

Nature Neighbourhoods:

**People, Place & Nature – Learning
from Community-Led Action Across
the UK**

(2024 - 2025)

Case studies

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Credits: Nature Neighbourhoods

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Case Studies: People Powered Plans for Nature Across the Four Nations

To understand how communities are driving local action for nature, four case studies have been developed across each of the four nations of the UK. These stories highlight the experiences of organisations creating people-powered plans for nature, particularly showing how the Nature Neighbourhoods project supports them through **communication, social networks, and system-level guidance.**

The case studies focus on what matters most to the four organisations and the communities they work with, offering a grounded view of the opportunities and challenges of community-led urban greening.

Readers can explore the story of each case study, which include audio clips sharing personal reflections from the people leading this work. Key learnings from across all four can be found on the next page.



Below are four local stories of urban greening in action:



England – Manchester: Sow the City and Easy Come Easy Grow MCR

An established organisation and a new community group in Newton Heath, Manchester, are working together through strong local networks. They face challenges at the local political level and have benefited from wider system support in pursuing their shared mission of social and environmental justice.



Northern Ireland – Belfast: Ligoniel Improvement Association and EastSide Partnerships

Two long-standing organisations in Belfast are helping communities take greater ownership of their local green spaces. Although they work in different parts of the city, both have needed social and system-level support to strengthen their community-first approaches to urban greening.



Scotland – Glasgow: Hamiltonhill Claypits Local Nature Reserve

A young organisation managing a local nature reserve in Glasgow has been focusing on boosting community engagement. They have received communication support to help raise their profile and build stronger connections with local people.



Wales – Newport: Greening Maindee, Maindee Unlimited

This emerging organisation in Newport is quickly adapting its strategy to meet community needs to improve local green infrastructure. With local system support, they are increasing their visibility and expanding their work through new partnerships.

There are similarities across the case studies which illustrate how the Nature Neighbourhoods project has helped to embed or enable community development work:

Creating places with people and nature as part of daily life

Sustaining support and capacity for community development work to focus on people and relationships, not just delivery

Strengthening community infrastructure with shared outside areas

Mobilising local ecosystems and networks

Growing visibility of organisations work through communications and connections

Building resilience when navigating system change

Strengthening community ties through belonging, wellbeing and inclusive spaces



Photo: Hamiltonhill Claypits



Photo: Maindee Community meal exercise - Credit: Dilip Sinha

England:

Sow the City & Easy Come Easy Grow Mcr

Location: Newton Heath, Manchester, England



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“We want to show that if just normal residents who live here can do this, anyone can.”

-Easy Come Easy Grow Mcr



Background

Sow the City, a Manchester-based social enterprise founded in 2009 with just a few packets of seeds, some compost, and some scaffold boards, began working with local communities to create greener, healthier neighbourhoods – or ‘green spaces in urban [places](#)’.

As society emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, Kieron from Sow the City, carried out door-to-door engagements with residents in the Newton Heath area as part of a project called Winning Hearts and Minds (focused on mental and physical health).

It was seen as a safe and rewarding community engagement activity at this sensitive time. It was through these conversations that he met Kelly and her partner who would go on to join other residents to form Easy Come Easy Grow Mcr (ECEG) as part of the Nature Neighbourhood project.

What began with the simple gift of a food-growing kit, a chat about nature and then help to install a small wildlife pond, soon grew into something much bigger: a grassroots social enterprise with a bold vision to make Newton Heath more accessible, inclusive, and eco-friendly. By creating community green spaces, ECEG now provides spaces where people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities can come together in the local area.

About Our Community and Place

Newton Heath is one of Manchester's [most deprived areas](#), with very few accessible green spaces and limited places for residents to connect with nature. The area is often described as a place with “nothing for the kids to do” and not even “a café where people can meet.” Both Sow the City and ECEG shared that the lack of community facilities has left people feeling overlooked and disconnected.

Before and during the Nature Neighbourhoods process, local politics and bureaucracy made progress even harder. Both cohort members spoke about the effort that went into securing sites for new community gardens (even just one!), only to have permissions suddenly withdrawn or blocked. As the ECEG team recalled: “We had one site lined up, we were so excited, and then suddenly they pulled out. No explanation. It was heartbreaking.”

Despite these barriers, there has been strong sense of determination across the collaboration, demonstrating that Newton Heath can be different. As ECEG put it: “People think nothing good happens in Newton Heath. We want to change that, to show this community can do amazing things.”



Photo: Site visit by tialt, June 2025



Photo: Newton Heath Library, site visit by tialt, June 2025

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“It began with a really positive doorstep interaction – one of those stars-aligning moments that sparked a key project idea. Newton Heath badly needed a green hub...”

Kieron, Sow the City



Press play to listen to the full audio

Nature Neighbourhoods Support Received



“Just today I was at the high-rise, talking with people and getting their names for a new project. It’s a world away from where we were this time last year – it feels almost unreal.”

-Easy Come Easy Grow Mcr

Connection through community hubs

The Nature Neighbourhoods project offered Sow the City and the local residents who would later go on to form ECEG a chance to reconnect and deepen their work in the area. In the formative stages of the project, a clear driver for the collaboration (as it was previously) was to have an accessible space to connect the community to the process. The local library in Newton Heath, known now as the Interim Green Hub, has become an important space for the collaboration to form, grow and how the work continues to evolve. The Interim Green Hub was selected for its location: close to the tram stop, in the heart of the town and easy to reach.

At the start of the project, Kieron hosted walk-and-talks nearby, and across the development of the Nature Neighbourhoods work, planning sessions, co-design workshops, and local ideas were brought together in the space. High levels of interest were shown and a healthy balanced representation between residents and ‘professionals’. In addition, the librarians working in the space themselves became advocates for the project, helping spread the word and welcoming new people to the project. Many of collaborations and partnerships were shaped in this space. Regular meetings were held with residents, council officers, and partners such as the National Trust and RSPB. These face-to-face sessions created space for honest dialogue that ‘emails could never achieve’. ECEG recalled that one council officer even remarked on how powerful it was to see residents leading the conversation.



Photo: Site visit by tialt, June 2025

At the opposite end of the High Street, the church, led by Father Andrew, also opened its doors. It offered another welcoming venue for conversations and community building to happen across the process.

Together, these spaces have become temporary hubs, places where relationships could grow and ideas could take root until a permanent green hub is established.

Communication: building trust and networks

Although Sow the City and ECEG had begun working together before the Nature Neighbourhoods project, there was no ECEG at the project's start in October 2023. The Nature Neighbourhoods programme gave Sow the City the time, resources, and flexibility to bring people together in new ways, turning early conversations into a shared community vision for greening their neighbourhood.

