adopt the broad definition of 'work' utilised in Institutional Ethnography to include any deliberate or routinised activity, encompassing both paid and unpaid work [55]. We use this definition to both categorise the complexity and diversification of work that is being done, and to highlight gaps in the official recognition of the work required to engage with land management and farming transitions in policy and funding narratives. We also draw on Turner [56] who shows the importance of tracing sequences of work, not only to what people do, but to how different activities develop over time. This provides a basis for examining forms of work as they build up and layer on top of each other over time. Applied to agricultural policy transitions, this approach shifts attention from participation outcomes to the labour required to make participation possible. In doing so, it offers new insight into how sustainability transitions are lived, negotiated, and sustained in practice, particularly in complex, diversified funding environments such as those now shaping upland England.

IE begins from people's everyday activities and traces how these are coordinated through "ruling relations" such as policy texts, administrative procedures, metrics, and organisational routines [57,58] which can also be organised into systems [59]. This makes IE particularly suited to analysing governance and implementation in complex, multi-actor settings where responsibility is dispersed and policy is enacted through texts and institutional processes [60]. IE is also a recognised approach for examining how policy is made workable in practice, by documenting the work of interpretation, coordination, and compliance rather than treating policy as a stable intervention [55,57].

A small body of IE work has investigated how agricultural projects and certification systems are socially organised through institutional relations [61] and illustrate the potential of IE to make visible the everyday work of farming within governance systems. However, such applications remain rare, particularly in relation to contemporary policy transitions toward sustainability and the navigation of diversified agri-environmental funding systems.

The interviews and the everyday accounts of farmers and intermediaries as they engaged with changing funding arrangements were critical to our analytical approach. These accounts provided the starting point for identifying the forms of work involved. We then used the funding matrix to examine the scheme rules, texts, and requirements that generated and organised this work, and the consultation documents to situate participants' experiences within wider sectoral narratives about reform. This multi-source approach allowed us to move from people's situated experiences outward to the institutional processes shaping them, consistent with the analytical direction of institutional ethnography.

All these stages had ethics approval. This was done via the Sheffield Hallam University's Research Ethics Committee with reference number ER66469965) and part of a wider research project on the barriers and enablers to nature recovery farming.

2.2. Review of funding schemes and construction of the funding matrix

To characterise the evolving funding landscape, we undertook a point-in-time analysis of public, private and blended funding routes relevant to biodiversity enhancement on upland farms in England. These were not limited to grants or subsidies but also included other mechanisms through which farming activity might be financially supported, such as market-based schemes, private finance, supply-chain initiatives and blended funding arrangements. The purpose was not to evaluate scheme effectiveness, but to map the range of funding routes that upland land managers might encounter and combine. This is consistent with scoping approaches used to clarify complex evidence bases [62].

The analysis was explicitly time-bound. An initial review was undertaken in 2023, with additional funding routes identified and incorporated towards the end of 2025. This period coincided with a rapidly changing funding environment in which schemes were being introduced, revised, phased in and phased out. The analysis should therefore be read as a structured point in time reflection of the funding landscape as encountered across this period, rather than as a definitive account of all schemes available at any single moment in time. Whilst the funding landscape was and continues to be constantly changing, the research took place within a timeframe where the funding matrix and interviews were contemporaneous, broadly categorised by the transitional period of 2023 to 2025.

Funding routes were identified through structured Google searches and follow-up review of official scheme websites, delivery documentation and associated guidance. Search terms combined references to upland farming, biodiversity, environmental land management and funding in England. Routes were included where they appeared relevant to environmental action in agricultural settings in the English uplands and were publicly accessible during the study period. Importantly, we also retained cases where little information was available beyond an initial website description, as this limited visibility formed an important

part of the landscape in its own right. In other words, the ease with which a scheme could be identified and understood was treated as analytically significant.

For each funding route, information was coded as consistently as possible from the materials available, including website descriptions, eligibility criteria, guidance documents, contract information and delivery materials where these existed. Where key information was absent, unclear, or no longer available because a scheme had changed or closed, this was recorded rather than resolved away, since such gaps themselves provide important context about the practical challenges of navigating funding opportunities.

Overall, the review was designed to approximate the experience of an upland farmer attempting to investigate what sources of support might be available and how far these could be understood from the information in the public domain. Consistent with IE's attention to the coordinating role of texts, the matrix treats scheme documentation as an empirical object that organises and standardises action across space and time [57,58]. A full list of source types with a brief description can be found in the supplementary materials.

2.3. Consultation document analysis

We reviewed a sample of national consultation documents relating to farming and environmental payments and subsidies. Document analysis is a well-established qualitative method for understanding how problems are framed, how responsibilities are distributed, and how policy expectations are constructed in official and sector-facing texts [63]. We identified and reviewed 13 publicly available consultation and engagement documents produced between 2019 and 2024 by

Table 1
Documents included in the consultation analysis.

