

OUR PLACE, OUR PLANET

Helping communities become
champions of climate action





“ Communities know the places they live in, what they need and often have huge untapped assets of ingenuity, commitment, creativity and passion. They have a vital role to play in making local areas more physically and economically resilient to meet any challenges they face.”

DAVE FACEY, COMMUNITIES TEAM LEADER, DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT



*Communities Living Sustainably
locations around England*

1. Introduction

Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) was a £12 million, five year programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Twelve communities in England received funding to help deal with the potential impact of climate change and to build the sustainability and resilience of their local area. They aimed to provide inspiration to other communities and to share what they had learned.

This report celebrates the achievements of the projects and presents some of the key lessons learned for the benefit of community groups carrying out similar activities and for local authorities, funders and other stakeholders in a position to support their efforts.

Alison is unemployed and cares for her son, who is on the autistic spectrum. She struggles financially and regularly uses a food bank. Alison received an energy monitor and took over a small allotment plot with the support of Green Prosperity.

“ I’ve got my energy bills down... I was paying £72 and I am now paying £68 a month, that’s just watching what uses the most energy... Because my budget is zero, I wouldn’t have managed without the fact that the allotment is free, and I was given seeds, otherwise there would have been nothing... and I’ve grown a lot of tomatoes, which helps my son’s nutrition.

ALISON, GREEN PROSPERITY

Each project has been led by a local anchor organisation embedded in each community and acting as accountable body for funding and partnership management, ensuring the right expertise is available to meet target outcomes.

The Big Lottery Fund was clear from the outset that CLS was a ‘learning programme’, an opportunity to test different approaches to supporting behaviour change in disadvantaged communities in order to shape its future funding strategy.

In order to achieve this, a Learning Partnership of five organisations with expertise in tackling climate change and promoting behaviour change was brought together to encourage and support the funded communities and to share lessons learned from their projects. The partnership comprised Groundwork UK, the Energy Saving Trust, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, the New Economics Foundation and the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

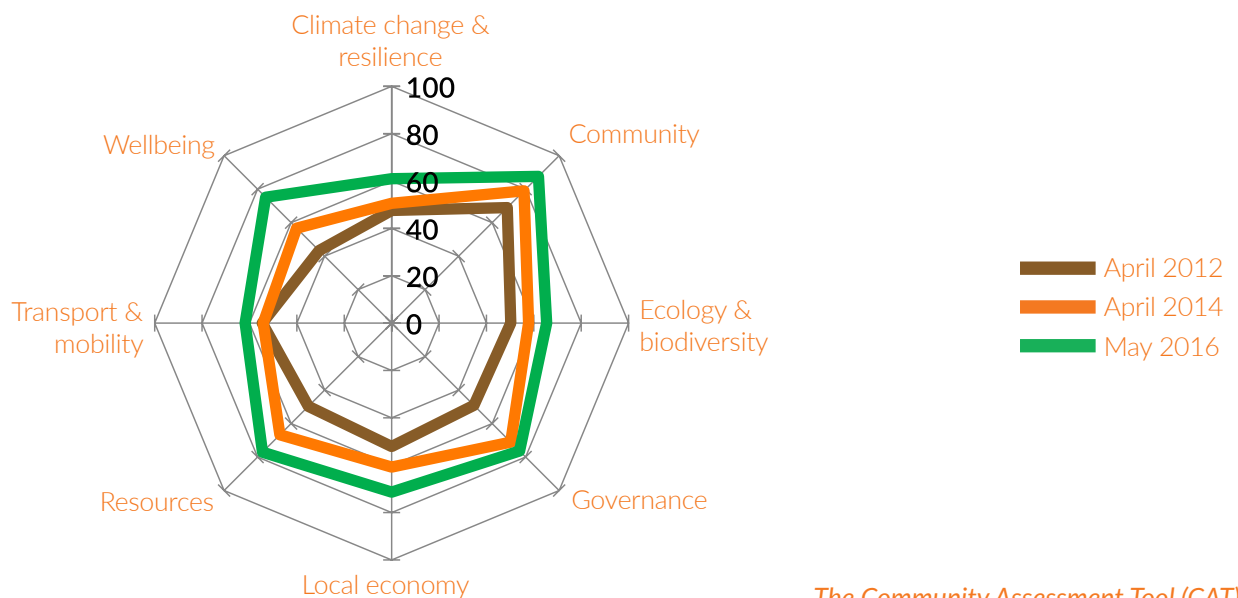
In addition, a learning network bringing together professional ‘enablers’ attached to the Learning Partnership and key contacts in each community was established to encourage peer to peer learning, to improve understanding about how communities can successfully live and work in a sustainable way and to provide information to inform and influence policy and practice both within the CLS programme and within the wider sustainability arena.