By early 2024, this informal collaboration began to take shape as a local group. Over the summer of 2024, members expressed a desire to formalise their work, and with Sow the City's guidance, including signposting to voluntary support organisations, ECEG became a constituted community-led social enterprise in November 2024.

This is one of the clearest examples of how the Nature Neighbourhoods project not only strengthened existing organisations but also helped create new ones, supporting the development of a social business where previously only a plan had been envisioned.

For ECEG, one of the biggest lessons has been the importance of building networks. Through Nature Neighbourhoods, Sow the City introduced them to local partners such as SNUG and The Orchard Project, forming genuine, supportive relationships.



Photo: Easy Come Easy Grow Mcr team. Site visit by tialt, June 2025

“The more people we talk to, the more helpful they are. Even just that support to see what people have done and think, yes, this is what we can do here. Trying to get people talking, because the more you talk about it, the more it catches on. We never knew we were gardeners, and here we are, doing it.”

— ECEG

As project lead, Kieron recognised how valuable it was for ECEG to be part of wider networks and national events. Instead of attending these gatherings alone, he brought the group with him, from train trips to Edinburgh workshops to shared meals and discussions. These experiences helped members build confidence, connect with others, and feel part of a larger movement for community-led nature action.

These new connections also led to unexpected opportunities. After meeting The Orchard Project at a SNUG event, ECEG attended one of their workshops and later members completed a Level 2 Forest Gardening qualification, a milestone they never imagined reaching. For them, this journey shows how being part of wider networks can unlock new skills, confidence, and a lasting sense of possibility within the community.



Photo: Community Garden being revitalised by Easy Come Easy Grow in Newton Heath, site visit by tialt, June 2025

Social: inclusion, healing and community connections

The Nature Neighbourhoods funding gave Sow the City the capacity to mentor ECEG consistently throughout the process. This long-term support created the space for confidence to grow. As the ECEG team reflected: “Sow the City’s mentorship gave us the chance to create something wonderful here – a chance to change people’s mindsets on sustainable living.”

Over time, ECEG has developed into a welcoming social hub with a much broader purpose, its mission is summed up in the words on their logo: accessible, inclusive, eco-friendly. For Kelly, these aren’t just slogans, but values rooted in her own lived experience. As she explained, being disabled and raising neurodivergent children has shown her first-hand how little there is locally for families like hers. “We always have to travel out of the area to do nice things that are free,” she said. “But we shouldn’t have to, we’ve got the basis here to do something wonderful here.”

The work is also about healing and bringing the community back together. After race-related unrest in Newton Heath over the last year, ECEG wanted to create spaces where people could cross divides and reconnect. Specifically, Kelly spoke about her neighbour who cooks ginger stew, and Betty across the road who bakes ginger cake for her husband: “It’s just bringing us all together to show that we’re all in the same place, doing the same thing.”

This ethos of inclusion runs through everything ECEG does. Activities are designed so that disabled residents and neurodivergent children can take part. One local mother told the team it was the only place her son felt comfortable joining in. Alongside gardening, the group now runs children’s craft workshops, and has developed a sensory garden, showing how green spaces can spark creativity, rebuild trust, and strengthen connections when access and inclusion are put at the heart.

Systems: challenges, resilience and



“I just want to say and I’m going to big you up here, Kieron, we’ve always felt we could come to you with any questions. You’ve been such a great mentor to us...”

Kelly, Easy Come Easy Grow Mkr



Press play to listen to the full audio



Photo: Easy Come Easy Grow. Site visit by tialt, June 2025

emotional impacts

System support has been both essential and deeply challenging for Sow the City and ECEG throughout their journey. On the one hand, the Nature Neighbourhoods project officers and allies within Manchester City Council have been vital. They provided not just practical advice but also emotional reassurance at times when local politics felt overwhelming. As ECEG explained, “I was always the one in the middle of it all, and it was disheartening. But the support we got put a fire under me, it made me think, no, you’re not telling me I can’t do this. This is for our community.”

Yet the collaboration has also faced some of the toughest barriers in the programme. ECEG described Newton Heath’s experience as one of the worst he had seen in terms of political hostility, with words like “bullies” and “misogynists” used to describe councillors who blocked or undermined their efforts. What should have been a hopeful project about nature and inclusion was, at times, overshadowed by “toxicity” from local politics. It was painful to watch, particularly when residents were full of energy and ideas but repeatedly had the rug pulled from under them.

These struggles took their toll. Both Sow the City and ECEG had to set boundaries for their own wellbeing and instead leaned on the more supportive parts of the system. The council’s neighbourhood team stepped in to act as a bridge, and new allies emerged, who ECEG now calls whenever issues arise: “I’ll just give her a quick ring, and she sorts it out.”

The experience has shown the importance of having champions inside the system who can help unblock bureaucracy and stand alongside residents. For ECEG, the hostility only sharpened their determination: “This isn’t just for me, it’s for us. For Newton Heath.”

Further challenges were felt, especially the slowness of council processes and gaps in financial know-how around staffing and governance when ECEG was established as a CIC during the project. But the combination of funding, mentoring, and persistence has given the group confidence to grow and continue.

Through it all, what stands out most is the collaboration’s resilience. Kieron shared, “If we were less strong, we would have given up months ago.” Despite repeated setbacks that might have stopped other groups, Sow the City and ECEG kept going. Their persistence reflects the determination within Newton Heath to create something better, even when the system makes it difficult.



Photo: Easy Come Easy Grow Mcr, Site visit by tialt, June 2025

Finance and Capacity: building skills and confidence

Nature Neighbourhoods funding created space and resource for Sow the City’s staff time to engage and mentor the ECEG team in a meaningful way. For the first time, there was dedicated capacity. As Kieron reflected, “Community development is so undervalued... but this gave us space to build relationships and really work with the community.”

This investment in time and money has unlocked big changes for the collaboration. Within a year, ECEG was constituted as a CIC delivering projects. Up until June 2025 they began applying for grants and, out of nine applications, seven were successful. “We’d never applied for funding before. Suddenly we’re winning bids, it made us feel like we can really do this.”

Along the way, the team learned new skills, from designing a logo in Canva to managing CIC paperwork and writing funding bids. What once felt daunting is now knowledge they share with others. The ECEG team described how an experienced community leader even called her for advice on becoming a CIC: “I’ve gone from not knowing where to start to supporting someone else to do it.”

A legacy beyond Nature Neighbourhoods

The legacy of this work will be both organisational and cultural ECEG (nominated by STC) won the Manchester City Council ‘Be Proud Awards’ in June 2025 for ‘Neighbourhood Action on Climate Change’.

