

Tackling climate change and changing communities

Power of the collective



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Foreword

This report is the first in a series, written by The National Lottery Community Fund in conjunction with Ashden, aiming to demonstrate and inspire community-led action on climate change. This first publication outlines the scale of the challenge posed by climate change, sets the UK's greenhouse gas emissions in context, and introduces our Climate Action Fund. It then outlines the importance, and potential, of community-led climate action (including the co-benefits). The report finishes by giving advice on how to set up a community-led project. In the second of the series, we collate a series of case studies that illustrate what's possible when people come together to help mitigate climate change.

We hope this series of reports provides both inspiration and practical advice to help you set up your own community-led climate action initiative.



“We’re proud to be involved in The National Lottery Community Fund’s Climate Top-Up initiative which has enabled us to install 24 solar panels on our community centre. This is not only helping us to reduce our carbon emissions, but we’ll also save on energy bills, making it good for business too.”

Margaret Sutherland,
Chief Officer, South Denbighshire
Community Partnership





Introduction

Climate change – a global problem

The challenges presented by climate change, and a planet that is heating at an unprecedented pace, are now widely accepted. The physical proof of these changes, in the form of more extreme and unpredictable weather conditions and shifting seasonal variations, mounts annually. These climatic changes bring with them a range of issues that the human race has never before experienced.

Countries from around the world have come together to address the dilemma of our ever-increasing carbon dioxide emissions - the main contributor to the problem - and created the Paris Agreement on climate change. This global treaty, signed by 174 countries, plus the European Union, in Paris in December 2015, aims to keep global rising temperatures to a maximum of 2°C above pre-industrial levels; with a further ambition to keep it as low as 1.5°C if possible. We have already experienced a warming of 1°C over the last century, and until we achieve net-zero emissions (when any greenhouse gas emissions that we add to the atmosphere are balanced by emissions that we remove from the atmosphere) the planet will continue to warm. To find out more about the warming of our planet visit the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change website](#).

The encouraging news for everyone who wants to take action is that local responses are both appropriate and necessary. Solutions are needed that can be implemented by individuals, groups, communities, villages, towns, cities and regions, as well as at a country and international level. In fact, locally created and driven solutions are at the very heart of the response to the climate change challenge, and each of us has a part to play in helping to keep average global temperatures below the 2°C rise. This report aims to enthuse individuals, spurring community leaders and others into action. A community-led response to climate change is a very powerful force for good and here we provide you with the essential tips and advice to get started with your own climate action community project.



“Chester is known for its love of cycling and through this project locals are not just encouraged to cycle more but also to be environmentally conscious.”

Graham Weaver,
CEO, The Bren Project

The UK context

The UK's contribution to global climate change is measured through its domestic greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). These amounted to just under 1% of total global emissions in 2018. This does not, at first sight, appear particularly high considering the UK's position as the sixth-largest global economy (measured by GDP), but it is by no means the full story. Alongside our domestically generated emissions, we have to account for those associated with imported goods and services as well as take responsibility for our ongoing investments in high-carbon-intensity industries overseas.

However, the UK has attempted to be at the forefront of efforts to address the problem of man-made climate change. In 2008, the UK became the first country in the world to introduce a climate change law, the Climate Change Act, which introduced a legally binding commitment to cut GHG emissions by at least 80%, by 2050. In 2019, following advice from the Climate Change Committee (CCC), the signing of the Paris Agreement, and the significant pressure brought to bear by many sectors of civil society, the UK Government strengthened that target, to becoming Net Zero by 2050. In simple terms, that means when all the UK's carbon emissions are calculated, there has to be an equal, or ideally greater, quantity of carbon dioxide taken out of the atmosphere in the same time period to compensate for the amount released.

This can be done in many ways, but there are two main categories.



Nature-based approaches that include afforestation (planting new forests) and reforestation (restoring degraded forests) and progressive, ecologically sensitive land management to restore grassland and wetlands and reverse peat losses.