Document (author, date)	Participants	Geography/scope
Barriers and opportunities for regenerative farming (UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology for DEFRA, 2023)	23 participants	UK - Farmers, land managers, advisors, NGOs, policy & industry
Peak District ELMS Test - Final Report (Peak District National Park Authority, 2022)	34 landholdings	Peak District (Dark & SW Peak, White Peak) Farmers and land managers
Regenerative Farming Report (Demos, 2023)	3011 respondents	UK (national) Nationally representative farmers
Farm Sustainability Fund: Regenerative Agriculture (Newcastle University, 2022)	87 participants	Northern England - Farmers, agronomists, researchers
Roadmap for Financing a Regenerative Agricultural Transition (WWF-UK, 2023)	Not stated	England - Food value chain actors incl. Farmers, finance, NGOs
Wild Peak Farmers' Assembly (Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, 2022)	18 participants	Peak District- Farmers, conservation bodies, NPA, NFU
Land Managers Forum Workshop (Peak District National Park Authority, 2022)	Not stated	Peak District National Park Farmers and land managers
LNRS Farmer & Landowner Engagement Report (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2024)	280 participants	West Yorkshire- Farmers, landowners, public bodies, NGOs
Blended Finance Pilot, Sheffield Peak District (Natural Capital Solutions, 2023)	6 farms	Sheffield Peak District - Upland and lowland farms
Hedgerows Survey (CPRE, 2022)	1160 respondents	UK- Farm owners, tenants, managers
Uplands Tenants Survey (NFU, 2022)	494 respondents	North of England - Upland and lowland farmers
Nature Friendly Farming Review (Resources for Change/Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 2023)	29 participants	UK- Foundation staff, supported organisations, stakeholders
Economics of Hill Farming (RSPB, Wildlife Trusts & National Trust, 2019)	29 farms	UK uplands & marginal areas Sheep and beef livestock farms

government bodies, research institutions, NGOs, charities, and sector organisations (Table 1). Documents were identified using Google searches and a call for evidence amongst the farming advisory community included in our interview sample. Of the 13 documents reviewed, 4 included 'regenerative agriculture' or 'regenerative farming' in the title which the UK Parliament defines as a "farmer-led movement that aims to work with nature and improve natural ecosystem processes" ([64] p2.) Whilst this term was included in our list of search terms, it was not a specific analytical focus of our work and was not used to frame our interview design or data analysis.

Collectively, the consultations reported engagement with over 5000 participants through large-scale national surveys, alongside more in-depth qualitative formats (e.g. workshops and interviews). While participant numbers vary substantially between documents, together they represent a broad and diverse cross-section of the farming and land management community (Table 1). Some participants may have contributed to multiple consultation documents, and sampling approaches varied across reports. The purpose of reviewing these documents is not to achieve statistical significance based on individual characteristics or factors, but to capture the breadth of institutional discourses and logics through which farming, environmental change, and policy implementation are framed.

These consultations therefore capture a wide spectrum of farming contexts relevant to transitions toward nature recovery and regenerative land management.

Documents were screened for relevance to; (i) agri-environmental funding reform; (ii) barriers to uptake and delivery; (iii) the role of advice, administration, and scheme design; and (iv) expectations placed on farmers, advisors, and delivery bodies. As part of the wider project, these documents were analysed qualitatively to identify recurring concerns, institutional problem framings, and points of contestation, using an iterative reading and coding approach consistent with qualitative document analysis practice [63].

2.4. Interviews: sampling, data collection, and analysis

A total of 14 participants were included in the analysis (see Table 2). Interviews and meeting-based conversations were conducted between 2024 and 2025 and included farmers, growers, farm advisors,

Table 2
Interview participant details.

Code	Participant background	Land/role context	Data format
BF2	Tenant farmer	Upland livestock system	Interview transcript
DVF1	Owner-occupier farmer	Mixed lowland-upland	Meeting notes
FG1	Owner-occupier farmer	Small upland holding	Interview transcript
MV1	Grower/CIC lead	Community food & land project	Interview transcript
HM1	Owner-occupier farmer	Mixed farming	Meeting notes (×2)
RV1	Smallholder (leased)	Peri-urban upland fringe	Meeting notes
UH1	Conservation org. Farm manager	Large upland holding	Interview transcript
UH2	Smallholder (owned)	Upland edge	Interview transcript
MVFA	Farm advisor	Advisory/facilitation role	Meeting notes
HVFC	Farm cluster coordinator	Landscape-scale coordination	Consultation notes
GWCT	Conservation advisor	NGO advisory role	Consultation notes
P13	Public land management officer	Protected landscape	Interview transcript
HF1	Upland livestock farmer	High Peak	Interview transcript
NED_1	Farmer (owner-occupier)	Upland fringe	Interview transcript

conservation organisation staff, and public-sector land management officers. Data were gathered through a combination of recorded interviews (later transcribed) and detailed contemporaneous notes from meetings and consultation events where funding and land-use transitions were discussed. Participants were recruited through targeted outreach to organisations and networks working in upland farming and nature recovery, including conservation bodies, advisory services, and farming groups. Sampling was then extended through snowballing, with interviewees identifying further participants whose roles were directly involved in navigating agri-environment funding and land management transitions.

