

Improvement Project Title Empowering Community-led Environmental Action
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Aim statement Increase by 50% the number of community groups delivering local environmental improvements in their neighbourhoods by 2026.
Link to Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026 Stretch Outcome 15 Nature and Safe Spaces “26% of Aberdeen’s area will be protected and/or managed for nature and 60% of people report they feel that spaces and buildings are well cared for by 2026.”
Link to Locality Plans Community ideas from the North and South Locality Plans have been mapped to this aim.
Why this is important and what are the issues with the current system? We are facing both a climate and a biodiversity emergency. The UK is one of the world’s most nature depleted places as evidenced by the Wildlife Trust Landmark Report. This multi-agency partnership project will support communities to take action on climate change and to support nature within their localities, as well as to help to realise the vision for Aberdeen in the recent refreshed local outcome improvement plan “A place where all people can prosper” Final-Draft-LOIP-Refresh-21.pdf (communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk) NESCAN Hub’s purpose is to support communities to take climate action and to empower them to have a voice in decision-making that affects their community. Communities are key stakeholders in the transition to Net Zero. As part of this role, NESCAN Hub and other partner organisations are running community assemblies and other deliberative processes in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, with both adults and with children and young people. We are working together with the Community Planning Partners, schools and community groups to pull together the common themes from these processes. During the NESCAN Hub Community Assemblies, as well as throughout the 2024 refresh of the LOIP, communities have expressed a desire to be actively involved in protecting, restoring and enhancing their local built and green spaces. Communities are passionate about their greenspaces. Evidence from the Aberdeen Open Space Audit 2024 (about to be published) clearly shows respondents stating that they want to see more nature in public places, with 82% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would like to see more greenspaces managed in a more natural way for the benefit of wildlife and nature. We all need to take an active role in reducing climate emissions and increasing biodiversity. For government and local authority strategies and policies to be successful, communities and neighbourhoods need to understand, support and drive the changes required. We need to not only act on the climate and nature emergencies, but we also need to take our communities with us. This project proposes to engage communities in a supportive conversation as part of the funding process around how to make their projects more sustainable and their neighbourhoods more climate and nature friendly, alongside positive social benefits such as wider inclusion, wellbeing and addressing inequalities. Our baseline data comprises the number of environmental improvement projects funded by grants administered by NESCAN Hub through the JTPB fund and our Seed Funding. During 2023 we funded 24 projects that meet this fund criteria. We seek regular feedback from applicants and network members. Communities cite access to funding as one of the significant barriers to taking action. These barriers include complexity of application processes, lack of capacity in terms of time or resources or experience for applications; groups not having a formal constitution or bank account; lack of experience of comms and PR required for vote animation in participatory budgeting. This project is designed to help to dismantle these barriers in order to empower communities to take an active role in improving their environment. The project

will also engage with other local funders to seek to align sustainability goals within different funding streams to help to raise awareness of the benefits of improving the environment on the social determinants of health. This would also help to identify some of the other ongoing local community environmental activity.

However, accessing funding is only one part of the picture. This project will help to empower and build the capacity of communities to take environmental action such as those identified within the locality plan, by sharing information, peer support, networking, lived experience, skills, knowledge, and linking into existing networks and contacts.

For communities to act they need support and resources. This project provides both, by giving communities the tools, support and funding to drive the improvements in their neighbourhood that they want to see. It gives them a voice and a role in reducing carbon emissions and increasing biodiversity. The creation of community projects builds community capacity, creating connections and relationships between people, which can reduce social isolation and improve physical and mental health. Improving the natural and built environment aids wellbeing and enables people to take pride in their place. It enables skill development and builds confidence. Research also indicates that when people have pride in place, there is less antisocial behaviour. Once a place looks cared for and meets the needs of the people in it, community wealth building can follow.

From previous improvement activity, there is a strong network of community-run greenspaces in place across the city. The changes in this project aim to build on previous improvement projects and not to duplicate any of the networks already in place. We intend to target existing groups that are active in the community, but perhaps haven't considered environmental action as part of their activities. We will link into networks such as Place and Wellbeing to promote sustainable environmental action through health professionals and green social prescribing. Our project will thereby identify further resources and expertise to support new groups and build capacity and sustainability.