CLS was not a pilot or a prototype and will not be replicated. It was designed to be a test-bed for a range of activities and interventions aimed at using collective action to stimulate individual change. It tested the premise that a focus on sustainability and resilience could bring about positive change in people’s quality of life now and lay the foundations for helping local areas cope better with climate impacts in the future. The learning generated along the way is being shared widely so that other communities might take up the challenge and other funders and stakeholders might support them more effectively. ■■

2. What's changed?

Project impact locally

The projects funded through CLS were chosen specifically to reflect a broad spread of geography and focus. Projects were located in urban, rural and coastal areas and operated at a mix of scales – from a neighbourhood through to a whole town. Although all the projects aimed to introduce communities to a wide range of sustainability-related behaviours, some focused in on specific topics such as local food growing or flooding.



The Community Assessment Tool (CAT)

Given this diversity, the challenge of capturing and analysing an overall picture of the change brought about by the projects has been significant. The Community Assessment Tool (CAT) was developed in order to enable local projects, the Learning Partnership and Big Lottery Fund to assess the degree to which those involved considered their local area to be more sustainable and resilient as a result of project interventions. The tool used eight recognised indicators of sustainability and was scored on the basis of risk – to what degree the local area is aware of and actively mitigating the risks attached to each area.

Each CLS project completed the tool at three points during the programme - a baseline reading in 2012, a mid-point reading in 2014, and a final reading in spring 2016. Sessions were facilitated by the Learning Partnership and those participating (a mix of project leads, partners and community members) were encouraged to think about the empirical data that could be produced to evidence their perceptions.

Cumulative CAT scores from the 12 projects demonstrate that participants felt progress had been made across all eight areas of sustainability. Wellbeing – the area with the lowest baseline

PROJECT PROFILES



CLS IN DORSET

Communities Living Sustainably in Dorset ran for three years, focussing on Bridport, Dorchester and the surrounding areas. Activities addressed the realities of rural, coastal life and the threats and opportunities arising from climate change and sustainability.

The project held a large number of events to engage members of the public, including talks, films and arts events and used innovative techniques for raising awareness, such as the arts, games, giant displays and pedal-powered appliances.

Solar panels were installed at 14 village halls and schools, providing free green electricity for the next 20 years.

An umbrella campaign was created for changing the food system in Bridport. This brought together diverse actors from the food sector around joint initiatives such as the Bridport Food Charter and the Local Food Map, stimulating demand for locally produced food.

New community groups were established to manage woodlands and existing ones were strengthened. Community woodlands in Dorset are now managed more effectively and engaging more volunteers.

The project gave intensive Eco-Schools support and coaching to 12 schools, getting them ready to achieve Green Flag status.

CLS in Dorset's holistic way of working has engendered support and solidarity among individuals involved in various initiatives such as Eco-Schools, eco-homes and community woodlands and a range of local organisations have been strengthened by these associations.

www.clsdorset.org.uk

SUSTAIN EDEN PROVIDED LOCAL COMMUNITIES WITH AFFORDABLE, APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS TO USE ENERGY MORE EFFICIENTLY AND REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF FUEL POVERTY. AT LEAST 435 FUEL POOR HOUSEHOLDS WERE ASSISTED TO SAVE MONEY ON FUEL BILLS.

SUSTAIN EDEN

Sustain Eden was a three year project to help the communities of Eden, Cumbria to become more sustainable, addressing challenges such as rural isolation and confronting the realities of climate change head-on in responding to extreme weather events.

Sustain Eden provided local communities with affordable, appropriate solutions to use energy more efficiently and reduce the incidence of fuel poverty. At least 435 fuel poor households were assisted to save money on fuel bills.

The project set up two community transport schemes, including the Alston Moor community bus service. Seven electric bikes are now available from four hire points.

Seven renewable energy schemes were supported to move forward, including an investment of £566,000 raised through Community Energy Cumbria share issues.

The project worked with six isolated and vulnerable communities to better prepare for the impacts of extreme weather. 12 voluntary organisations established emergency plans and 146 people have been trained to deliver them.

Two community woodlands were established, 300 trees were planted and the project involved over 600 individual school pupils in workshops and practical activities to better understand the role of trees in climate management.