Within the scope of the study we took the decision to purposively sample individuals and organisations that were interested and engaged with nature recovery farming and therefore we do not claim to have gathered a representative sample of views or experiences, but rather a broad range of perspectives from people working as farmers and with farmers in upland areas. Interviews focused on participants' roles in land management and funding engagement, before moving to detailed accounts of how funding decisions were made, how schemes were navigated, and how challenges were managed over time. Particular attention was paid to how farmers and advisors interacted with payment schemes. Interviews also explored how participants anticipated future changes, evaluated risks, and coordinated their actions with advisors, landowners, regulators, and delivery organisations.

Interviews were conducted in a largely unstructured and conversational manner, allowing participants to direct discussion toward issues they considered consequential in their day-to-day work. This approach enabled the research to remain open to unanticipated lines of inquiry and to follow the institutional relations surfaced by participants themselves [65].

Data were analysed using iterative thematic coding in NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2020) using established qualitative coding principle including; familiarisation, open coding; focused recoding; and iterative theme development [66]. While coding was inductive, it was later interpreted using an IE orientation to "work" and coordination.

Initial inductive coding was grounded in participants' accounts of what they were doing to identify, access, understand, and navigate diversified funding opportunities from the interviews. During this coding, particular attention was paid to the sequence in which different activities arose. Institutional ethnography's concern with tracing how work develops through institutional processes over time [56] revealed that different forms of work became necessary as participants moved from first making sense of available opportunities through to coordinating multiple schemes over longer time horizons. The categories were distinguished by the main practical problem each form of work addressed and its position within this wider sequence of engagement, rather than by assuming that the activities occurred separately in practice. Where interview excerpts contained several overlapping forms of work, they were revisited during focused coding and classified according to the dominant practical purpose being addressed at that stage of the funding process. The resulting categories were then refined through triangulation with IE literature on work and wider research on visible and hidden labour in farming. Finally, they were cross-referenced against the funding matrix and consultation documents, which were treated as institutional texts that helped explain how these forms of work related to wider issues within the farming sector.

3. Results

Table 3 summarises the six forms of work identified through the interviews and then examined alongside the consultation documents and funding matrix. While analytically distinct, these forms of work often overlap in practice as farmers and intermediaries navigate a diversified funding landscape. There was a temporal dimension to these different forms of work as they accumulated and became more interconnected as participants moved further into scheme engagement and

Table 3

Six forms of work involved in navigating diversified agri-environmental funding.

Form of work	What it involves
Orientation and sense-making	Interpreting guidance, eligibility signals, and policy change to understand what schemes are available and actionable under uncertainty.
Alignment work	Judging fit between schemes and farm systems, land capability, labour, tenure, and local notions of "good farming".
Administrative and textual work	Preparing applications, contracts, maps, records, and evidence; managing reporting, compliance, and verification across schemes.
Anticipatory and risk-management work	Assessing future commitments, cashflow timing, policy volatility, and risks of long-term lock-in or constraint.
Advisory and relational work	Building trusted advice relationships; brokering access, credibility, and coordination across advisors, organisations, and peers.
Coordination and positioning work	Sequencing and stacking schemes; positioning land and organisational arrangements to remain eligible over time.

began managing several funding arrangements at once. These activities were not strictly linear and often recurred as rules, circumstances, or combinations of funding changed. The sections that follow draw on all three sources to show how each form of work was generated, experienced, and connected to the others in everyday practice.

3.1. Orientation and sense-making work

The first form of work concerns orientation and sense-making within a complex and evolving funding landscape. The funding matrix documents a diverse funding environment for farming for nature in England, identifying 41 distinct mechanisms comprising 20 public, 12 private and 9 third sector schemes (Table 4). A consistent theme throughout the interviews and consultation documents was that this funding landscape was rapidly diversifying. Following the exit of CAP, rather than replacing a single dominant payment mechanism (Basic Payment Scheme), this landscape is characterised by layering; schemes operate simultaneously, with different objectives, delivery bodies, administrative processes, and temporal commitments. The research shows this necessitates an open-ended form of engagement in which changing rules, shifting timelines, and distributed governance require continual monitoring and reinterpretation.

Analysis of national consultation reports show that the protracted process of scheme design post-CAP has contributed substantially to uncertainty felt by farmers about how they will plug the impending funding gap (Newcastle University, 2022; Natural Capital Solutions, 2023; RSPB, Wildlife Trusts & National Trust, 2019). The funding matrix shows orientation has become a distinct and intensified form of work. Across the private-sector mechanisms, many require brokered or relationship-based access (e.g., via supply-chain participation, negotiated unit/credit sales, or finance structures), compared with public schemes which are typically presented through centralised guidance and formal application routes. Simply knowing what exists, what is changing, and which funding can be trusted becomes a non-trivial task, a situation described by one farm policy advisor as like the "wild west" because of the complexity, lack of clear scheme governance, and even accounts of farmers and landowners getting cold calls about available funding (P13).

