



Community Planning Aberdeen

Progress Report	Project End Report: 15.1 Community Run Green Spaces. Increase the number of community run green spaces by a minimum of 8 that are organised and self-managed for both people and nature by 2023.
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Report Author	Steven Shaw
Date of Report	20 June 2022
Governance Group	CPA Board – 6 July 2022

Purpose of the Report

This report presents the results of the LOIP Improvement Project Aim, Improving Access to Green Spaces: Increasing the number of community run green spaces, and seeks approval to end the project as the aim has been achieved.

Summary of Key Information

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Through our LOIP we are committed to supporting green economic and environmental recovery, with a focus on harnessing the levels of community volunteering and collective ownership seen throughout the pandemic to further build community resilience to respond to social and environmental challenges. A key priority creating and managing more land for people and nature, not just for people at the exclusion of nature, but also for our sustaining our health and wellbeing. As such we have added a new Stretch Outcome focussed on addressing the nature crisis while increasing the quality of our open spaces by groups and organisations to manage more land for people and nature. To build back the integrity of nature, this requires an essential interconnected approach from all stakeholders, a single landowner approach will not deliver the outcomes required. We need to work in partnership with all landowners to achieve a balance of more nature friendly and natural spaces with green space that is safe and accessible for people to enjoy.

1.2 There are many benefits of community run green spaces, such as:

- Improved health & well-being
- Enabling a sustainable culture that leads to an increased number of community champions, volunteers and community led green spaces.
- Improved access and use of accessible and safe green spaces
- Green space cared for and protected
- Developing skills and confidence around green space, volunteering, health, environment, gardening etc
- Improved community relationships
- Increased interaction and engagement within community

- Building / strengthening connections between council and communities
- Gives the community a voice

1.3 Our project charter set out to include working with established staff and contacts to increase partnership working across Aberdeen's communities and to encourage members of the community to take the lead in running green spaces to ensure that all of our citizens regardless of their locality and circumstances have access to community green spaces and the benefits that come from those. The project is about communities – getting people involved, caring, and collaborating in looking after themselves, their neighbours, and their environment.

2 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AIM

- 2.1 The CPA Board approved the project charter initially in December 2020 and refreshed in September 2021. The project aimed to increase the number of community run green spaces by a minimum of 8 that are organised and self-managed for both people and nature by 2023. The charter can be viewed [here](#)
- 2.2 The project aimed to build on the existing good partnership work already taking place with regards to community run green spaces, community engagement, community gardens and volunteering. This included partnership work in schools and communities and with businesses. The project looked to further expand the number of community run green spaces by a minimum of 8 that are organised and self-managed for both people and nature, particularly in priority localities where satisfaction and use is low.
- 2.3 The city has successful links with Keep Scotland Beautiful and RHS and has many groups who successfully participate IN Beautiful Scotland, It's Your Neighbourhood and Britain In Bloom. Aberdeen has had more success than any other Scottish Local Authority with regards to these initiatives and this is down to the number of community partnerships in place. The project sought to build on this success and create new community run green spaces that are organised and self-managed, particularly in priority localities where satisfaction and use is low. The project looked to bring together groups of interested local people to come together to improve the appearance, facilities, conservation value and safety of a local green space.
- 2.4 Priority neighbourhoods were a priority and the project team worked closely with Locality leads to identify and engage with key groups in these areas. The Central locality, Tillydrone, Seaton, Woodside, were a focus for the project team.
- 2.5 The project aimed to focus attention specifically on new community green space where in addition to the well-being benefits for those involved, it will help to change attitudes towards local green space and create positive role models for communities, helping to get broader sustainability measures in place to protect green space long term.

3 WHAT CHANGES DID WE MAKE?

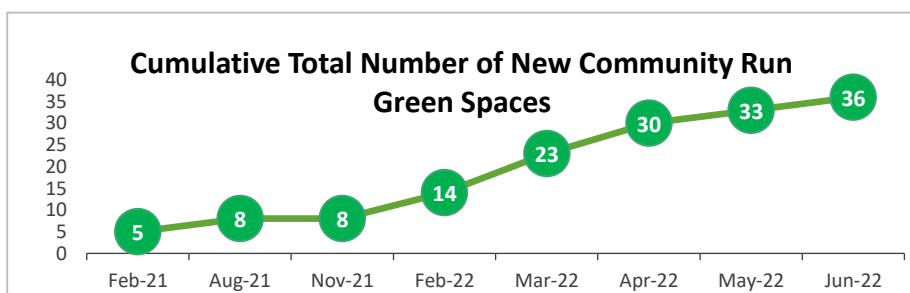
- 3.1 Our change ideas are focused on the promoting the availability of community green space and the opportunities for communities to run such spaces, as well as the wider benefits from this and introducing mechanisms to support and enable communities to feel confident and empowered in running their local green spaces knowing that there is a network of support, guidance available to them and being able to capture/promote the benefits they are delivering for their area and share this with others.