Technology-based approaches include biomass with carbon capture and storage (or BECCS, which involves using biomass for electricity generation and capturing and storing the carbon dioxide emissions) and new, currently untested, technologies that capture carbon directly from the atmosphere and store it underground.

For more information on greenhouse gases visit the [CCC website](#).

The most effective defence against climate change is to not emit the carbon in the first place. And there are many opportunities to lower or even eliminate our carbon footprint individually and, more impactfully, collectively.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to work together – government, businesses, the public sector, communities and individuals – to shift the way we generate and use energy, change how we move around and what we purchase, restore the natural environment and develop a more sustainable, nature-friendly approach to food, water and waste. It is important that all sectors play their part. Together these actions can help protect the planet, boost economic activity and create green spaces, cleaner air, warmer homes and healthier travel. Everyone can benefit – now and into the future. To read more about climate action co-benefits, visit the [Ashden website](#).



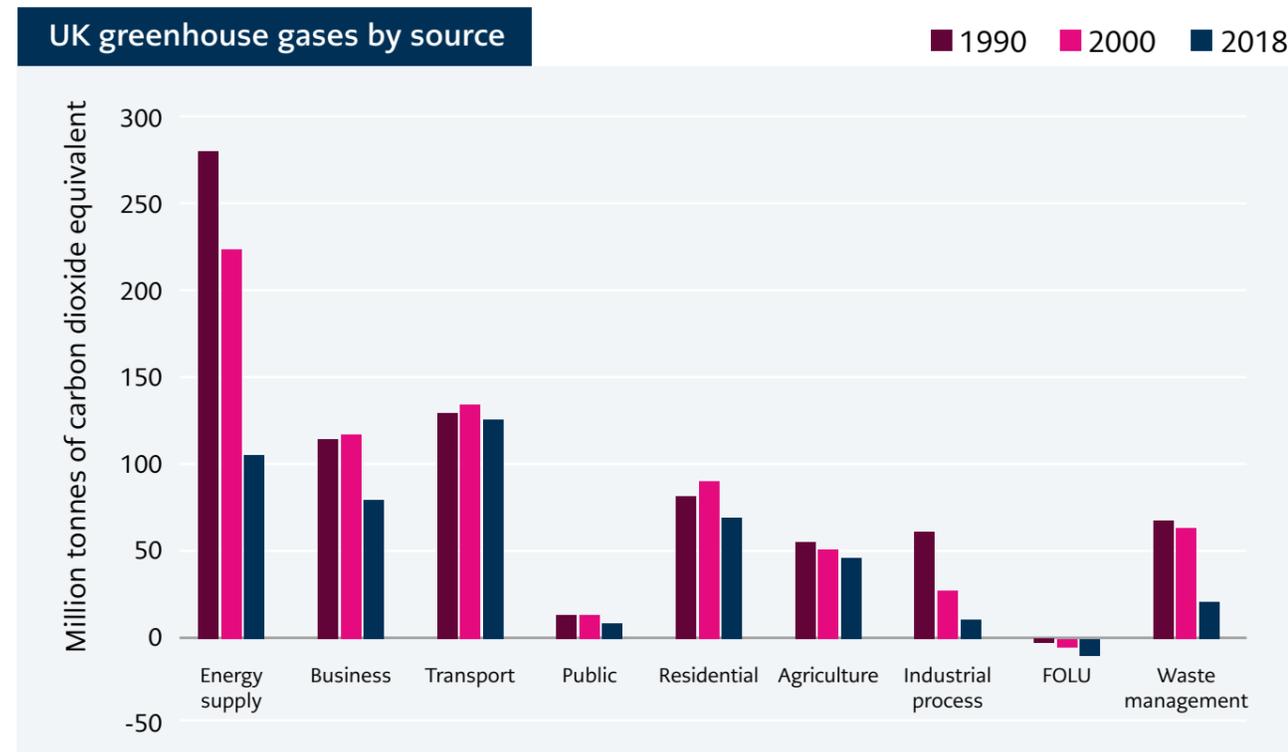
UK greenhouse gas emissions

Emissions of a number of individual greenhouse gases are estimated each year in order to monitor the UK's contribution to climate change. The emissions estimates of each of these GHG are converted into an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide so that the relative impacts of each can be compared. This is why quantities of any greenhouse gas are usually expressed in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e). To find out more about UK greenhouse gas emissions, visit the [UK Government website](#).