One farmer reflected on emerging private markets such as biodiversity net gain as confusing and unclear; "*I don't know the ins and outs of it all ... that comes back to like big companies, don't it?*" (BF2). Even where these markets were known about, they were difficult to understand as workable options: "*it's really hard to pin down actually ... I'm a bit lost on how that's going to work*" (BF2). Others described a similar sense of overload and circularity, with one participant noting that "*most of us are completely ignorant of what's going on, so we're just trying our best*" (FG1).

Table 4

Quantified characteristics of upland farm funding schemes in England based on a sample of 41 funding mechanisms identified in the funding matrix.

Dimension	Description	Implications for navigation
Sector mix	20 public, 12 private, 9 third sector funding streams. Public schemes dominate numerically; private schemes tend to involve longer-term commitments, whilst market-based provision is variable.	Farmers must work across multiple governance logics (state, market, supply chain, cooperative), increasing translation and positioning work.
Visibility and access	Public schemes are high-visibility with centralised guidance with lengthy text. Most private schemes or funding opportunities are low-visibility, embedded in supply chains or delivered via price premiums or credits (e.g. pence per litre of milk), rather than discrete funding calls.	Low visibility increases sense-making and relational work, relying on advisers, buyers, or networks rather than formal application routes.
Payment type and duration	Public schemes are often short to medium term (≤ 5 years), action or capital-based. Private schemes are often outcome-based and long-term, including BNG (~ 30 years), peatland/woodland carbon ($30\text{--}35+$ years), and Nutrient Neutrality (~ 60 years).	Extends the temporal horizon of risk and commitment, requiring anticipatory planning well beyond policy and business cycles.
Administrative intensity and verification	All schemes involve formal entry conditions. Many private and hybrid schemes require ongoing monitoring, reporting, and third-party verification over the life of the agreement. Often full details are not clear.	Expands administrative and evidencing work, often shifting verification costs and responsibilities onto farmers.
Stacking and compatibility	Public schemes can restrict double funding of actions. Private schemes may allow stacking, but with conditions around additionality, permanence, and audit compatibility that are complex.	Increases alignment and sequencing work to ensure schemes remain compatible over time.

Advisors and intermediaries similarly described being overwhelmed by the breadth of schemes and the pace of change, echoing the matrix's depiction of a landscape in which effective engagement requires tracking multiple instruments, eligibility rules, and interactions simultaneously.

Together, the matrix, consultation review, and interviews show that orientation and sense-making are foundational forms of work within the current agri-environment funding system. This work extends beyond information gathering to ongoing judgement about how schemes relate to one another, which information can be trusted, and whether engagement is worthwhile. This aligns with sense-making research, which shows how actors develop workable understandings under uncertainty to support action rather than focusing directly on accuracy, precision, or finding a single objective truth [67]. Rather than being episodic, orientation is continuous; responsibility for interpreting options, matching schemes to land, and anticipating change is increasingly shifted onto individual farmers who then construct their own interpretations of what is available to them.

3.2. Alignment work: fitting schemes to farms, land, and tenure

While orientation and sense-making are about understanding what

schemes exist, alignment work involves determining whether and how particular schemes can be made to work on a given holding, alongside existing land uses, tenancies, labour availability, ecological conditions, and farmer identities. This is practical, situated work; translating generic scheme options into locally workable configurations.

Many consultation documents highlight the work required to interpret scheme eligibility criteria, including a sense that many ELM schemes exclude certain types of farm or farming landscape (e.g. upland) (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2024; Demos, 2023). There is also recognition of the paradigm shift needed for 'landscape scale' ecological transformation as a viable alternative to traditional high-intensity farming (UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology for DEFRA, 2023; Peak District National Park Authority, 2022).

Farmers interviewed discussed a shift from predictable payments to a requirement to continually re-read the farm through funding categories; *"You've got to look at your farm and think, what's the best approach ... If that SFI is there, what can I do for that area?"* (BF2). Alignment here is not abstract agreement with policy aims; it is field-by-field judgement about what can be changed without undermining the farming system and business viability, especially when *"something isn't producing a lot"* and the question becomes whether there is *"a chance of doing something else different with it"* (BF2).

The funding matrix illustrates why alignment has become more demanding. Schemes varied from gaining increased prices for produce enhancing biodiversity friendly farming (often through supermarket schemes) to setting aside land for pond creation, woodland enhancement or peatland restoration. Schemes vary not only in objectives and eligibility criteria, but also in spatial assumptions, payment logic, stacking constraints, and delivery intermediaries (Table 4). Interview data shows that this work is experienced as deeply farm-specific. A tenant upland farmer, described repeatedly assessing whether schemes "fit" the realities of hill farming, contrasting his position with that of arable farms:

"If I was an arable farmer, it would look good and promising. As a hill farmer, I didn't really see many options, many at all really ... not on the scale [of previous schemes]." (BF2)

Another farmer interviewed spoke of how alignment work is complicated by tenure, fragmented advice, and prior negative experiences (FG1). Having received early advice that later resulted in boundary disputes and loss of land control, they described difficulty trusting scheme guidance and uncertainty about how requirements translate on the ground. For this farmer alignment is inseparable from vulnerability. Decisions about fencing, grazing, and eligibility had long-term implications for land ownership and access, meaning that aligning with schemes carried risks that extended well beyond the payment itself. This reinforces that alignment work is not purely technical. Alignment involves safeguarding autonomy and control over land management.