Through the partnerships funding group, ECEG has secured £36,071.62 in new funding, a significant achievement that will enable the next phase of community-led projects and strengthen the foundation for lasting environmental action in Newton Heath.

In addition a mass tree planting initiative, starting with 120 standard trees, is programmed to begin in October 2025 as one of the first major actions born from the project. The planting will take place on underused patches of grass across Newton Heath to address local “tree equity” issues, and it simply wouldn’t be happening without this project.

Alongside this, ECEG plans to establish a Green Hub Trail, linking gardens, orchards, and community spaces across the neighbourhood. They are already mentoring other groups in Manchester, creating a ripple effect of grassroots greening.

For the wider system, the Newton Heath project offers a new model of collaboration, one that centres resident voices and co-design. Manchester City Council is now exploring how this community-led approach can be replicated in other neighbourhoods.

Most importantly, the legacy will be a renewed sense of pride and possibility.

“*Newton Heath has a bad name. But we’re showing it doesn’t have to be that way. We’re proving this community can lead the way.*”

- Easy Come Easy Grow Mcr



Photo: Easy Come Easy Grow award

What I've scribbled down here is quite simply, that without Nature Neighbourhoods, I don't think anything would have happened...

Kieron, Sow the City



Press play to listen to the full audio

What has advanced organisational readiness for community-led urban greening?

●

Dedicated time and flexibility from Nature Neighbourhoods allowed Sow the City to mentor and support Easy Come Easy Grow MCR from informal activity into a constituted community-led social enterprise.

●

Relationship-based mentoring and trust built through local engagement enabled residents to shape their own environmental action rather than having it externally led.

●

Network building and peer learning connections with SNUG, The Orchard Project, and other local groups strengthened confidence, visibility, and shared learning.

●

Collaborative participation in wider events (including national gatherings and site visits) helped ECEG connect with similar initiatives and feel part of a wider movement.

●

Tangible legacy actions, including a mass tree-planting programme (120 standards scheduled for Oct 2025) and a planned Green Hub Trail linking community spaces — ensure long-term environmental and cultural impact.

●

Growing organisational resilience through ongoing mentoring, peer exchange, and leadership development has strengthened ECEG's confidence to sustain activity and adapt to future challenges.

Northern Ireland: Ligoniel Improvement Association (Ligoniel Dams) & EastSide Partnership

Location: Ligoniel West Belfast & East Belfast (EastSide Greenways)



“People just can’t get their heads around environment and community development going together... but to me, there’s no difference.” (Maria, Ligoniel)

“One in six people that live in this area are from a different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, so they have as much right to see what we can do for them, and they as much of a say in how this looks or how it’s managed, or what activities are put on. You don’t want to drown out their voices because others are louder.” (Nadine, EastSide)



Ligoniel Improvement Association and EastSide Partnerships

Ligoniel Improvement Association and EastSide Partnership operate in post-industrial areas of Belfast with strong histories of grassroots community development. Their shared mission is to improve local well-being through environmental regeneration, though their contexts and capacities differ — making their partnership valuable for peer learning and mutual support.

Ligoniel Improvement Association (LIA) is a long-standing community organisation rooted in a former mill village in North Belfast. Formed in response to industrial decline and social deprivation, LIA has been protecting and promoting the local environment for nearly 50 years. Their work centres on conserving historic green spaces, the mill dams, Ligoniel Glen, and surrounding woodlands, which hold deep social, cultural, and environmental value.

Politically unaffiliated and community-driven, LIA relies on local energy, resilience, and creativity rather than government backing. Their approach is community-first: building local ownership of land, engaging residents in placemaking, and resisting developments that threaten the area's ecological or historical integrity. The Nature Neighbourhoods programme supported this work by providing tools to navigate community politics, strengthen co-design, and expand engagement around the Ligoniel dams.

“Our goals now are exactly the same goals we had when we were created in 1974: to meet the needs of the community.”

– Maria



Photo: EastSide

EastSide Partnership is a regeneration charity working across education, arts, heritage, and environment. Established in 1995, it has led high-impact regeneration projects across East Belfast for over 25 years. Its flagship initiative, the Connswater Community Greenway, transformed nine kilometres of degraded rivers and land into a connected linear park through a £40M investment. The project restored rivers, built 15 bridges, and protected 1,700 homes through flood alleviation, blending environmental engineering with community design.

The Greenway is now vital local infrastructure, connecting neighbourhoods and creating safe, accessible green space. C.S. Lewis Square has become a focal point for local pride and engagement. Support from Nature Neighbourhoods funded a full-time role to deepen community co-design and grassroots programmes, helping residents share ownership of the space. The Greenway is now recognised internationally as a model of urban placemaking, cited by universities and planners, and holds *Living Landmark* status.

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“Gaps wise, again, we do have good active voices and good active community participation. But there's, there's also big gaps in, you know, across the community, there are a lot of people who don't, who are unheard voices.”

Nadine, EastSide



Press play to listen to the full audio

Urban Nature as a Site of Identity & Memory (Communities)

For both Ligoniel Improvement Association (LIA) and EastSide Partnership, urban nature is deeply connected to community memory, identity, and activism. These landscapes tell stories of industrial decline, environmental damage, and regeneration.

In Ligoniel, the community's relationship with nature is rooted in the history of local mills that once powered the economy but left behind polluted, abandoned sites. The mill dams, ponds, and historic corn mill were saved through community action:

“*We wanted to ensure that developers didn't come in and completely bulldoze... ultimately we wanted that space preserved, conserved... within community ownership.*”

– Maria

Protecting these areas wasn't just environmental, it was about safeguarding heritage, preventing erasure, and keeping land in public hands.

Communities served by EastSide Greenways and Ligoniel Improvement Association share deep local roots and strong cultural identity but face economic hardship and social isolation. EastSide's river restoration projects also reduced flood risk for residents in deprived neighbourhoods.

These communities often prioritise day-to-day concerns like housing and income over abstract environmental goals. Yet, there is a powerful sense of ownership, pride, and grassroots involvement, through volunteers, gardeners, schools, and youth groups. Their connection to nature grows through practical, inclusive, and relationship-based approaches that make environmental action part of everyday life.

Managing local politics

For both Ligoniel and EastSide, efforts to reclaim and regenerate urban green spaces often unfold in contested environments. In Ligoniel, the fight to protect green assets like the mill dams involved direct resistance from parts of the local community, some of whom feared exclusion, change, or loss of control.