The biggest contribution comes from carbon dioxide (CO₂), which makes up about 80% of the total impact. Methane (CH₄) adds a further 10% and the remaining greenhouse gases make up the rest.

The greenhouse gas emissions generated within the UK's borders have reduced from around 790MtCO₂e (million tonnes of carbon dioxide-equivalent) in 1990 to about 450MtCO₂e in 2018, a reduction of more than 40%.

There are two main ways of attributing greenhouse gas emissions to different sectors. The first is by allocating the emissions to where they were generated.



Source: 2018 UK greenhouse gas emissions: final figures - data tables (Table 3 - GHG emissions by source)

When you look at emissions this way, you see that the energy supply sector (electricity generation, oil refining etc) was the largest source of emissions in 1990, but the sector's emissions have reduced significantly since then and are now the second-largest source after transport.

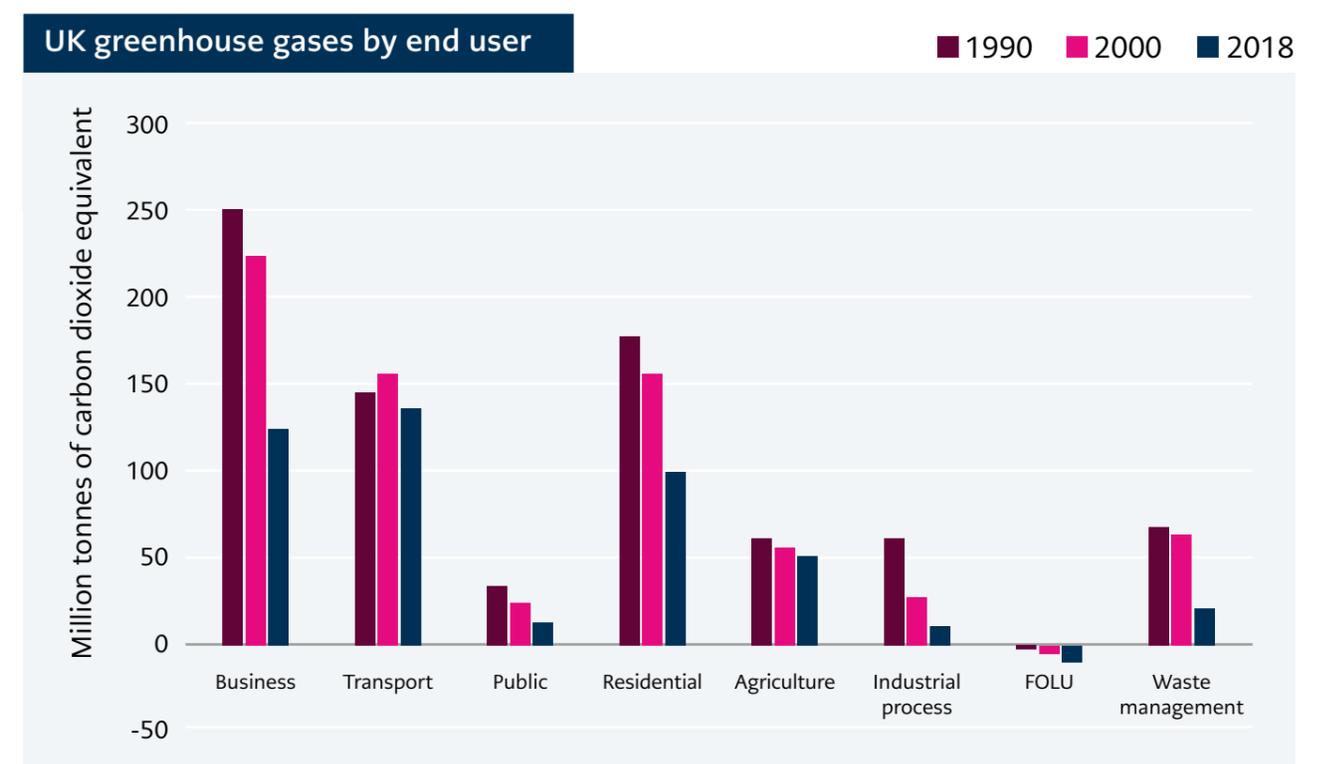
This dramatic change in emissions is due to a large reduction in coal-fired electricity generation (which will be phased out completely by 2025) and the sizeable increase in renewable generation during this period.