From an institutional ethnography perspective, local alignment work shows how institutional texts organise action while leaving farmers to resolve tensions between scheme rules, land capability, and business needs. This translation labour involves skilled, context-specific judgement, drawing on local knowledge to make general rules workable for particular holdings, and differs from orientation work by focusing on fit, constraint, and defensible decision-making in practice.

3.3. Administrative and textual work

Administrative and textual work refers to the everyday effort farmers and advisors put into making funding schemes function in practice. This includes filling in applications, interpreting guidance, producing maps and evidence, managing contracts, keeping records, responding to inspections, and reporting against requirements. This work is not occasional or peripheral. Rather, it is continuous and necessary for participation, and it increasingly falls on individuals to carry out.

Consultation reports highlight perceptions of schemes as

bureaucratic and burdensome, as well as identifying a range of skills and knowledge gaps that act as a barrier to engagement with transition practices, including support needed with scheme application processes (Resources for Change/Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 2023; Peak District National Park Authority, 2022; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2024).

The funding matrix shows that administrative work is unavoidable across the funding landscape. All public schemes require formal applications and reporting, while private and blended schemes sometimes rely on bespoke agreements and ongoing documentation. Consultation documents repeatedly highlight the absence of standardised forms and metrics for farmers, which was seen as a key barrier to navigating schemes and to unlocking private finance for the transition (WWF, 2023).

Diversification therefore does not replace one set of forms with another; it layers multiple systems of paperwork on top of each other. Each scheme introduces new texts that must be read, understood, completed, and kept up to date, often alongside others. Farmers we interviewed repeatedly contrasted this with the relative simplicity of earlier subsidy systems:

"Whereas before, you just got your payment, didn't you? ... you just filled your paperwork in and it was done, weren't it? Now I think it's more down to yourself." (BF2)

Here, administrative work becomes a source of frustration and fatigue. Keeping up with changing rules, deadlines, and requirements takes time away from farming itself and often requires skills farmers do not feel they have been supported to develop.

This work also extends beyond the farm. Farmers described relying on accountants, ecologists, and advisors, many of whom are themselves struggling to keep up with scheme changes and technical detail:

"... from an advisor perspective, just the sheer amount of things that they're expected to know or do is really, really overwhelming." (P13)

As a result, administrative work becomes spread across a chain of people, where gaps in knowledge or sudden scheme changes can stall progress entirely. Several interviewees described needing to pay for professional help, which in turn discouraged engagement: *"When you mention professional help ... it means money, and of course that does put me off." (FG1)*

Administrative work was closely linked to feelings of scrutiny and loss of control. Some farmers resisted surveys or data collection not because they opposed environmental goals, but because evidence gathered could later constrain how they farmed, making data collection itself feel risky. Together, these accounts show administrative and textual work as a demanding form of labour, shaping whether participation is seen as worth the time, cost, and exposure involved over time as well as concerns of autonomy and trust.

3.4. Anticipatory and risk management work

A fourth form of work is anticipatory and risk management. This involves evaluating trade-offs, managing uncertainty, and protecting future options. Risk work refers to the effort involved in assessing, absorbing, and managing the potential losses associated with engaging with new funding mechanisms under conditions of rule instability and institutional uncertainty. This includes financial exposure, opportunity costs, and reputational or operational risks that arise not from non-compliance, but from attempting to adapt.

Consultation reports highlight managing uncertainty as a key concern for farmers nationally, with the initial transition to regenerative agriculture seen as particularly risky (Natural Capital Solutions, 2023; Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, 2022) with a lack of confidence in both the quantity of financial support available and the stability of both public and private income streams (Demos, 2023; UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology for DEFRA, 2023).

The funding matrix reveals why this work becomes structurally embedded in the new landscape. Many of the public schemes involve short-term commitments, whereas the private/blended schemes required long-term commitments up to 60 years, exposing farmers to far longer regulatory and market risk horizons. This anticipatory work was shaped by abrupt scheme changes due to unstable and changing policy, reinforcing the need to plan under institutional uncertainty.

Interviewees described how this translated into future-oriented caution and strategic trade-offs. One farm owner showed deliberate avoidance of land reclassification to retain long-term planning permission potential, even where this restricted access to certain funding streams, illustrating anticipatory work as the protection of future optionality.

Concerns about long-term reliability were especially visible in discussions of BNG and council finances:

"Can they trust them for 30 years to pay him for the BNG? ... there's all these horror stories recently of councils going bust." (NED_1)

A clear illustration of this emerged in one conservationists account of attempting to move between evolving SFI options. Having entered early, the organisation later sought to transition into newly introduced options that better aligned with their objectives. However, this required formally withdrawing from the original agreement:

"We said, 'Can we move into these new schemes because they're really good?' And they said, 'Well actually what you want to do is withdraw from the last one and start again.' Which we did." (P8)

What followed exposed the risks of acting within a system still under construction:

"Only to find they didn't have a withdraw button on it. So it took them six months to allow us back in again ... We lost about £20 grand." (P8)

This was not a one-off concern, and a number of participants shared similar examples, as well as highlighting a feeling that if they enter existing schemes, they might not be eligible for future (potentially better) opportunities.