The relationships forged through Sustain Eden have played an important role in shaping and strengthening the ability of partners to influence sustainability policies and actions at a strategic level.

www.cafs.org.uk/projects/sustaineden/

GREEN PROSPERITY STAGED THE INITIAL HULL HARVEST FESTIVAL - 'FEEDING THE CITY'. OVER 500 PEOPLE CAME TO SHARE FOOD, INSPIRING PEOPLE TO COOK FROM FRESH LOCAL INGREDIENTS, AND TO GROW FOOD THEMSELVES. THIS IS NOW AN ANNUAL EVENT.



GREEN PROSPERITY

Green Prosperity was a three year project working within two deprived wards in east Hull: Southcoates East and Longhill. The project built more prosperous and coherent communities, using sustainable living as the catalyst for improving the quality of life of local residents.

Green Prosperity stimulated a range of community food growing activities including establishing a volunteer community garden at East Hull Community Farm and Seed Swap sessions at schools. A group of volunteers now help on the community garden and allotments.

The project has supported volunteers to attend horticulture courses at Hull College. In addition to facilitating and paying for attendance, the project also allowed the course attendants the opportunity to practice new skills at the community garden.

The family growing project Grow it, Eat it, Love it - at Home! provided ongoing support to 10 families from Longhill and Southcoates East to grow their own food, supported by staff and existing volunteers as mentors.

The project staged the initial Hull Harvest Festival - 'Feeding the City'. Over 500 people came to share food, inspiring people to cook from fresh local ingredients, and to grow food themselves. This is now an annual event.

Energy monitors were provided to 500 local households who were also given information on tariffs and other forms of support and assistance.

In total Green Prosperity worked with over 600 local residents delivering real impact in communities affected by a range of social and environmental challenges.

www.emsyorkshire.co.uk/services/green-prosperity/

SUSTAINABLE HARBOROUGH

Sustainable Harborough is a five-year project working across the town of Market Harborough in Leicestershire. It has used the sense of pride and identity in the town to encourage behaviour change and improve resilience to climate change.

The project set up Harborough Energy, a co-operative venture to drive investment in affordable renewable energy projects. This has raised money through community share issues to complete two solar installations that are benefiting the town.

Sustainable Harborough is working with a range of partners to establish a Local Food & Drink brand for the town and developed a map of retailers that grow, rear or produce their food locally.

edible16 was set up as an online click and collect shopping service for local food in the district. Food from local producers is advertised on the website and consumers place orders directly online either for collection or delivery.

In collaboration with Waterloo Cottage Farm, local volunteers have created a new community garden complete with raised beds, compost bays, fruit patches and a polytunnel and are now growing vegetables.

The project runs the Efficiency Network, a free quarterly networking meeting for companies of all sizes from north Northamptonshire and south Leicestershire. It allows businesses to meet up, share expertise and to access assistance to make more of their resources and save money

The project was a brand new initiative for Market Harborough and intends to have a life beyond its funding period.

www.sustainableharborough.co.uk

score – has seen the most dramatic change, increasing by over 30 points from the baseline reading. This is likely to be attributable to the significant emphasis placed by many of the projects on food growing and physical activity, but also the well-established links between environmental activities and mental health. The area recording the highest final reading (87%) was Community, reflecting the locally embedded, neighbourhood-based projects that have characterised the programme and the significant reach of these activities in terms of both open access community events and targeted interventions such as home visits. The large increase in the Governance and Resources score suggests that project participants believe communities now feel more in control of local assets.

Whilst there are clearly caveats to the robustness of the measurement tool, the workshop-based approach used to generate the scores helped both local projects and the Learning Partnership to assess progress, reflect achievements and explore further development of activities. The following sections provide some headlines of the issues explored through the learning process and the progress local projects have made in improving the sustainability of their local areas.

Climate change and resilience

The past five years have seen resilience to climate change develop from a theoretical issue to a practical one in many places, with severe floods affecting CLS projects and the communities they support in places such as Greater Manchester and Cumbria. The threat of extreme weather events has forced many local authorities to take action and many more places now have emergency resilience plans in place.

For the projects most directly vulnerable to climate impacts, this has been an integral piece of work. Projects have worked to embed the knowledge and resources needed to withstand the impacts of climate change over time, and to mitigate their effects through physical improvements. Together the 12 projects have

reached in the region of 5,600 people likely to be particularly vulnerable to climate impacts.