The business, public and residential emissions represent only the emissions generated by burning fuels in those sectors' buildings and do not include emissions from electricity consumption. The residential sector's emissions have seen a reduction since the year 2000, as insulation measures installed in the last decade helped to reduce heating energy demand.

Industrial emissions have seen a large reduction since 1990, in part due to improvements in efficiency, but also due to reductions in the UK's manufacturing capacity over the last few decades, as this activity has moved to other parts of the world.

Forestry and other land use (FOLU) emissions arise from how we use land in the UK. Some ways of using land (for example, draining peat bogs) lead to greenhouse gases being emitted while others (for example, planting new woodland) lead to greenhouse gases being drawn down from the atmosphere and stored in the land. Over the last few decades, the way we use land has led to carbon being taken out of the atmosphere.

Transport's emissions have barely changed in the last three decades, mostly because the increase in efficiency in our vehicles has been offset by the increase in the number of vehicles on the road and by UK citizens driving further.



Source: 2018 UK greenhouse gas emissions: final figures - data tables (Table 19 - GHG emissions by end user)

When looking at emissions by source it is important to remember that the emissions from electricity used, for example, by the residential or business sectors have been allocated to the energy supply sector. Allocating the emissions from the energy supply sector to the end user gives a slightly different picture, as shown in the second graph.

In this case, the emissions for the business and residential sectors (which use a lot of electricity) have increased substantially. Meanwhile the reduction in the carbon intensity of electricity generation that has been achieved by the energy supply sector, along with significant reductions in energy demand in our buildings, have translated into substantial reductions in emissions in these two sectors in recent years. Transport emissions also increase when examining the data by end user because some of the emissions generated in oil refining and processing are allocated to transport.

All of the emission estimates given in this section have been for emissions generated within the UK. They do not include emissions from fuel used by aircraft departing the UK for foreign destinations (which has increased by more than 130% since 1990) or international shipping. They also don't take into account emissions generated in other countries to produce goods and services imported into the UK. If you include these imported emissions then the UK's total carbon footprint increases from 450 to 770MtCO₂e, of which nearly half (46%) is generated overseas. To read more about UK carbon emissions, visit the [UK Government website](#).



YMCA Allotment Redhill

Climate Action Fund

Launched in July 2019 by The National Lottery Community Fund, the Climate Action Fund supports communities across the UK to take action on climate change. The 10 year, £100 million fund aims to reduce the carbon footprint of communities and support community-led movements that demonstrate what is possible when people take the lead in tackling the climate emergency.

The funded projects have supported communities to take local climate action and focused on environmental themes including energy, food, transport, waste and consumption, and the natural environment. They include large-scale schemes delivered by local partnerships, as well as smaller development grants, which will see the National Lottery funding used for emerging ideas to engage different communities and to test new approaches. The projects will work together, share their learning and be active participants in a broader movement of change.

The Climate Action Fund is part of The National Lottery Community Fund's Environment Strategy, which has seen significant National Lottery investment in community-led projects that are focused on activities that not only improve the environment, but also use it to enhance the lives of people and communities. Since April 2013, the Fund has awarded more than £340 million to environmental projects, through almost 4,800 grants.

COVID-19

Since this review was commissioned and during the writing of it, the world has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has struck at the heart of communities and how they operate. Projects referred to in this review were started before the coronavirus crisis and some of their methods of operation and levels of human interaction will seem impossible in the current climate.