3.5. Advisory and relational work

Another form of work identified through this research involved building and sustaining trusted relationships that help people access funding, interpret requirements, and feel confident about long-term commitments. Consultation reports call for support from trusted advisors as essential to improve engagement with new funding opportunities and ways of managing land (UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology for DEFRA, 2023; CPRE, 2022). The need for better working relationships between farmers and government is seen as essential (Peak District National Park Authority, 2022; Newcastle University, 2022) as well as recognising the importance of peer-to-peer networks and local collaborations required to deliver landscape scale transformation (WWF-UK, 2023; Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, 2022).

The funding matrix points directly to why this work is intensified because there are such a broad range of schemes available from a range of different actors. Our analysis identified a limited set of funding mechanisms explicitly or implicitly supporting the relational work required to engage with agri-environment schemes. The Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund directly supports individuals who act as facilitators to bring together groups of farmers. Time-limited initiatives like the Farming Resilience Fund provide business support to farmers and land managers in the first few years of adapting to agricultural transition. Partnership-focused schemes, including Landscape Recovery and Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL), formally recognise collaboration by funding partnership work.

While relational work is essential to making layered funding systems function in practice, it is only partially and inconsistently recognised within current funding architectures. Some farmers spoke of these

schemes very positively but highlighted that they were often time-bound, not ongoing. Conservationists and farm policy advisors mentioned that DEFRA often advocated this kind of support, but it was not matched by adequate funding. Interviewees described advisory relationships as both enabling and contested. Relationships with National Park Authority advisors (often through FiPL) were consistently described as productive and place-based, offering trusted guidance and mediation across competing land-use visions. However, other relationships were sometimes viewed as administratively burdensome, capital-intensive, or misaligned with local views of appropriate land-use change.

Relationships with and perceptions of eNGOs were also complex. One individual commented that some NGOs are perceived to be “hoovering up” large amounts of money and “not doing much with it”. There were also examples of ideological differences between groups; related to tensions over the amount of land that should be set aside for nature within individual farms which hinted at tensions between divergent aspirations for land amongst different actors.

Farmers and advisors described how effective engagement required repeated meetings, events, and on-farm conversations, alongside substantial travel and preparation time. With P13 stating how engagement with farmers on schemes has been going on for decades allowing trust to be built up. One conservationist reflected on how this labour was largely invisible within scheme design and often poorly accounted for financially:

“When you actually sat down and worked out the costs involved-running events, holding meetings, travel time-it wasn’t actually cheap within an organisation’s payroll. Those that managed it were either consultants working for very little once all the background work was done, or organisations where the time was effectively subsidised as part of a wider project.” (UH1)

This highlights how advisory work is sustained through informal cross-subsidy, personal commitment, or underpaid labour, arrangements that are difficult to maintain at scale. Trust between farmers, advisors, conservationist and wider actors was a key theme amongst many of the interviews and consultation documents. This emphasis on trust was closely linked to the time and resource intensity of building up relationships, which involves not only emotional investment but also significant, often unrecognised, organisational effort. Evidence from the ELMs tests and trials suggests that trust is required not only between farmers and advisors, but also across advisory networks. Drawing on an engagement with over 40 advisors, P13 highlights the time and relational work involved, and the perceived risk of losing trust when making referrals.

“You spend a heck of a lot of time and effort building that relationship with those farmers ... If you’ve spent so long building those relationships to drive the changes that you want to see ... your relationship as an advisor is at stake when you offer up someone else to support them.” (P13)

Many participants highlighted that funding designed to promote partnership working rarely supports the long-term labour required to build those relationships. As one conservationist noted, partnerships are only truly “competitive in a bidding environment” when informal partnerships are already in place, because you cannot manufacture these kinds of relationships over short periods of time (UH1).

Together, these accounts show that advisory and relational work is slow, cumulative, and difficult to substitute. In a funding landscape that increasingly relies on intermediaries and private finance, this work becomes more central to scheme navigation yet remains structurally invisible, dependent on trust built over time and on forms of labour that are rarely fully recognised or resourced within policy and funding narratives.

3.6. Coordination and positioning work across schemes and institutions

Diversification generates coordination and positioning work which is the often invisible labour required to sequence applications. It involves manage interactions between schemes, and reconcile conflicting rules so that multiple schemes can function together over time. This work arises once schemes are already in play and is routinely excluded from policy and administrative accounts. Without this largely invisible work, layered agri-environment funding systems would be unworkable in practice.