3.2 Several changes have been tested throughout the course of the charter project, namely:

- Built a green space network of communities and partnerships that empowers communities to establish, take responsibility and run their local green spaces leading to more local engagement and an increase in volunteering and community pride.
- Introduced and supported visible community champions to raise awareness and change thinking about wider sustainability issues in communities.
- Shared information on initiatives, projects, and funding with community partners. This included linking groups up with each other.
- Publicised availability of community green space through all available platforms, how to get started and ways for communities to identify potential unused land.
- Promoted the benefits of successes of current community run spaces, as well as the wider community benefits such as health and wellbeing.

4 HAVE OUR CHANGES RESULTED IN IMPROVEMENT?

4.1 The changes have resulted in improvement. We achieved our aim with 36 new community run green spaces established as at June 2022, an increase of 31 (600% increase) since Feb 2021, 11 in North, 9 in South & 16 in Central Localities. This is in addition to the 100 existing groups and 4125 people volunteering to help manage green spaces across the city during 2021/22.



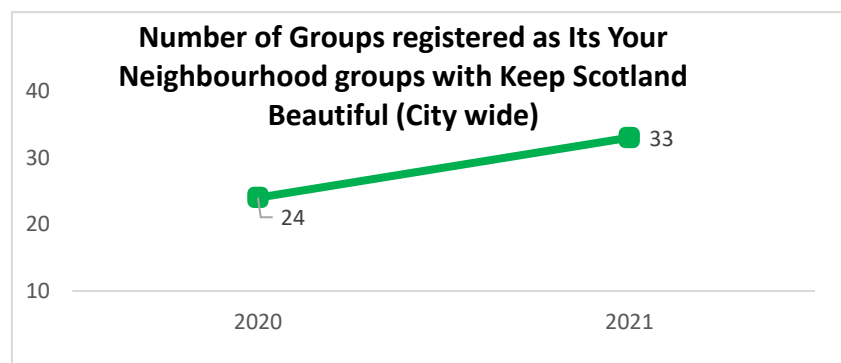
4.2 Aberdeen's green spaces have been pivotal during the last two years of the pandemic and have helped people stay connected with family, friends, and neighbours, providing access to nature in a time when this has been most needed for health. Community involvement in the development and protection of green spaces is key to the continued successful use of parks and green spaces and ensuring green spaces meet the needs of the people using them.

4.3 Communities running and using the new green spaces have provided the following positive feedback:

'At the hub its become a great way of chatting with different blocks abs residents. It helps me get outside. It is a reward. Seeing some colour, hope and possibility'. Sam, FRESH.

4.4 We had 4125 people volunteering across green spaces, across the city in 21/22, an increase of 166% since 2020/21. The increase in volunteers has been vital in helping to care for and invest in local green spaces. We are evaluating existing groups activity per month to run a change idea looking at whether community run green space volunteers would be willing to volunteer in other areas during months of reduced activity in green spaces. Our volunteers are all active participants of our green network, providing support and connecting with each to overcome when appropriate.

- 4.5 In addition to our success in supporting and increasing volunteers and green network, through our changes and support to empower communities to establish, take responsibility and run their local green spaces leading to more local engagement and an increase in volunteering and community pride, we also now have community champions who as well as promoting green spaces, they are also promoting wider sustainability issues in their communities, for example – arranging litter picks, food growing.
- 4.6 64.5% of City Voice panellists were satisfied or fairly satisfied with the quality of overall green/open spaces in the City. In particular in the Central Locality where we have seen the greatest increase in community run green spaces, as well as the establishment of community champions we have seen a 7.9% increase in 2021 City Voice panellists from the Central Locality reporting that they are satisfied or fairly satisfied with the quality of overall green/open spaces in their local green spaces. This increase has not been seen in the North and South Localities and these will be a focus over the next year, with champions to be established.
- 4.7 33 community partnerships registered as Its Your Neighbourhood groups with Keep Scotland Beautiful (City wide) in 2021, a 38% increase since 2020. 7 in North, 14 in South & 12 in Central Localities. Aberdeen has significantly more registered groups than anywhere else in Scotland.