The project will support the delivery of:

- United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal on Climate Action - 13.3, improving education, awareness raising and human institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.
- Aberdeen's commitment to becoming both climate and nature resilient, as well as net zero emissions by 2045.
- Aberdeen's Nature Awareness Strategy
- the Net Zero Vision for Aberdeen & the Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap, in particular, the Natural Environment Strategy.
- This project directly supports the three main outcomes of the Net Zero Aberdeen Empowerment Strategy (1) – increasing communication and understanding; (2) Improving collaboration and participation; and (3) ensuring intervention and action.
- Aberdeen Adapts is supported by this project, including:
 - **Our natural environment**
Monitoring for change, responding to pressures and adapting through nature, for a healthy and productive natural environment.
 - 7. Increased space for nature
 - 8. Healthy & productive soils
 - 9. Trees & woodlands: protected & enhanced
 - **Society & Economy**
Healthy, resilient communities and strong, robust businesses, with the capacity and knowledge to adapt.
 - 10. Prepared & connected communities
 - 11. Health, wellbeing & climate justice

What have our communities/children and young people/lived experience said?

Communities and young people have expressed clear concerns about nature, green spaces and biodiversity as evidenced during the recent LOIP refresh, the NESCAN community assemblies, and during children and young people's place-based planning, where the first 6 priorities were: Protecting and Improving Local Nature (Stewart Park) Local Farming and Food, Better Adventure and Play Opportunities, Providing Good Housing and Care Homes, Cleaning Up Waste, Litter and Pollution ([see report by Aberdeen for a Fairer World](#)). The LEAF Fund can support action on these priorities.

Adding to this, [The 'Your Neighbourhood, Your Plans': What matters to you? 2023](#) engagement revealed that Natural Space scored highly as a theme and young people and children thought that our parks, trees and woodlands were good, and that "having better parks, welcoming animals and more trees would make our natural space better".

Community Planning Aberdeen carried out an online survey in March 2021 to understand the issues most important to the citizens of Aberdeen. Although this was not a representative survey, the two highest ranking concerns were:

1. Supporting children and young people with their mental health
2. Supporting people in distress and reducing suicide rates.

Our project supports these aims by helping to create better local environments where people live, work and play. Access to greenspaces and nature is a crucial aspect of dealing with mental health. As shown by a wide array of research and seen within the context of urban young people in this report: [young-green-and-well-report-2022.pdf](#) (parksforlondon.org.uk)

Measures

Outcome measures

- Number of community groups delivering local environmental improvements in their neighbourhoods (citywide and broken down by locality and whether funding or non-funding)

Process measures

- Number of applications from Aberdeen City community groups (city wide and broken down by locality)
- Number of grants awarded to community groups and both new and existing community led projects (city wide and broken down by locality and by fund)
- Amount of match funding awarded
- Amount of wider funding leveraged by match funding
- Number of feasibility/planning / retrofit assessment projects supported.
- Percentage of people reporting that they want to be able to make improvements to their local environment for nature (city wide and broken down by locality)
- Percentage of people reporting that they are able to make improvements to their local environment for nature (city wide and broken down by locality)
- Number of minority and other equalities groups that receive funding/ deliver environmental action projects
- Percentage of groups continuing post funding.

Potential Balancing measures (Unintended positive or negative consequences)

- Number of community groups receiving national and regional funding
- Number of community groups providing nature based social prescriptions
- Number of groups unsuccessful in applying for funding therefore not proceeding with proposed activity.

Change ideas (1) Develop, promote and test the uptake of a new community environmental improvement fund to support community-led local environmental action. (2) Work with community partners to develop and test the impact and reach of different targeted communication strategies to ensure that opportunities to undertake environmental action reach minority and other equalities groups. (3) Create and test a new support infrastructure and individual support for community groups applying for and/or awarded funding and continuing beyond the initial funding allocation. (4) Test whether a Global Village Environment Network Cards event at the CAN Day increases the number of new community-led environmental actions and facilitates sustainable community-led decisions about local environmental issues. (5) Promote opportunities of adopting available land that can be used for community-led environmental improvements. (6) Work with local funders to introduce criteria around sustainability, environment, nature and climate to different funding streams, and test the impact of these criteria on the projects funded and align funds to ensure that there is no duplicate funding.	
Location/Test Group (1) This project aims to achieve an increase in community-led environmental improvement activities across all localities, however it is expected that there will be a focus on place-based groups in priority areas. The “test” group will not be geographically based as this has been tested before unsuccessfully. Our tests will be based on an iterative process by allocation of smaller pots of funding over a short time period (starting with Phase 1), then review and revise before each additional phase. We will monitor applications from the priority neighbourhoods where NESCAN Hub has already been working and compare with other areas. (2) Test with ethnic minority groups (3) Test in Priority Neighbourhoods (central) (4) CAN Day attendees (5) Test in Priority Neighbourhoods (central) (6) Test with HIF	
Resources This project requires funding to administer and distribute to community groups. In addition, it requires a management fee to pay for staff time to publicise, manage and administer the fund, as well as monitor, evaluate and report. Dedicated staff time will be required to liaise with community groups to ensure maximum impact from the fund. The required funding is being provided by Aberdeen City Council as part of its commitment to delivering on the citywide Net Zero Aberdeen Empowerment Strategy, as well as supporting LOIP and local political priorities. The project requires other resources such as specialist knowledge and expertise, in addition to community development support and capacity building. This will come from NESCAN Hub, NESBiP and from linking in with network members and partner organisations. The most important resources however will be the time, efforts and commitment from community members and groups to apply for the funding and implement their project ideas. The project will be delivered in three phases: Phase 1 – pilot test & review. £30,000 funding for this phase has been agreed. Phase 2 – revise & expand. The funding for this phase is yet to be agreed. Phase 3 – embed & expand. The funding is expected to be multi-year.	
Potential risks and/or barriers to success & actions to address these	
Smaller community-led organisations may not have the capacity to apply for and manage a grant, or to carry out evaluation and reporting.	• Application process made as straightforward as possible