At the time of writing, we are still working through the longer-term potential consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is difficult to predict what permanent changes may need to be implemented for us to have a level of confidence that interactions with others are safe. What is clear, however, is that there will be a new normal, with some type of social distance and enhanced health and safety measures in place to protect us all. This may very well impact on the way that community-based projects are carried out. We are open to, and will welcome, innovative new ideas and suggestions as to how such projects can operate successfully in our new reality. We will provide further advice and guidance as and when that information becomes available.



Climate action

The importance of community-led climate action

Throughout the UK, thousands of community groups have already developed practical and inspiring examples of how to tackle climate change, from waste food cafes, to repair shops, to ambitious community energy schemes. These are powerful projects that help to connect and empower people, bring unlikely partnerships to life, and help to normalise sustainable behaviour as part of everyday life. To read more about the people and projects who are helping make a zero-carbon Britain, visit the [website of the Centre for Alternative Technology](#).

Community groups are grounded in and connected to their local area and often able to overcome the institutional, structural or cultural constraints that bigger organisations can encounter. With lived experience of big societal challenges, community groups more often than not have the most suitable and most innovative ideas for their areas. To read more about communities coming together in Europe to combat climate change, visit the [ECOLISE Status Report on Community-led Action from 2019](#).

Community-led action on climate change often offers unexpected benefits, way beyond a simple reduction in carbon emissions and a better, cleaner, greener environment. These are known as co-benefits, and can include such elements as improving community cohesion and, physical and mental health, reducing isolation and loneliness, helping people save money, creating new employment opportunities and developing the local economy. Overall, community climate action has the potential to enable innovative and systemic change and is a critical part of the move towards a net-zero carbon society.

Join the collective

ECOLISE, a Europe-wide network of community-led sustainability and climate action groups, has 43 members in 21 European countries. The Transition Network has over 600 local initiatives across Europe, while there are around 130 Ecovillages in Europe, and thousands of permaculture projects. Furthermore, initiatives such as the Northern Ireland Best Kept Awards, Tidy Towns, The Scottish Climate Challenge Fund, One Planet One Wales, Communities Living Sustainably and Low Carbon Communities (to name a few) have all helped to establish and support hundreds of communities across the UK to adopt multilayered action in a bid to curb the climate crisis and live in a more sustainable and fairer society.

How to make a difference - what we know

There is currently a huge amount of climate action being undertaken right around the globe, involving all sectors of the community - from school children to activists, employees in their workplace to retirees and dedicated volunteers in the field. You can get a flavour of how the global effort to rise to this challenge is shaping up [here](#), brought together by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and [here](#) at the Climate Action Tracker website.

While it is inevitable that some activities will enable more carbon savings than others, some projects (such as food growing or repurposing waste, for example) may be important starting points to initially engage your community, and provide a base that you can then build upon to bring in other potential opportunities for greater carbon savings. The Transition Movement, Ecovillages, Permaculture and Low Carbon Communities are good examples of an integrated approach to climate action, with a variety of projects to interest a diverse population. For some other inspiring, ambitious, big ideas for climate action that might be possible in the future, click [here](#).

It's important not to get too hung up on calculations of potential carbon-emission savings, especially at the start of your project. As we demonstrate below, the co-benefits of taking climate action – such as energy efficiency, food growing or, circular economy projects such as clothes swapping – are important too. It might not be possible to accurately measure the total greenhouse gas savings from your project in the first instance; instead it's useful to map out the range of positive impacts of undertaking your project. For example, it's relatively straightforward to calculate the potential future energy (and hence carbon) savings from installing insulation in domestic properties, but much more difficult to get a grip on the potential carbon saved from a community food-growing initiative before you start. This should not deter you, as the co-benefits to such a project – wellbeing, physical health improvements, food-poverty alleviation and reduction in isolation for the volunteers are valuable outcomes too. Calculations on the reduction of food miles, and packaging, will evolve as the project progresses.



“I enjoy being part of the community of beach cleaners across the globe and I enjoy being able to make a small but consistent difference to the places I love and which I call home.”