“*We faced protesters at our front door... their ears and hearts were closed.*”

– Maria, Ligoniel

This resistance reflects broader tensions: between progress and preservation, between long-standing mistrust of outside agendas and the promise of transformation. In East Belfast, similar challenges emerged when trying to spark conversations about climate and environment in areas where daily survival takes precedence over abstract policy issues.

Many residents see environmentalism as disconnected from their lived experience. Overcoming these struggles requires deep listening, persistence, and humility. Both organisations focus on relationship-building over time, embedding environmental work in activities people already value, like gardening, walking, and community events.

Ligoniel and EastSide connected with each other (and the wider cohort) throughout the Nature Neighbourhoods process, finding value in sharing their own experiences in their similar contexts, learning from each other on how to navigate these tensions. They meet resistance not with confrontation, but with small, visible wins, inclusive language, and the steady presence of trusted people. These struggles are real, but so is the progress, measured not just in acres restored, but in minds changed, trust built, and communities reconnected to place.

Engaging the local communities in the everyday

Ligoniel Improvement Association and EastSide Greenways engage local people through creative, nature-based programmes that build connection, pride, and long-term care for the environment. Rooted in cultural traditions, storytelling, and hands-on activities, their approach makes nature feel relevant and accessible to everyone, from families and children to those less familiar with environmental work.

Through partnership and shared learning, both organisations have developed strong community programmes that respond to local challenges and help people reclaim and reimagine nearby green spaces.

At Ligoniel Dams, the team has transformed a once-overlooked site above the community into an accessible pocket of nature which offers a vital escape and gathering place when intentionally visiting it as a 'place'.

To connect residents, Ligoniel runs:

- **Seasonal nature events** – Solstice walks, fire festivals, Brigid's Day celebrations
- **Forest school sessions** – Bug hunts, crafts, and outdoor play for families
- **Wildlife activities** – Bat walks, species surveys, and biodiversity projects
- **Creative co-design** – Design competitions, postcard feedback, and pop-up ideas boards
- **Volunteer engagement** – Clean-ups, gardening days, and plans for traineeships in land stewardship
- **Cultural programming** – Folk music, crafts, and storytelling in nature

Together, these activities strengthen local identity and demonstrate how everyday engagement can make nature a shared and celebrated part of community life.



“This is all about building capacity. This is all about getting people to, you know, to engage. And it's not just the capacity of our community, it's capacity of those people working within the community that are that, that are key here.”

Marie, Ligoniel



Press play to listen to the full audio



“We have what else tools, like I said, we have the community buy in from all the work that the people did at the very start of the project...”

Nadine, EastSide



Press play to listen to the full audio



Photo: Ligoniel site visit by tialt (view from hills with local community in the background)

For EastSide Partnership, the Connswater Community Greenway is an everyday space that connects homes, schools, and community centres across East Belfast. It offers residents a safe, accessible route to walk or cycle through the city — linking daily routines with nature and wellbeing. This functional use of green space makes environmental infrastructure both practical and essential to local life.

Through Nature Neighbourhoods, EastSide has expanded its programmes to reach more residents through co-design and grassroots engagement.

Current programmes include:

- **Greenway Growers** – A community food-growing initiative promoting skill-sharing, wellbeing, and sustainability. Now evolving into a wider Community Garden Network and a potential *People’s Panel for Nature* rooted in local, working-class voices.
- **Environmental Education** – Hands-on learning through *Wildlife Wanders* in Victoria and Orangefield Parks, promoting biodiversity and climate awareness for all ages.
- **Greenway Leaders Programme** – Employs local people as caretakers and mentors, linking stewardship with community cohesion.
- **Events Calendar** – Year-round markets, arts, and wellness activities, engaging over 2,000 participants across Orangefield Park and nearby areas.
- **Legacy Youth Development Programme** – Supports 18–25-year-olds to build skills, confidence, and employment pathways.
- **Accessibility Audit Project** – Led by residents with disabilities to shape physical and social improvements across the Greenway.

“We took loads of organisations and members of the public who were living with accessibility issues... it was them that completely led that conversation.”

- Nadine, EastSide

For both EastSide and Ligoniel, community programming is rooted in long-term trust, creativity, and inclusive participation, ensuring nature and neighbourhood life grow together.

“One of the reasons why we wanted to be part of Nature Neighbourhood, was our organisation, that we were very environmental, land, heritage rich, but very limited in terms of either resources or capacity.

Maria - Ligoniel



Press play to listen to the full audio

Working with the Nature Neighbourhood's project

The Nature Neighbourhoods Project has been transformative for both Ligoniel and EastSide, providing funding for dedicated full-time roles, *Nadine* (EastSide) and *Susie* (Ligoniel). Despite different contexts, the support was used similarly to build capacity, strengthen partnerships, and deepen community engagement.

The programme provided credibility, learning, and legitimacy, helping both organisations:

- Secure partnerships with groups such as the National Trust and local councils
- Apply structured frameworks and gather new evidence (e.g. biodiversity surveys)
- Grow ambition around co-design and community visioning

Financial sustainability with Nature Neighbourhoods support

The most direct benefit has been staff funding, enabling teams to deliver long-term programmes such as *Greenway Growers*, community engagement work, and partnership building. This stability allowed both organisations to manage challenging relationships and plan confidently for the future.

“*There’s no point in not talking about [it], the money feeds into my wages. It means I can continue to do what I do.*”

– Maria

Peer learning and UK-wide connectivity

Through Nature Neighbourhoods, both teams connected with 18 other projects across the UK, sharing experiences, building solidarity, and realising that “the challenges are the same everywhere.” These exchanges built morale, resilience, and a shared sense of purpose.



Photo: Ligoniel site visit by tialt

New methods and strategic support

The project introduced practical co-design and participatory tools, helping formalise approaches to local engagement. Hands-on support from project officers guided planning, reporting, and strategy, especially valuable for navigating local politics and pushing forward amid community tensions.

Encouraging innovation and grassroots ideas

Nature Neighbourhoods also created space for experimentation, such as EastSide’s proposed *People’s Panel for Nature*, offering a working-class perspective on national conversations.

“*The People’s Plan for Nature—it’s very middle class... we wanted to get a reaction to that, to present our own plan.*” – Nadine

“*Valentina has been invaluable... We wouldn’t have thought of these ideas without that support.*” – Maria



I think for me, it's been kind of the organisational support. And like I my capacity has been very stretched. And plus, since March, I've been a one man team, one woman team...

Nadine, EastSide



Press play to listen to the full audio

Legacy of the Nature Neighbourhoods project across Belfast

The Nature Neighbourhoods project has left a legacy across East Belfast and Ligoniel, strengthening the foundations for inclusive, community-led environmental action. By investing in people, place, and partnership, it has fostered a long-term culture of collaboration and shared stewardship.