Consultation evidence suggests that perceived administrative complexity becomes a barrier precisely because schemes operate on different temporal cycles (West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2024; RSPB, Wildlife Trusts & National Trust, 2019). Public schemes can restrict double funding of actions; and private schemes sometimes allow stacking, but with conditions around additionality, permanence, and audit compatibility that are not often clear. These constraints mean that alignment is rarely additive. Instead, farmers must actively choose between options, often trading one opportunity against another. Alignment therefore becomes a form of positioning work, in which farmers assess how engaging with one scheme might foreclose others, reshape land use, or alter future flexibility.

Interview examples illustrate coordination as both practical and strategic. Some participants described being constrained from engaging in clusters or stacked payments due to holding classifications, and others described organisational agility, shifting legal forms (e.g., cooperative to charity to Community Benefit Society) to fit grant criteria. Altering institutional form to remain eligible in a changing funding environment is a clear example of positioning work. Farmers also described needing “new skillsets” and careful financial management to operate under budgeted schemes:

“You have to really be careful with your money because they will give you a budget but how you spend it is then up to you.” (HF1)

One interview with a conservationist highlighted the perspective of an intermediary organisation, highlighting project design often assumes forms of integration that are difficult to realise in practice. Discussing tree planting and biodiversity funding they noted:

“If you’re running a grant scheme you give information on your grant scheme. You don’t give a full 30-year farm management plan. You don’t have the resources.” (UG1)

This illustrates that funding is often project-based and largely driven by a siloed agenda. Sudden changes (including scheme closures) impacted advisors who had built businesses around scheme delivery. Coordination, then, is distributed: it is enacted not by a single institution providing coherence, but through multiple actors trying to “make things fit” across schemes with different rules, logics, and durations.

4. Discussion

This paper set out to examine how contemporary agri-environmental funding reforms are navigated in practice, using upland England as an internationally significant case of rapid agricultural policy transition. By combining a funding matrix with consultation analysis and interviews, the study moves beyond a focus on individual scheme design to show how diversified funding landscapes are made operable through everyday work. The findings demonstrate that diversification does not simply expand opportunity; it fundamentally reshapes the labour of engagement, distributing new demands across farmers, advisors, and intermediary organisations.

4.1. Extending agri-environment scheme research beyond uptake and design

Much existing research on agri-environment schemes focuses on

participation, behavioural drivers, or the effectiveness of specific instruments (e.g. Ref. [16–18,68]). This literature has generated important insights into how scheme rules, incentives, and farmer characteristics shape uptake. However, it often treats engagement as a bounded decision, whether or not to join a scheme, and often evaluates schemes in isolation.

Our findings suggest that this framing is increasingly insufficient. The funding matrix shows a layered landscape of public, private, and third sector mechanisms operating simultaneously, often with overlapping objectives but different governance logics, time horizons, and constraints. In this context, participation is rarely a simple opt-in choice. Instead, engagement is an ongoing process of navigation, coordination, and adjustment. The six forms of work identified in this paper provide a way of conceptualising what engagement entails under conditions of diversification.

By foregrounding these forms of work, the paper complements existing AES research by shifting attention from *whether* farmers participate to *how* participation is made possible, sustained, or constrained in practice. This is particularly important in policy contexts, like England, where diversification and private finance are actively promoted by the Government as solutions to funding gaps and environmental delivery [69].

4.2. Institutional ethnography and the visibility of hidden work

Institutional ethnography directs attention to work that is often taken for granted, obscured, or rendered invisible in policy narratives [57]. Applying IE in this context reveals that much of the labour required to make agri-environmental funding function, especially under diversified models, sits outside what is formally recognised as “delivery” or “implementation”.

Across the six forms of work, only a narrow subset is explicitly resourced or acknowledged in funding schemes, typically in the form of paid capital works, management actions, or formally contracted advice. In contrast, orientation and sense-making, alignment, anticipatory judgement, and much advisory and relational work are treated as implicit capacities that farmers and intermediaries are expected to absorb. These forms of work involve time, emotional labour, local knowledge, risk-bearing, and long-term relationship building, yet they are rarely accounted for in scheme budgets, timelines, or evaluations.

This matters because IE shows that when work is not recognised, it is not evenly distributed [70]. Instead, work tends to fall on those with the capacity, or willingness, to absorb it. In the context of agri-environmental funding, this raises important questions about who can engage and at what cost.

4.3. Uneven burdens, exclusion, and social differentiation

The findings highlight how diversified funding systems may unintentionally privilege certain actors while disadvantaging others, not through explicit exclusion but through the kinds of work they require. An important implication of these findings concerns what counts as “work” in farming contexts, and for whom. Several of the forms of work identified here, orientation, alignment, administrative work and relationship-building, sit uneasily alongside traditional understandings of farming work as productive, physical, and land-based. Previous research on farming identity shows how legitimacy is often tied to visible, hands-on activity and measurable outputs, while administrative or relational labour is more ambiguously valued [35,36]. In this context, time spent in meetings, reading guidance, building partnerships, or managing scheme interactions may not be readily recognised as work by farmers themselves, even though it is increasingly required to sustain farm income.