- 4.8 Through the quarterly publishing of the Green Times we have promoted the successes of our green spaces and highlighted available green space and support for other Our volunteers are active contributors to the Green Times, providing articles/tips etc.
- 4.9 National recognition and awards for our community partnership work ie Aberdeen Gold Medal winner in 2021 Keep Scotland Beautiful.

5 HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN AND MONITOR THESE IMPROVEMENTS?

- 5.1 We have continued to show sustained improvement with the number of new community run green spaces continuing to grow per month. As well as establishing new groups, we are also focused on sustaining the level of participation and engagement of our existing groups. We will continue to encourage and work with partnerships looking to take more responsibility and ownership of their local green spaces through our developed green network; community champions and volunteers we will continue with the following improvement activity:

- Further developing the green space network of communities and partnerships to further empower communities to establish, take responsibility and run their local green spaces.
 - Introducing and supporting visible community champions in the North and South Localities to raise awareness and change thinking about wider sustainability issues in communities.
 - Using the network and champions to share information on initiatives, projects, and funding with community partners.
 - Continuing promotion of available community green space through all available platforms, how to get started and ways for communities to identify potential unused land.
 - Promote the benefits of successes of current community run spaces, as well as the wider community benefits such as health and wellbeing.
- 5.2 The team will continue to encourage new groups and partnerships to register with Keep Scotland Beautiful and their Its Your Neighbourhood initiative to ensure they are getting the recognition for their work and have something to work towards.
- 5.3 Project team members will continue to use and build on the learning from the project and use their experience and lesson learned when working through other similar project charters.
- 5.4 Should it be agreed that the project is ended, the data recorded will continue to be recorded and reported to the Sustainable City Group, as well as the Improvement Programme Dashboard/Outcomes Framework to ensure that performance continues.

6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALE UP AND SPREAD

- 6.1 The change ideas tested have been embedded as business as usual, however there remains areas of unused land across the city that could be utilised. The project will continue to encourage and support new community groups and partnerships and will use the connections/improvements to take forward project “Increase community food growing in schools, communities and workplaces by 12 2023”.
- 6.2 The initiative will continue to seek support from the relevant agencies and be mindful of new opportunities where they present themselves.
- 6.3 Enabling a sustainable culture that leads to an increased number of community champions, volunteers and community led green spaces. We recognise the vital contribution of our volunteers to our community run green spaces, but we also recognise that the during the winter period we have reduced activity and we want to ensure that we are supporting and not losing volunteers during this period. To support this, we are engaging with volunteers are present to evaluate existing groups activity per month to run a change idea looking at whether community run green space volunteers would be willing to volunteer in other areas during months of reduced activity in green spaces. This could help support the achievement of other LOIP projects such as 11.2 “Increase opportunities for people to increase their contribution to communities (volunteering) by 10% by 2023.” The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of being outdoors to people’s mental and physical health, as well as the inequality of access to green space. Ensuring our groups are sustained is paramount. As well as through the existing improvements, to sustain the existing groups the team has taken early steps to explore social prescribing. Conversation is being held with NHS in early June.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the CPA Board:

- i) Agree that testing is concluded and that this Improvement Project is ended on the basis that the aim set has been achieved and that the change ideas have been embedded;
- i) Agree that the green space data / improvement activity will be reported periodically to the Sustainable City Group to ensure improvement and alignment to the other improvement aims continues and that the dataset for the overall aim will continue to be included on the Improvement Programme Dashboard/Outcomes Framework to ensure progress is monitored; and
- ii) Note the steps proposed to sustain the improvement detailed at section 5 and 6.3 of the report, in particular that to support sustaining the existing groups, as well as the mental wellbeing of citizens, the team has taken early steps to explore social prescribing, with a conversation being held with NHS in early June.

Opportunities and Risks

Include a summary of the key opportunities and risks highlighted by this report.

- Getting the timing right for promoting project and encouraging community involvement.
- Slow uptake or lack of interest from communities.
- Securing community and volunteer attendance / participation in the process.
- Aligning the aims and contributions of different project partners.
- Getting the right skills in place to support projects.
- Funding for site specific projects.
- Identifying / getting buy in from a suitable Champions.
- Wintertime sees the group's activities and projects reduce.

Consultation

Community Run Green Space Project Team
Sustainable City Outcome Improvement Group
Environmental Services
Community Planning Team

Background Papers

The following papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Aberdeen City Council Local Outcome Improvement Plan
Improvement Project Charter – 15.1 Community Run Green Spaces

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