At the heart of both projects is a commitment to community ownership of nature. Residents in Ligoniel and EastSide co-created neighbourhood nature plans that reflected local priorities, embedding co-design and participation into everyday practice.

“It’s about people seeing themselves in the space feeling that the Greenway belongs to them.”

- Nadine

Both organisations received vital capacity-building support, including tools, training, and tailored guidance for planning and funding. This allowed groups like Ligoniel to take manageable steps toward larger goals, strengthening confidence and vision over time.

The programme also boosted visibility and credibility. EastSide Greenways was recognised as a *Living Landmark* and became a model for community-led green infrastructure. Learning from Nature Neighbourhoods has influenced wider policy, including Belfast’s 10-Year Tree Strategy and its community climate planning work.

Most importantly, the project nurtured a lasting culture of reflection and creativity. Practices such as walk-and-talks, storytelling events, and seasonal celebrations are now core to how both organisations engage communities, ensuring nature work remains grounded in care, imagination, and co-ownership.

The legacy of Nature Neighbourhoods is a more resilient, inclusive, and people-powered approach to urban nature recovery, one that will continue to grow well beyond the life of the programme.



Photo: Eastside – Map of the Greenway and Urban Nature Spaces



Photo: EastSide – C.S Lewis Square

What has advanced organisational readiness for community led urban greening:

●

Funded engagement capacity through Nature Neighbourhoods provided dedicated staff time for both organisations (Susie at Ligoniel and Nadine at EastSide), enabling consistent community engagement, relationship-building, and trust.

●

Active problem-solving with project officer support helped navigate complex community politics and differing local perspectives, building confidence to push forward through challenges.

●

Strengthened community-first approaches through co-design and participatory planning both organisations developed clearer methods for involving residents meaningfully in shaping urban green spaces.

●

Strategic guidance and mentoring improved project planning, evaluation, and communication, helping both groups secure new partnerships (e.g., National Trust, local councils) and funding opportunities.

●

Increased visibility elevated both organisations' roles within Belfast's environmental sector, influencing wider strategies such as the city's 10-Year Tree Strategy and community climate planning.

●

Cultural and community connection - both projects reframed nature as part of everyday identity and place-making, using storytelling, events, and heritage to make greening relevant across communities.

Scotland: Hamiltonhill Claypits LNR

Location: Glasgow, Scotland



“It’s not just a partnership of ‘you’ve got a space, can we put something on there?’ It’s about the people first. We know they care for our community as much as we do”

- North West Recovery

Photo: Members of the local community coming together in the space



Communities

Hamiltonhill Claypits LNR

Hamiltonhill Claypits is a community-led nature reserve located in North Glasgow, transforming a formerly neglected industrial site into a vibrant and inclusive publicly accessible green space. The site has become a meeting place, for health, wellbeing, education, and community connection. Situated along the Forth and Clyde Canal in north Glasgow, the Claypits serves a diverse urban population of around 18,000 households. Over the course of the Nature Neighbourhoods programme, the Claypits have grown into a recognised anchor in the area, expanding their projects,

strengthening partnerships, and deepening their connection with the community. The organisation is volunteer led, with just one part-time paid staff member and retired volunteers forming the core team. Despite limited capacity, the group champions local partnerships to deliver a wide range of activities; from forest schools and wellbeing walks to events and community celebrations. All with the goal of connecting people to nature, improving health and wellbeing, and creating a sense of local pride and ownership.

Centering the local community

The Claypits are in a part of Glasgow shaped by diversity, resilience, and long-standing social challenges rooted in the city's industrial past. For many residents, especially those experiencing poverty and inequality, the site offers both a symbol of change in the area and a valuable community resource, seen with a sense of pride in the community.

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Our community is so varied. So it's about 18,000 homes that surround the claypit local nature reserve, and in those homes, we've got children, families...

Julianne



Press play to listen to the full audio

The team put community voices at the centre of their work. The facilitated co-design sessions gave residents real influence over how spaces developed, from growing plots to play areas. Young people were involved through schools and youth projects, helping them feel connected to the site. Cultural and inclusive events, such as International Women's Day celebrations and activities welcoming new Scots, particularly women and families—encouraged people to use the Claypits, connect with nature, and take part in events that felt relevant and interesting to the wider community.

The wider projects, hands-on tasks, and community engagement gave people an active role. These approaches reshaped perceptions of the Claypits. Once seen as derelict and unsafe, the site is now a place of pride, identity, and belonging.

“

*“The Claypits is a great community asset because the gates are never locked, people know it belongs to them.” **Others spoke about how engaging with nature on their doorstep broke down barriers:** “It's about breaking down barriers, so people who may not think of themselves as ‘nature people’ can still feel this is their space.” **Speaking to members of the local community at an event, there was a strong feeling of ownership and pride for the space and the activities. One attendee noting** “I never used to come here, but now I feel like I am welcome and want to bring more people, it's really changed the area for the better, it gives everyone something to see and do.”*



Photo: Hamiltonhill Claypits

Gathering place and coming together in nature: projects and their successes

From the beginning, the Claypits team were determined to make the site feel alive, not just through the physical transformation of the land, but also with activity. Seasonal events, family-friendly celebrations, wellbeing projects all became part of their evolving programme.



"The one of the big things is raising awareness. So the clay pits was built for the community. It was basically to connect communities that surround the canal and the local area..."

Participate



Press play to listen to the full audio

The programme was co-designed with a deep understanding of the local community. It included Walk and Talk sessions that encouraged residents to connect in nature, outdoor classroom activities, and the Recovery Through Nature project, offering safe, meaningful opportunities for people in recovery. Culture and play were used as gateways to nature, with inclusive events that made the space welcoming and engaging. Activities such as the climate relay, litter picks, and environmental awareness sessions helped position the Claypits as a place for both enjoyment and climate action.

At the heart of the Claypits is a dedicated team of volunteers who give their time to support events and maintain the space. As one volunteer reflected, *"I was raised around here, and it's amazing to give back to the place that helped raise me... volunteering gives me something to do and put my mind to while letting me be out in nature."* Volunteers contribute both to their community and their own wellbeing, valuing the mental health benefits of spending time outdoors.

Through their combined efforts, the Claypits has become more than a greenspace, it's a gathering place. *"The harvest festival was a chance for*

neighbours to come together, share food and celebrate the garden – far more people came than we thought possible," one team member recalled.

By the end of the programme, the team's efforts paid off: they secured three years of National Lottery funding to support a dedicated Community Development Manager. This milestone marked a shift from reliance on volunteers to a more sustainable model, ensuring the projects begun under *Nature Neighbourhoods* can continue to flourish.