Orientation and administrative work, for example, place heavy demands on literacy, digital skills, and confidence in navigating bureaucratic systems, barriers that have been documented for some traditional

farming groups and older farmers [71]. Where engagement depends on informal information flows or brokered access, those outside established networks may be systematically disadvantaged.

Similarly, advisory and relational work often relies on long-term trust-building and unpaid or underpaid labour. Participants’ accounts suggest that this work is frequently sustained through personal commitment, organisational cross-subsidy, or poorly remunerated consultancy. There is scope for this burden to fall unevenly, including along gendered lines, where relational, organisational, and administrative labour is often disproportionately carried by women within farm households [37,72,73] or advisory organisations, an issue widely noted in rural and organisational studies but rarely addressed explicitly in agri-environment policy design.

Our research demonstrates there is often a reliance on pre-existing partnerships and “readiness” to bid for funding further risks concentrating resources among well-connected groups. As participants noted, competitive funding environments reward those who already have informal collaborations in place, while offering little support for the slow, foundational work of building new relationships.

This tension is compounded by the uneven distribution of this labour across actors. For advisory organisations, NGOs, or consultancies, some of this work can be absorbed into paid roles, organisational overheads, or project funding. By contrast, for some farmers in our study, engagement often requires taking time away from core farming activities, with no direct remuneration for the labour involved. Attending meetings, hosting site visits, or engaging in iterative negotiations represent opportunity costs that are rarely acknowledged within funding models. As a result, the same forms of work may be recognised and resourced when undertaken by institutions but rendered invisible and unpaid when undertaken by farmers. Over time, this may fragment social networks, reinforce existing inequalities, and limit participation by smaller, tenant, or more isolated farms.

4.4. Implications for policy and programme design

Taken together, these findings suggest that recognising diverse forms of work is not simply an analytical exercise but may have practical implications for policy development and programme delivery. Whilst further research is recommended to strengthen the evidence base for policy design, our work cautions that policies that assume farmers and intermediaries can seamlessly navigate complexity risk underestimating the effort required and overestimating capacity across the sector.

Acknowledging these forms of work explicitly, within scheme guidance, ongoing advisory funding, and programme timelines, may help align policy ambition with lived realities. This could include providing ongoing resourcing orientation and coordination activities, supporting long-term advisory relationships rather than short-term projects, and designing funding mechanisms that help to streamline and orientate existing stacking conflicts or administrative duplication. It also suggests the value of moving beyond competitive, short-cycle funding where trust, learning, and collaboration are central to delivery.

More broadly, applying an institutional ethnographic lens encourages policymakers to ask not only what outcomes schemes are designed to deliver, but what kinds of work they assume, who is expected to do it, and under what conditions. Making this work visible can help avoid reproducing inequalities and can support more inclusive and resilient approaches to agricultural transition by informing policy measures and mitigations which reduce negative unintended consequences.

4.5. Limitations of the study

Whilst the analysis of consultation documents and funding schemes allows us to discuss a national picture, the interview sample is small and confined to a group of purposively sampled individuals and organisations operating within upland areas of Northern England who were interested in nature recovery farming. We acknowledge that this sample

is not representative but rather brings a range of perspectives from individuals and organisations involved in farming or supporting farming with a focus on those actors actively exploring or engaging in nature recovery farming transitions. The sample size was limited by the size of the study and the capacity of the research team. To mitigate the limitations of our sample size, we analysed consultation reports that drew on much larger numbers of participants, to triangulate data from our interviews. However, further testing and refinement across larger and more diverse samples of actors would be a valuable direction for future research.

4.6. Relevance beyond England

While grounded in the English context, the findings have relevance for a much wider set of sustainability transitions. Across policy domains, governments are increasingly replacing uniform, state-led interventions with layered mixes of public schemes, private finance, and outcome-based mechanisms, shifting responsibility for coordination onto front-line actors [74]. Similar dynamics have been observed in healthcare, welfare, and environmental governance, where reforms rely on actors' capacity to interpret complex rules, manage uncertainty, sustain relationships, and coordinate across fragmented institutional landscapes (e.g., Ref. [75]).

In this sense, the six forms of work identified here offer a transferable framework for examining how policy transitions are enacted in practice beyond agri-environment schemes. IE has shown that when such work remains unrecognised, it is often unevenly distributed and absorbed through informal, unpaid, or under-resourced labour [57,58]. By making these forms of work visible, this paper contributes to broader debates on sustainability transitions by demonstrating how policy change is not simply implemented but actively worked into being. Recognising and resourcing this work is therefore critical if transitions towards sustainability are to be both effective and socially equitable across environmental and social policy domains.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Anna Hawkins: Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Joe Glentworth:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Emma Cary:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Ellen Bennett:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Catherine Hammond:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Stephanie Webb:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Formal analysis.

Research data for this article

Due to the sensitive nature of the interview data, participants were assured that raw data would remain confidential and would not be shared. Sources reviewed for content analysis are clearly signposted in the article and whilst many of these are in the public domain, some are not and access would need to be requested. We are happy to provide access to additional anonymised data upon request.

Data not available/The data that has been used is confidential.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jemecp.2026.100026>.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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