Jo, The 2 Minute Foundation

The co-benefits of climate action

Taking action on climate change can also reap benefits for your community beyond the environmental impact. It can help improve:

- 1 community cohesion and reduce loneliness** by connecting people around a common goal, organising meetings, and building supportive networks.
- 2 health and wellbeing** as a result of improved air quality through reduced use of combustion engine vehicles, increased activity through people walking or cycling more, and reduced fuel poverty, from more energy-efficient homes.
- 3 equity and social inclusion** through focussing on the most vulnerable in society, such as action to alleviate fuel poverty. Investing in initiatives to reduce carbon emissions can also create a wealth of economic opportunities and jobs in the low-carbon economy. You can read more about this in a report by [The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate](#).
- 4 the resilience of places and their communities** to future changes in energy prices, as well as to the impacts of climate change.

Examples of multiple co-benefits of climate action (Figure by Ashden)

| Action | Carbon | Health | Economy | Equity | Resilience |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Insulating homes | Cuts energy demand and cuts carbon emissions | Reduces fuel poverty as people stay warmer | Creates jobs for local people People save money on energy bills | Increased access to affordable warmth | Households are better placed to withstand future energy prices |
| Car sharing | Reduced fuel consumption cuts carbon emissions | Improves air quality. Improved wellbeing through social interaction | Saves money on petrol Reduced congestion | Brings people together; can reduce isolation and loneliness | Resilience to future increases in fuel costs |
| Cycling | Reduced fuel consumption cuts carbon emissions | Improves air quality Increased activity increases health | Saves money on petrol Reduced congestion | Increased connections to local community through cycling initiatives | Resilience to future increases in fuel costs |

To read more about climate action co-benefits visit the [Ashden website](#).



Your climate action project

How to set up your project

So, you are inspired to take action on climate change, and want to engage your community in it, but are not sure the next steps. This section will help you in the initial planning and set-up of your project.

The term community group is a broad, catch-all term that covers a diverse range of projects, initiatives and organisations. It can be a geographically close-knit group of people, or it can be purely online in nature, with participants never meeting in real life. It could be demographically uniform in make-up, an older-aged day-care centre, for example, or include different age groups, as in a community choir. Socio-economic factors play a part too; and there is benefit in getting culturally diverse groups together to work on a common cause. One size definitely does not fit all – this is why it's so important that the community itself, whatever form it takes, shapes projects that work for its members. However, there are some essential, common factors that can help develop a great idea into an impactful project.

Develop a plan

- Develop a plan of action to help form a common understanding of the overall vision for your community project, and to help explore the opportunities and barriers to success.
- Think about how you can measure the difference your community project will make. Developing a baseline before you start will be invaluable in helping measure the positive effects you will achieve.
- Delegate individuals, groups or organisations to lead particular tasks depending on their skillsets, experience, preferences and natural abilities.
- Think about the activities and changes you can make that will help make sustainable behaviours the norm.

Be aware of diversity and inclusivity

- Many community groups encounter challenges around diversity. Broadening the reach of a project so that it is inclusive and reflects the mix of people in your local community is very important, but it takes effort and time to bring about.
- From the start of your project it is important to reach out, engage and make the most of the strengths and passions of your whole community. There is much richness and hidden talent in your wider community, so don't be afraid to leave your comfort zone and talk to people who would not be the most obvious people for inclusion in your community group.
- Where possible, make your project and the work it undertakes relevant to people with different backgrounds, ages and economic situations, ensuring equality and diversity.

Share your story

- Find a space and time to meet regularly and stick to it - in real life or virtually - and share stories about your work, the successes and the failures.
- Network: connect yourselves with existing organisations that are already doing work in this space; get other established groups to join your group (eg school groups, sports groups).
- Look at top tips for framing and messaging from organisations like [Climate Outreach](#).

Build good partnerships

- Good partnerships can offer different specialisms and capabilities, improve and widen the capacity of your project. They can be essential to success. Look at groups you can join forces with and the initiatives your local authority runs, and check whether they are using the right tools (eg the [Ashden tool kit](#) for councils). Look to see if there are local businesses that are active on the issues you care about. Partnerships can enable you to access resources and people and create sustained change as well as amplifying your message.