Photo: Hamiltonhill Claypits

Building Effective Partnerships to Support the Community Through Nature

Collaboration has been central to the Claypits' success. Rather than working in isolation, the team has invested time in developing strong, trust-based partnerships that expand reach and deepen impact. These relationships, built over time, reflect the key role the Claypits plays in the community, connecting local groups, centring diverse voices, and bringing people together in a space that feels shared, safe, and theirs.

Partnerships with organisations such as Clay Community Church, G20 Youth Project, and North West Recovery Communities (NWRC) have enabled the Claypits to engage families and groups who might otherwise have remained disconnected. Health partners, including local GP surgeries, have begun referring patients to the Claypits' wellbeing walks, recognising the benefits of nature for physical and mental wellbeing.

As one team member reflected, *“Our partnerships have opened doors to communities we had struggled to connect with on our own.”* Another added, *“Working with others has been about finding the overlap in our goals, not just what they can do for us, but what we can build together.”*

The Claypits is widely recognised by its partners as a catalyst for positive collaboration. Organisations describe how working together has strengthened their own work — from hosting activities in green space to enhancing the wellbeing impact of their programmes. Participants note that taking part in activities at the Claypits has encouraged them to spend more time outdoors and connect more deeply with their community.

The Claypits team plays a vital role in enabling this. Their passion, consistency, and care underpin every partnership. They provide practical support, share resources, and offer access to urban greenspace, volunteering, and non-traditional learning settings, helping partners widen their offer and strengthen their community impact.

“*It’s not just a partnership of ‘you’ve got a space, can we put something on there?’ It’s about the people first. We know they care for our community as much as we do, we’re working from the same script.*” – North West Recovery Communities



Photo: Claypits & Nwrc: Partner stalls at a Recovery Through Nature event

Recovery through nature: partnership in practice

A strong example of this approach is the Recovery Through Nature project, delivered in partnership with North West Recovery Communities. The programme offers people in recovery from addiction, poor mental health, and social isolation the chance to take part in meaningful, structured outdoor activities, from conservation and gardening to creative projects. These sessions provide consistency, skill-building, and connection, helping participants rebuild confidence and reconnect with their community.

The partnership also extends to community celebration. Each summer, NWRC hosts its Recovery Oriented System of Care (ROSC) event at the Claypits, a family day themed around Recovery through Nature. Partners are invited to run activities, stalls, and wellbeing sessions, showcasing the benefits of being outdoors and the many ways nature supports health, healing, and social connection.

“*This is by far the best programme I’ve been in. It feels genuine, like I can really be myself. Even just coming together for events, having food, a wee dance, some fun, it feels different, more real.*”

– Participant

The project meets a clear local need. For many people in recovery, safe and welcoming outdoor spaces are rare. Recovery is about more than treatment — it depends on confidence, purpose, and supportive social networks. The Claypits’ open gates and inclusive ethos make it an ideal setting for this work. By combining the expertise of recovery practitioners with the therapeutic value of urban nature, the partnership delivers deep, lasting impact.



Photo: Hamiltonhill Claypits

Participants describe improved wellbeing, motivation, and belonging, while partners highlight how stigma is challenged as people in recovery are seen and celebrated as valued members of the community. Many participants now return to the Claypits outside of structured sessions, seeing it as a space that truly belongs to them.

Once an abandoned, post-industrial site symbolising decline, the Claypits has become a visible symbol of regeneration and pride. Through its partnerships, it has transformed into a place of healing, connection, and community-led change a living example of how nature and collaboration can drive positive transformation in urban spaces.

Working with Nature Neighbourhoods team to address grassroot challenges

Like many grassroots organisations, the Claypits faced significant challenges: limited staff capacity, funding insecurity, difficulty engaging some groups, and the practical realities of negotiating with landowners and external agencies. Reliance on a small core team meant delivery was often stretched, and uncertainty about long-term funding made strategic planning difficult. Some groups remained harder to engage, while external pressures like weather and cost-of-living crises further limited participation.

The support of the Nature Neighbourhoods programme proved crucial in addressing these barriers. Funding allowed the team to recruit a Community Development Manager, providing continuity and much-needed capacity. Training in facilitation, negotiation, equality, and fundraising gave the team new skills to overcome challenges — from building confidence in approaching funders to handling complex conversations with landowners.

One team member reflected: *“The training gave us confidence to approach funders and partners we might not have before.”* Another described how negotiation skills helped them deal more effectively with external stakeholders, turning potential obstacles into opportunities.

Peer learning was another vital element. Regular cohort meetings with other organisations offered solidarity and practical solutions. *“Hearing how others tackled similar challenges gave us new ideas and reminded us we weren’t alone.”*

Visibility and credibility also grew through Nature Neighbourhoods. Participation in national initiatives such as the Running Out of Time climate relay placed the Claypits on a bigger stage, boosting their profile with both the local community and external funders.

“*Short-term support is welcome, but what made the difference was training, confidence, and connections we’ll carry forward long after the funding ends.*” (Julianne)

By combining financial support with skills development, networking, and national visibility, the programme enabled Hamiltonhill Claypits to not only overcome their immediate challenges but to grow into a stronger, more resilient organisation.



Photo: Hamiltonhill Claypits - credit - For Girls Who

A thriving urban nature reserve - legacy of Nature Neighbourhoods

The story of Hamiltonhill Claypits is one of transformation through trust, creativity, and persistence. By working alongside their community, forging meaningful partnerships, and embracing the opportunities offered by the Nature Neighbourhoods programme, they have turned a once-derelict industrial site into a thriving urban nature reserve and a source of neighbourhood pride.

For Hamiltonhill Claypits, the legacy of the Nature Neighbourhoods programme lies in the transformation from a small, volunteer-driven

group into a confident and resilient community anchor. With support from the programme, the team secured long-term funding and dedicated staff, giving them the capacity to plan rather than simply “getting by.” Partnerships built during the programme embed the Claypits more deeply into the life of north Glasgow, while the community itself now sees the site differently. The enduring legacy is not only in projects delivered but, in the confidence, capacity, and sense of ownership that ensure the Claypits will continue to thrive as a space shaped by and for the community.

What has advanced organisational readiness for community led urban greening?

Communication support and mentoring from Nature Neighbourhoods helped the group strengthen their public profile and clarify their community offer, leading to increased engagement.

Improved visibility and storytelling raised awareness of the Claypits’ role as a vital local greenspace for wellbeing, inclusion, and recovery.

Dedicated support for strategic planning enabled the team to transition from a volunteer-led initiative to a structured community organisation with clear governance and shared goals.