Sustainable Sheppey, delivering on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, involved hundreds of people in the development of a 45-point action plan which has now been adopted by the community, and Sustain Eden, in Cumbria, worked with a total of 17 community and voluntary organisations to put emergency plans in place.

The Irwell Valley Sustainable Communities project in Salford, Greater Manchester, identified over 100 vulnerable residents who will now be supported by trained community volunteers on the implementation of emergency flood plans. The project engaged with both Salford City Council and the Environment Agency to identify ways of improving the effectiveness of the flood basin, in the process establishing a new urban wetland. Local schools were involved in the planning process and have also used the opportunity to grow plants for transfer into school ponds. It is envisaged that the wetlands will become a visitor destination in its own right in the near future - a place of natural beauty, learning, wellbeing and recreation that simultaneously increases the resilience of the area to future flooding.

All CLS projects embedded climate change messages into their activity. In London, Manor House PACT's Closer Neighbours programme used peer support to increase awareness of climate change, and One Planet Middlesbrough ran the Carbon Fast, a 40-day series of activities designed to promote behaviour change that ran through the Lent period. A key strength of the programme was the opportunity to demonstrate the links between different topics under the banner of CLS. Through strengthening community cohesion, projects have improved the resilience of these communities by enabling people to get to know each other and build strong social links. This means that when an emergency happens, as it did in Irwell Valley, the community is better placed to respond swiftly and collectively. In Eden, Irwell Valley and Sheppey there are now action plans in place that have ongoing maintenance and input from the wider community, with a wider group



Greening Wingrove's 'Green Clean Team', boosting local community pride

of stakeholders committed to maintaining and continuing this work.

In addition to upskilling communities and embedding action plans, CLS projects will continue to mitigate the effects of climate change in the longer-term through positive physical improvements. Across the projects hundreds of trees have been planted which will mitigate negative impacts as they mature, and the legacy of Irwell Valley's input into the wetlands flood basin will be felt for decades to come.

Community

A key tenet of CLS was that projects should be aimed at nurturing collective action on climate change in communities that were vulnerable to climate impacts, but that also experienced wider social and economic disadvantage.

The projects went on to demonstrate many positive examples of community development and highlighted the strength of civic pride within the areas targeted.

Collectively CLS has reached well over 60,000 people, increasing their awareness about sustainability and bringing them together through a wide range of initiatives. Community engagement and cohesion has been at the heart of all 12 projects and a number of common themes have emerged. Many CLS projects have supported existing community venues and businesses, helping them to be more energy efficient and facilitating communication and collaboration between them. In Newcastle, Greening Wingrove's Green Centre project developed into a dispersed model offering green technology and insulation at existing community centres. The project's Community Innovation Fund put funds directly in the control of local people so that they can address issues for themselves on a neighbourhood level. Proving that the North East is a hotbed of civic action, One Planet Middlesbrough worked closely with a network of community hubs and venues providing a new focus for group activities and extending participation in CLS more widely across the town.

Many projects have been able to break down barriers within the local community and involve groups often referred to as marginalised or 'hard to reach'. One Planet Middlesbrough have specifically worked with BAME and migrant communities in the area, while Sustainable Sheppey achieved success engaging people with mental health issues and disabilities in their community allotments.

Creating growing spaces has been one of the most popular and effective ways for CLS projects to bring the community together and, across the programme, there has been an explosion of community allotments, 'meanwhile gardens' and community farms. A number of these community growing spaces are continuing to flourish, led by self-organising voluntary groups.

There are many assets that have been established through CLS that will continue after the end of the programme, such as Greening Wingrove's Bike Garden, which is a vibrant community space developed on the site of a previous bowling green in Nuns Moor Park, which now serves the community as a place to join in on regular food growing activities, to hire for private and public events, and much more. Community events and festivals first funded through CLS are now being repeated and have become regular fixtures in the local calendar such as the Hidden River Festival in Manor House, London and the Harvest Festival in Hull.

Most projects reflect that this vibrant array of community-led activity is set against a backdrop of vanishing community services and infrastructure. In particular, projects have noted the significant reduction in contacts and capacity within local authorities over the five-year life of the programme. The impact of spending reductions has varied across the regions and, in some areas has been exacerbated by other policy changes which have made it harder to establish viable community ventures, such as the changes to feed-in tariffs for community energy projects.