	• Support from NESCAN Hub Community Development Officers to help with project development and reporting • Access to training
Smaller / new or emerging community-led groups not aware of fund	• Comms and Publicity Strategy & Work Plan to advertise the Fund
Minority groups don't access the fund	• Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Fund and publicity through gateway organisations such as GREC and SHMU
Potential improvements on biodiversity not maximised	• Support from NESBiP to ensure maximum biodiversity benefits, monitoring and reporting
Projects are not sustainable and have no lasting impact	• Ongoing support from NESBiP and NESCAN Hub community development officers and network members to support groups with capacity building, project planning and access to further funding. Linking groups with other community orgs via network to facilitate peer support and ripple effect.
People not engaging with the opportunities	• Review and reassess communications and engagement strategies to ensure culturally appropriate,
Other funders unable to adapt processes	• Work with different funders and ensure that we are sufficiently flexible to adapt our processes where relevant.
Projects unsustainable due to burnout or overcommitment	• Ensure projects are set up to succeed, starting small and building capacity
Project Team Alison Stuart, NESCAN Hub CEO Rachel Smith, NESCAN Hub Funding and Community Development Anna Thomas, NESCAN Hub Communications Officer Abbie Ferrar, NESBiP Co-ordinator Guy Bergman, ACC Environmental Planner Jacqueline Bell Public Health Researcher NHS Grampian Suzi Thomson, Health Improvement Fund Steven Shaw, ACC Environmental Manager Graham Donald, ACC Locality Planning David Innes, Aberdeen for a Fairer World Anne Knight, Fairer Aberdeen Fund Communities will be engaged with as outlined below Consultation with the following Dave Black, SHMU Community Engagement Manager Mike Melville ACVO Ross McKay GREC Dawn James RSPB Ruth Quigley Buglife (Aberdeen B-lines Project) We will use Phase 1 to identify key project partners who can ensure a multi-agency approach as part of our planning for Phase 2. Community/User Representation/Engagement Community is at the heart of our project and to achieve our objectives, community groups are asked to apply for funding for the environmental projects they believe are right for their locality. The fund is open to any	

community group to apply. We will engage with applicants to involve them in the design and review of the fund, communications and support processes.

- We will use straight-forward feedback forms for community groups that have applied for/ received funding to monitor and report on the progress and impact of their projects
- Questions in City Voice
- Consultation through Priority Neighbourhood Partnerships Meetings
- Consultation through Community Council Meetings
- Consultation through Locality Empowerment Groups
- We will invite community members, particularly young people and members of minority groups to support the design and testing of the change ideas.

Community Ideas for Improvement from Locality Plans Aligned to this Project

The following community ideas from the Locality Plans have been mapped to this aim:

- Visually improve the area to encourage use/business (Central)
- Encourage responsible dog ownership (all locality plans)

Outline Project Plan

Project Stage	Actions	Timescale
Getting Started (Project Score 1-3)	• Project team established • Baseline established • Financial information provided • Development of Project Charter • Design changes to be tested • Identification of key target groups • Communication strategy developed • Organisation criteria agreed • Project criteria agreed	June 2024
Designing and Testing Changes (Project Score 4-7)	PILOT - PHASE 1 • Application form created • Guidance written and agreed • Charter finalised • Webpage launched • Pilot launch 28th June 2024 • Promote fund to ensure diverse uptake and equalities • Pilot Close 5th August 2024 • Completed first iteration of change idea (1) To “develop, promote and test the uptake of a new community environmental improvement fund to support community-led action to improve the local environment.” • CAN Day 14th September 2024 • Just Transition Participatory Budgeting Fund (JTPB fund) launched 19th August	July - August 2024
Implementing and sustaining changes that demonstrate improvement (Project Score 7-10)	• Grants awarded during pilot phase 1 total £27,000. Comprising at least 9 x £3,000 grants or lower • If insufficient applications, any residual funds to be rolled over to next phase. • Review the impact of the changes with the community members involved, reassess the change ideas and adapt as required.	July - August 2024