Inclusive programming from guided walks to creative events, built trust with diverse communities and created pathways for new volunteers and local champions.

Cross-sector collaboration with Glasgow City Council and local partners embedded the Claypits as a model for co-managed urban nature spaces in the city.

Peer connections with other Nature Neighbourhoods projects across the UK gave the team confidence and practical tools to sustain engagement and grow capacity.

Wales: Greening Maindee

Location: Maindee, Newport, Wales, UK



Nature placemaking in Maindee

Greening Maindee: Gateways to Urban Nature Connection

Greening Maindee is a community led organisation (part of the charity, Maindee Unlimited) which has a mission to transform neglected spaces to safe and attractive areas for people to enjoy. At the heart of their work, they create public spaces so that local people can connect with urban nature. Their emerging priority is to create play spaces for children which have been identified with the wider community as a key need for the area.

Maindee Triangle: The transformation of Maindee Triangle began in 2019 with the aim to create a public space for Maindee residents. Greening Maindee volunteers (the 'Mainbees') take care of the space on a weekly basis as part of 'Mainbee's Green Safari'.

'Everybody can see all these bees... if you create it, they'll come'

Although the organisation's roots are as community place-makers by providing visible improvement in the neighbourhood which gives hope, their urban greening work aims to foster environmental education through community engagement. Placemaking through urban greening is a gateway for broader engagement to address lack of quality green spaces in the area and raise awareness of local climate issues such as flood risk.



Working with Nature Neighbourhoods to Harness People Power in Maindee

An active volunteer network is vital to the success of ongoing community work, yet keeping the network going demands care to nurture community involvement. The Project Community Engagement Officer (Kathy) has been fully funded by the Nature Neighbourhoods project. Kathy has a crucial role in building local networks on the ground with Lead and Manager of Greening Maindee (John). Together, Kathy and John identify strengths of volunteers to inform the organisation's development, which is part of everyday life in Maindee. Sustaining community engagement requires time to build trust which the Nature Neighbourhoods funding has supported. It is important that funding opportunities do not require unnecessary administrative tasks, as this takes valuable time away from the outdoor work when there is already limited team resource. It is in the outdoor work where the value is created, led by local action to benefit local communities.

Historically, Maindee has had a strong sense of local community and Maindee Unlimited actively rejuvenates citizen power as part of developing Maindee's future which creates pride and care of the area. The people of Maindee benefit from diverse communities, however the protection of community run venues is crucial to bring communities together and foster shared understanding across groups of people. Maindee's community infrastructure has been strengthened by asset transfers of key community buildings such as Maindee Library and The Triangle (and more recent development of Eveswell Community Centre). The organisations' role in preserving spaces for communities is highlighted by their recent care of ECC's community gardens which has contributed to formal investment of the centre. ECC acts as an important space for multi-faith groups and wider communities in Maindee



I think people respond to what they can see happening within the community...

Julianne



Press play to listen to the full audio



Eveswell Community Centre: The Centre has received investment to develop the building, helped by Greening Maindee's volunteering work and creating a local network of green spaces.

Greening Maindee's work exists amongst struggles faced by communities due to the 'informal' economy, addiction and social deprivation. Their work facilitates safe spaces in the public realm, curated by community members themselves. Through value led work, Greening Maindee fosters a spirit of generosity which creates a powerful force (of love) which shows in the greening of urban places of Maindee.

Greening Maindee's presence is spoken in the spaces that they create, providing space to rest, be creative, think, connect and restore. Through collaboration with artists local murals provide public spaces for engagement and conversation and an accessible way to engage with nature. Greening Maindee provide a bridge between the local and national climate movement which centres nature in the everyday lives of residents.

In the process of caring for green spaces to flourish, knowledge is exchanged about plant growing, food sustainability and medicinal plants. Connection with nature encourages connection and care with others; everyone involved becomes a caretaker of shared spaces. The many caretakers have emerging roles that keep the organisation's work going such as 'fundraising' 'crafting' and 'maintaining'. The network is self-organising in creating places for all.

The 'Mainbees' have a visible identity that unites generations, backgrounds and skills. Through connection in the outdoors a relaxed social environment is created which invites new and old volunteers to gather. Volunteers are motivated to become involved for different purposes, such as creative, social, environmental and spiritual reasons. Some recognise that involvement in the

group forms 'family'. There is a recognised need to increase engagement with other faith groups in the area. Recent connections and events suggest multi-faith engagement is happening with time and scaling up of activities will enable deeper engagement across Maindee with diverse groups. The visible impact of local greening projects is seen on surrounding streets (at the hyperlocal level) such as green roofs, with neighbours taking pride in their outdoor spaces.

Greening Maindee now find themselves at a pivotal point in the development of their work as they seek to scale up their projects to provide local environmental education and community-led revitalisation of the public realm.



Photo: Maindee - Poyraz taken by his mum Sabriye

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So one of our goals is to empower the community to look after their own spaces, start to skill them and give them the resources to do it themselves.

Participant



Press play to listen to the full audio

How the Nature Neighbourhoods project has evolved strategy through connectivity

The flexible funding model has enabled Greening Maindee to spend time on local engagement that will sustain activities and work over the long-term. The connectivity and relationship building nature of Kathy's role has had direct and indirect impact on the strategic direction of the organisation by:

- Developing existing and new urban green spaces in Maindee
- Developing the local ecosystem and networks to bring nature and people together
- Influencing the development of large-scale projects for local green infrastructure which impacts capability as an organisation

The Nature Neighbourhoods project officer role has provided support to Greening Maindee by giving structure and strategic support to the development of the organisation through regular catch ups to reflect, review and plan. Offering flexibility for when the 'People -Powered Plan for Nature' is completed has been important for effective community engagement, as Greening Maindee are aware of risking fatigue with communities due to numerous consultation activities that have taken place over the years. The Nature Neighbourhoods funding period has acted as a catalyst for the growth of timely local opportunities and network development.