The projects have demonstrated beyond doubt that positive community change can be achieved through inclusive and collaborative partnership working. Projects have also found that complex

problems in communities need a coordinated response rather than single-issue solutions. It is the ability to bring different groups and interests together that has characterised the success of the CLS programme and that has been of greatest value to those in communities who most need help.

Ecology and biodiversity

Growing and nature-based activities were numerous in CLS and many of these included provision for wildlife as well as community benefit. Examples of projects positively impacting on the ecology and biodiversity of local areas include Irwell Valley's development of the Lower Kersal wetlands in Salford, which has been improved by planting new trees and by engaging local people in river and pond clean-ups, improving habitats for water voles and other animals.

Elsewhere in Greater Manchester the Real Food Wythenshawe project created many new natural habitats by establishing green corridors across urban areas. A similar approach was taken in Market Harborough where wildflower planting helped increase habitats for bees through the Buzzing Borders project. Water voles were the focus of attention in Middlesbrough where a strand of the programme focused on improving water habitats.

As well as improving wildlife habitats projects set about creating new and more accessible green spaces for communities. 100 new gardens were created in Wingrove while in Sheppey derelict land has been turned into allotments and a community wildlife garden which won a Wildlife Trust silver award. In Dorset 700 trees have been planted as part of a major drive to support local community woodlands.

Sites that have been improved and developed will continue to enhance the biodiversity and sustainability of the areas for many years to come, with new beehives installed, trees planted and seeds sown. CLS in Dorset's involvement with Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has led to many more people being educated in the value of the green spaces on their doorstep

Jocelyn is a single mother living in a flat in Hackney. She received a home visit from Manor House PACT as she was concerned about her high electricity bills. During the visit, the home energy assessor discovered that the reason for her high bills was that she had no central heating and was using electric room heaters to keep warm.

“ I am so happy now because after the first visit the council came to my home and arranged a grant for me to have a new boiler and radiators. I'm very thankful as it has made a big difference for me.

JOCELYN, MANOR HOUSE PACT

and – through the project's Square Meal Debate - has ignited a process to develop an integrated food and farming policy that embraces health and wildlife.

Governance

One of the questions CLS set out to explore was how communities could be supported to get more involved in the management of services and assets to improve the resilience and sustainability of their areas. Over the life of the programme this question became more pressing to answer as it became clearer that local authorities were having to step back from some functions due to budget cuts.

CLS projects have been directly involved in establishing and supporting scores of community groups and other structures that enable residents to have more say over how their neighbourhoods are run. Approximately 11,000 people have been supported in this manner, including community woodland groups set up by CLS in Dorset and Sustain Eden and community gardening projects established by L8 Living Sustainably in Liverpool and Sustainable Sunderland.

For many CLS projects a positive relationship with the local authority has been crucial to testing new forms of community ownership and projects have been able to act as conduits to help local residents inform and influence local decision-making. The work of the One Planet Middlesbrough project has helped to ensure that sustainability is incorporated directly into the new mayor's agenda through the adoption of the One Planet Living framework.

Community energy projects are one of the most effective ways of putting power literally in the hands of the community, and both Sustainable Harborough (in Market Harborough, Leicestershire) and CLS in Dorset worked to bring the many benefits of controlling energy production to local groups. The approach has proven incredibly popular with Dorset Community Energy's second community share offer raising £352,000 in less than three weeks.

Leaving behind new sustainable community structures to continue project activity is one of the most powerful elements of the CLS legacy. Thanks to Sustainable Sheppey, a dedicated Allotments Group, Community Energy Trust and Sheppey Environment Forum are all now representing community interests and providing opportunities to influence local decisions through dialogue with the local authority.

Local economies

Supporting small businesses and stimulating new economic activity within local areas has been a common theme throughout CLS. A particular focus for a number of projects has been the local food economy, while others have looked at improving the skills and employability of local people so that they are better able to connect with emerging economic opportunities.

CLS in Dorset and Sustainable Harborough both produced local food maps promoting small independent producers and retailers in the local area with Sustainable Harborough going one step further by establishing edibLE16, an online hub taking local produce directly to

market. One Planet Middlesbrough focused on developing a stronger local strategy around local food procurement, establishing the Growing Middlesbrough network which has supported a range of new business ventures.

In Market Harborough confidence is high that the vibrant local food network in the area will become an integral part of the local economy and the project has engaged the local tourism board in supporting the local food map through branding and sponsorship opportunities. Plans for the future including growing the food tourism industry with more events, paid staff and a high profile brand. There is a similar legacy being developed in Dorset where Food Future Bridport is now an established partnership, start-ups are high and there is growth in small and micro businesses.