Remember the big picture

- Every effort makes a difference, big or small, and always keep in mind that your community's work is a vital part of a bigger picture of action to tackle climate change across the UK. Slowing and reducing climate change is going to take a huge team effort and whether you're shaping your project or telling stories about its impact, it's making a difference. Every tonne of carbon saved today will have benefits for future generations.

Diversify your funding

- Try not to rely on a single source of funding. Think of innovative and diverse ways to get the support you need. It does not always need to be in the form of a financial contribution.

Create local leaders

- Find natural, local leaders who are already well networked and respected within the community and have the passion (and time) to drive things forward.
- At the same time, develop resilience in your project by trying not to make the success of your project dependent on the energies of just one or two people.

Start small, think big

- A climate initiative doesn't have to solve every problem – you can focus on making progress in a particular area. Some of the most successful initiatives started off small and with a single focus, and have grown into larger, multilayered and more impactful projects through time.

Think outside the box

- There are often simple activities the community can undertake to help make a big difference. For example, is your group using a green energy tariff? Also, think about where to invest your money, perhaps you should switch your current account(s) to an institution with a stronger sense of environmental responsibility and encourage your wider community to do the same.

Build in health, wellbeing and improved community cohesion

- Climate action will be the main focus of your project but, as this report shows, a good local climate project can help your community in a variety of ways. Think about how your project can improve the lives of local people, and the strength of your community. Understanding this can help you build support for your project and maximise its impact.

Don't rush, patience is its own reward

- Climate change is an urgent issue, but progress doesn't always come overnight and the road to positive change is rarely straight. Be patient, take the time to think your project through, and be open to opportunities during the life of your project.

Make it rewarding

- For real success, people need to enjoy what they are doing. That is one of the ways to ensure long-lasting impact. Remember that other communities are working on this too – your effort is important in itself and part of something much bigger.
- Talk to others in the climate action movement for support, feedback, ideas and advice.



Rhubarb Farm

Telling your story well

Telling a compelling story about your project is a great way to increase support for it across your community and beyond. And of course a coherent, well-thought-out narrative with quantified results strengthens the case to receive further funding to continue your work. Good stories engage, explain, move and motivate people. They can bring alive the value your project adds to your community, your partners, and the wider world.

Climate change can be a complicated subject to explain, but there are plenty of online resources to help you think about how to tell your project's story in an impactful, creative way. Perhaps you could start by checking out resources developed by [Climate Outreach](#) or the [Overseas Development Institute](#).

Alongside these resources, we've developed a five-point plan to help you when you're developing communications about your project.

- 1 Know your audience**
Work out who you are trying to tell your story to. Whether you are communicating to your community, your partner organisations, your local authority, or your funder, it's good to be clear about who you want to hear your story, so that you can shape your message in a way that you know will work for them.
- 2 Make it relatable**
Once you have identified your audience, use language and examples that are relevant to them. That could be the theme your project relates to, some specific issues or challenges that are relevant for your community, an initiative your project complements, or funding criteria. Messages that are relevant to your audience's interests and context can be more impactful.
- 3 Stick to what you know**
Climate change is a complicated subject and covers many themes. Seeing your project as part of the big picture is really important because, alongside other complementary projects, it is part of a bigger change. But remember that your project is focussed on making progress in specific areas – when you're telling your stories remember to focus on those specifics to help your audience understand the tangible difference you have made.
- 4 Use images and visuals**
Images can help bring stories about your project to life – they are often more effective than technical graphs and can capture concepts such as sea-level rise. The same is true for community projects focussed on anything from energy to food. Climate Outreach's [Climate Visuals](#) project is a good starting point.
- 5 Be positive**
Your project inspires action and positive change in your community that wouldn't exist without your work. Celebrate the successes and show that, by working together in community projects, normal people have the power and agency to tackle climate change. Your story of positive change can inspire other communities, and that will make a real difference.

Disclaimer

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