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So expanding that knowledge and it's sort of becoming more educational, more opportunities for people to learn about things like green infrastructure'

Participant



Press play to listen to the full audio



Photo: Greening Maindee

Enhancing visibility through grassroots communication networks and system engagement

Nature Neighbourhoods project has been effective at working with Greening Maindee to enhance the profile of the organisation through three core areas:

Communication of Greening Maindee's work

- Increased engagement with local events (which may also be influenced by people having greater awareness of climate issues)
- Training workshops held by National Trust on Youth Work have guided engagement strategies with schools in Maindee
- Working with GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping partner as part of Nature Neighbourhoods funded work

Development of engaged, grassroots networks

- Increase in young people volunteering over the past year as the work has become more visible in the community
- Development of relationships with multifaith groups, such as *Young Muslim Community Organisation* (YMCO) and further collaborations
- Development of local networks with schools and local businesses i.e. Shared BUPA funding application for local street greening project

System wide relationship building to steer local green infrastructure development

- Direct opportunity created by Nature Neighbourhoods project team through introduction with Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to develop a garden at the gateway of Maindee which now is part of the caretaking work and engaged the local authority in the process
- Joint funding bid in development with housing association (POBL) as part of Green Futures Bid which will provide local employment opportunities
- Development of new local green infrastructure at Archibald Pocket Park
- A growing reputation in the area has led to an advisory role with the council on development of a green verge in Maindee



Photo: Greening Maindee

Working with Local System Partners to Green Maindee

Greening Maindee has faced challenges in engaging with the local authority as a small organisation. Local momentum could be better harnessed to create improvement to public spaces. The following barriers have been experienced which the Nature Neighbourhood project has helped to recognise and navigate:

- Administration tasks slow pace of change when there is a need to seek permission for activities in public spaces. As a small community led organisation with limited resources the time required to engage with administrative and legal processes can have an emotional impact on already stretched resources. Some beneficial relationships have developed such as with the Tree Team at the local council, but it can be challenging to know who the right people are to support community led change effectively.
- Missed opportunities to harness momentum can impact mobilisation of local networks. The Nature Neighbourhoods project has helped provide emotional and practical support to work with the local system and develop ways of working that can guide partnerships over the long term.

The development of the RHS garden has demonstrated possibilities of working together with the council and provided a template of what revitalisation projects can do in the area to bring people together and provide access to a restorative space. Now, the RHS garden has a volunteer caretaker of the site who lives close to the garden who can offer time to maintain it which demonstrates effectiveness of community ownership.

A Green Legacy at the Green Heart of Maindee

The legacy of the Nature Neighbourhoods project has given gravitas to timely opportunities which have developed local networks for urban greening. The support has enabled trust to continue amongst local groups, such as establishing the RHS garden. At a system level to start, a path has emerged towards influencing future green infrastructure plans led by community needs in the current regeneration scheme and capital investment for Newport. This potential opportunity has positioned the organisation as a partner to train other local organisations and advise the council on local urban greening projects.

However, sustained engagement at scale requires greater capacity. The funding of a community engagement role (with Kathy) has been key to support meaningful work in the ‘everyday’ and allow strategic priorities to be community driven (i.e. spaces for children). In the short term, Greening Maindee are embedded in sustaining safe green spaces for the people of Maindee. The organisation is positioning itself to influence change at a city-wide level as part of regeneration initiatives, which has the potential to unlock sustainable funding, which has been enabled through the support of the Nature Neighbourhoods project; an alliance that has helped to build capacity and capability.



Photo: Greening Maindee



Photo: Greening Maindee

What has advanced organisational readiness for community led urban greening:

Flexible project timelines

allowed the development of people-powered plans for nature to align with evolving local networks and emerging opportunities.

Structured training

opportunities strengthened knowledge and strategic capacity, helping organisations plan for growth and scale their work effectively.

Embedded project officer support

provided an external perspective and ongoing guidance, helping organisations reflect, adapt, and stay focused on long-term goals.

Dedicated capacity funding

from Nature Neighbourhoods provided the time and focus for Maindee Unlimited to adapt its strategy, strengthen governance, and embed environmental action across its community programmes.

Enhanced visibility and communication support

helped the organisation better tell its story, connect with residents, and build stronger recognition of its work across Newport.

System-level guidance and mentoring

supported the team in refining project planning, evaluation, and partnership approaches, enabling longer-term thinking and stronger funding applications.

Summary Findings

The case studies across the four nations show how NGOs and partners can equip community organisations to lead climate and nature action from the ground up. Providing time, trust, and flexible support has helped communities strengthen their capacity, build relationships, and embed nature into everyday life. Across the Four Nations, the following principles have been key in advancing organisational readiness for community-led greening:

At the Centre

- 1. Flexible Support and Timing**
Adaptable funding and project timelines allowed organisations to align engagement with real community needs and opportunities enabling growth at a natural pace rather than forcing quick results.
- 2. Structured Learning and Skills Development**
Access to tailored training (e.g, facilitation, co-design, funding, communication) built both capability and confidence, helping teams to act strategically and sustain projects beyond initial funding.
- 3. Advisory and Problem-Solving Support**
Dedicated project officer guidance provided trusted, reflective space to navigate entrenched local politics, build confidence in advocacy, and maintain momentum when challenges arose.

Building Community Capacity and Local Networks

- 4. Funded Community Engagement Roles**
Dedicated staff and consistent presence on the ground were vital for building trust, nurturing relationships, and developing peer-led initiatives that connect people and place.
- 5. Peer Learning and Cross-Network Exchange**
Regular contact across the UK cohort gave organisations solidarity, shared learning, and new ideas—turning isolation into collaboration and sparking innovation across contexts.
- 6. Strengthening Local Assets and Anchors**
Using familiar community venues (libraries, parks, community centres) as “green hubs” created inclusive, accessible entry points for local engagement and sustained use of green spaces.

Working Towards Socio-Environmental Justice

- 7. Co-Design and Inclusion at the Core**
Placing community voices at the heart of planning ensured nature projects reflected lived realities, connecting environmental goals with everyday priorities like safety, wellbeing, and belonging.
- 8. Building Confidence and Leadership**
Mentorship, training, and small wins-built self-belief within emerging groups, helping local leaders, especially from underrepresented communities, develop the confidence to lead and influence wider change.
- 9. Integrating Wellbeing and Everyday Life**
Nature engagement was embedded into daily routines, through walking routes, food growing, and creative activities, so environmental action became part of everyday community life, not an extra task.
- 10. Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces**
Projects that welcomed diverse participants, including disabled residents, people in recovery, and young people, strengthened wellbeing and social cohesion, demonstrating that access to nature is a right, not a privilege.

Sustaining Change and System Connection

- 11. System Navigation and Advocacy Skills**
Training and mentoring helped groups understand local systems, find allies within councils, and advocate effectively for community-led change.
- 12. Evidence and Visibility Building**
Support for communications, evaluation, and storytelling helped organisations demonstrate impact, attract investment, and gain legitimacy within wider urban and policy systems.
- 13. Long-Term Investment in People and Place**
Financial stability, particularly funding for staff time, was the most critical factor in sustaining engagement, enabling organisations to plan strategically, build resilience, and continue to deliver meaningful local impact.



Photo: Hamiltonhill Claypits