In Manchester, Real Food Wythenshawe took a fun approach to inspiring young people to learn by engaging them in bushcraft and foraging sessions. Elsewhere L8 Living Sustainably provided training in how to refurbish white goods and upcycle furniture as a way of providing transferable skills and preparing participants for self-employment. Across CLS more than 6,000 people – many with significant barriers to employment – have had opportunities to prepare for work in the local green economy.

Natural resources

At its most basic, sustainability and resilience is concerned with the natural assets that can be drawn on by a community in order to function effectively: energy, water, land and food. Understanding how we change behaviours to minimise waste and maximise resource efficiency has been a primary concern of projects. Collectively CLS has educated and encouraged nearly 10,000 people to make greener choices in their homes or workplaces, ranging from reducing utility bills to changing patterns of consumption.

Nearly all CLS projects carried out some work around domestic energy efficiency. Most notable has been Green Prosperity's installation of 500 energy meters in the Longhill, Southcoates East and Marfleet areas of Hull, generating average

savings of £200 per annum per household. Manor House PACT deployed home visits by expert Green Doctors to help residents make simple changes to their home and connect with wider sources of help – a programme which will continue through other funding streams. Greening Wingrove also gave people the means to control their energy usage through low-cost interventions such as reflective radiator foil.

Whilst water efficiency is not yet getting the same level of attention as energy efficiency, increasing water shortages in some parts of the country and the introduction of metering by water companies mean that the issue is rising up the agenda. A number of CLS projects have introduced the issue into their programmes of work, either through education and advice campaigns or through the introduction of practical measures. For example, Real Food Wythenshawe identified opportunities for water saving through 'grey water' recycling systems.

Recycling and composting were commonplace in most CLS projects. Reclaimed wood was used in Hull to create raised beds and bat boxes which are now in use across the local area. Sustainable Harborough, meanwhile, is formulating an ambitious plan to link up with a gasification plant to power the local community - collecting food waste from one business, converting it to oil and then powering another business, a first for a community owned project in the UK and a powerful example of the circular economy.

Underpinning much of the activity within CLS has been learning how to get maximum environmental and community value out of the limited land resources available to communities. Growing activity has been a significant part of many projects, for example with L8 Living Sustainably reclaiming land for food production through their Patchwork Urban Farm and in Sheppey, parish councils driving commercial food growing on the island through mechanisms such as neighbourhood plans.

Real Food Wythenshawe focused on improving the availability of local food through free tasters and their new UnitE venture, a food storage warehouse distributing to food banks across



Wheely Tots, developed by Manor House PACT, aims to increase cycling confidence among families

Wythenshawe. Demonstrating that every scrap of land can be productive, the project even established an 'edible interchange', growing fresh fruit and vegetables for local people at the main transport hub in the area.

Cementing these changes means ensuring behaviours are sustained in the longer term. Green Prosperity's seed swap and Harvest Festival now have a life of their own, using food produced on local allotments as the centre-piece of events bringing the wider community together.

Transport and mobility

Although transport has not been a primary focus for any of the projects funded through CLS, the ease with which people can get to where they need to go sustainably - through public transport, cycle networks and walking routes has had a significant bearing on how local initiatives have been designed.

One Planet Middlesbrough, which took a whole town approach to supporting sustainability, was able to feed into new transport plans for the town and, working with partners, helped promote the concept of walkable neighbourhoods. Greening Wingrove's Wellbeing Walks engaged community groups in mapping activity in their area while L8 Living Sustainably organised Walk the Ward and Loving Lodge Lane to encourage

people to get out and about and appreciate points of local interest.

Increasing cycling confidence among families was the focus of the Wheely Tots project developed by Manor House PACT, which has now been developed into a standalone social enterprise. Meanwhile, the Bike Garden hosts gentle group bike rides, encouraging adults to cycle more and build their confidence. These are led by a trained ride leader and last about an hour and a half. There is also the opportunity for more confident riders to train as ride leaders so the group can become self-led and sustainable into the future.

Whilst CLS has stimulated a varied and vibrant range of activities to increase awareness and action in terms of sustainable travel, project leads point out that lasting change is dependent on ensuring more communities have better access to infrastructure – from public transport routes to cycle paths – which in turn means strategic prioritisation and investment by local authorities.

Wellbeing

CLS projects have been operating against a backdrop of significant cuts in many of the local services that aim to keep people well, either directly (such as mental health support and drug or alcohol counselling) or indirectly (such as leisure centres and parks). Given the focus of the

PROJECT PROFILES

ONE OF SUSTAINABLE SUNDERLAND'S LEGACIES IS A NETWORK OF URBAN GROWERS UNDER THE BANNER OF 'GROW SUNDERLAND' WHO ARE BUSY GROWING THEIR OWN AND CREATING MEANWHILE GARDENS TO MAKE USE OF EVERY AVAILABLE PIECE OF LAND



SUSTAINABLE SUNDERLAND

Sustainable Sunderland was a four-year project operating across four wards in Sunderland that have the highest levels of fuel poverty in the city – Hendon, Millfield, Pallion and Southwick. It had a focus on engaging marginalised groups, particularly people of colour.

The project delivered integrated advice and support to vulnerable older people, worked with social landlords to support residents' ideas for sustainable green projects and delivered Train the Trainer workshops to improve fuel efficiency in the wider community.

56 community-led entrepreneurs were supported to develop ideas and create green start-up businesses in the area. This has been supplemented by a volunteer strategy designed to give people skills and access to employment opportunities.

Sustainable Sunderland ran community workshops to discuss climate change impacts, including looking at the effects on global communities as a way of engaging a diverse local population.

Specially designed low carbon challenges were created with community awards for the most innovative ideas to be put into practice

One of the project's legacies is a network of urban growers under the banner of Grow Sunderland who are busy growing their own and creating meanwhile gardens to make use of every available piece of land.

The project brought together diverse partners within the city to work together in a way that had not been possible previously, relationships which are invaluable and will continue to be a focus for all those involved.

www.sustainablesunderland.org.uk

MANOR HOUSE PACT

Manor House PACT (Prepare, Adapt, Connect, Thrive) was a three-year project working in the Manor House area of North East London. It focused on supporting people living complex and sometimes chaotic lives, exploring how to deliver social outcomes while building the resilience of the area to climate change.

The project established the Hidden River Festival, a free annual waterside festival providing a mix of live music, food stalls, art and fun. This connected the communities living alongside the New River, which runs through Hackney and Haringey.

Through PACT new opportunities were created for local people to grow food while others were inspired to eat more healthily through sessions on foraging. PACT meals brought the community together and also confronted the growing issue of food waste.

364 people enjoyed wildlife walks along the New River path and Finsbury Park. Family friendly walks took residents to areas they may not have visited before and helped foster new friendships.

The PACT project provided free energy saving advice and installed measures in 500 homes, encouraging householders to use less energy and improving the health of those living in cold, damp homes.

The partners worked with 286 volunteers and helped 141 people access free training to pursue careers in the green economy.

Manor House PACT has ensured that more local people, businesses and communities will be able to thrive by being prepared for changes to the climate and by connecting with each other in new and different ways.

www.mhdt.org.uk/pact



THE IRWELL VALLEY PROJECT WAS AN EXAMPLE OF CLS SPECIFICALLY TARGETING THOSE MOST VULNERABLE IN A COMMUNITY AND USING PEOPLE'S IMMEDIATE CONCERNS AS A PLATFORM FOR EXPLORING WIDER SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

SUSTAINABLE SHEPPEY

Sustainable Sheppey ran for three years on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. It raised awareness of the impact of climate change on the island, promoted renewable energy generation and energy efficiency and built resilience in a place that was vulnerable to climate impacts.

A 45-point action plan was developed for the island as part of Kent Coastal Communities. This was a large programme of engagement with residents envisaging Sheppey in 2150 and developing approaches to mitigating likely climate impacts.

Green Doctors – professional energy efficiency advisers - visited 1,900 properties, incorporating energy advice and water stress into their visits. They provided advice around water meters and fitted measures such as Hippo water savers and shower timers to turn commitments into action.

New community allotments were created with Standford Hill prison, allowing prisoners to enjoy the health benefits of work in the open air and providing specially designed areas for groups with mental health issues and disabilities.

Offenders also carried out accredited training and gained work experience in an oil and wood recycling initiative

The project established a new independent Community Energy Trust, providing a non-profit social enterprise structure to deliver energy projects and to share the benefits across the community.

Sustainable Sheppey engaged the whole community on the island in dealing with some pressing short term issues while planning a more sustainable long-term future.

To find out more contact Swale Borough Council:
www.swale.gov.uk

IRWELL VALLEY

Irwell Valley Sustainable Communities is a five-year project focused on the wards of Broughton, Irwell Riverside and Kersal in East Salford. The project's primary focus has been to support vulnerable people to increase their resilience to the impacts of flooding.

The CLS project became a focal point for flood resilience in the area, developing a community emergency plan and acting as a channel to encourage 7,000 people to subscribe to the Environment Agency flood helpline.

On Boxing Day 2015 the River Irwell burst its banks and the project mobilised a community response to limit the damage, receiving a United Nations disaster award for its efforts. The Irwell Valley project has had a significant influence on the design of the local flood basin, encouraging Salford City Council to convert 6.5 hectares of land adjacent to the river into wetland, which not only absorbs flood water but also provides a key habitat for birds and amphibians.

The project worked with schools, colleges and faith groups, including the prominent local Jewish community to promote carbon literacy, developing and designing a training programme and 'train-the-trainer' sessions to cascade messages more widely.

A number of community gardens have been set up by the project, including a specially designed dementia garden.

A programme of food courses was run to promote healthier lifestyles within the community leading to the production of a recipe book full of residents' own creations.

The Irwell Valley project was an example of CLS specifically targeting those most vulnerable in a community and using people's immediate concerns as a platform for exploring wider sustainability issues.

www.greenmyvalley.com

Brian returned to the UK after spending many years living in Spain. He had been diagnosed with bowel cancer and had undergone extensive surgery while in Spain but was struggling to recover. On his return to Wythenshawe, Brian decided to get more exercise and gave the allotment a try.

“ *The allotment is such a friendly place... Nobody minds if you're not feeling up to working on the plot, the group...know what you are going through on bad days. I have made good friends here and I generally feel healthier eating seasonal, good quality food.*

BRIAN, REAL FOOD WYTHENSHAWE

projects on working with the most vulnerable people in their communities, it's no surprise that many have explicitly made the link between collective resilience and individual wellbeing.

By their very nature, community projects generate significant gains in terms of social inclusion – bringing people together in a way that improves confidence and social networks and combats isolation and loneliness. The Community Living Rooms project delivered by Greening Wingrove has helped break down barriers and establish trust within neighbourhoods, forging friendships and networks that will outlive the programme with lasting benefit for the wellbeing of those involved. In a similar vein the work that has gone into identifying households vulnerable to flooding in the Irwell Valley means more people are likely to receive quicker and better support in emergency situations.

From the outset CLS was designed to support and sustain behaviour change and projects have had significant success in demonstrating the health benefits of adopting more environmentally sustainable lifestyle choices. There is a greater awareness of active lifestyles and eating better in areas such as Irwell Valley and Liverpool where food workshops and outdoor activities have given residents the information and inspiration to benefit from fresh air, exercise and good nutrition. There has been a focus on ensuring

vulnerable communities have better access to places that promote healthy choices, such as the many parks and green spaces that have been improved, but projects have also worked to reduce the impact of unhealthy places, such as the focus in Middlesbrough and Manor House PACT on reducing fuel poverty and tackling the blight of cold, damp homes.

From 'vertical veg growing' in Greening Wingrove to Green Prosperity's community allotments, from Irwell Valley's dementia garden to L8 Living Sustainably's Walking Wards, improved wellbeing can perhaps be seen as the greatest legacy of CLS. Empirical evidence of this changed behaviour can be found in the gym at the Freedom Centre, where Green Prosperity was based, which has reported significantly increased membership as a result of the project.

The strength of the partnerships built up through the CLS programme provides a strong base for developing more activities that enhance wellbeing, as organisations are better able to pool their limited resources and deliver services holistically. All of the projects have grappled with the challenge of engaging health commissioners in supporting their work and recognise the need to generate a stronger, evidence-based business case to compete for funds given tightening NHS budgets. ■■

3. What's new?

Tools and resources to support sustainability

CLS was devised explicitly as a learning programme with significant resources invested in identifying and sharing good practice, supporting peer to peer networking and providing projects with specialist support to test their assumptions and stretch their ambitions.

In order to draw out shared experiences and support the CLS groups, members of the national Learning Partnership led thematic work programmes designed to support effective practice, identify the need for new tools or guidance and share the learning from the programme with a wider group of specialist stakeholders and policymakers.

Four themes were chosen based on an assessment of the nature and focus of project delivery across the programme:

- Energy
- Resilience to climate change
- Growing and food
- Behaviour change

Energy

All but one of the CLS projects prioritised work related to energy, primarily focusing on fuel poverty, home energy efficiency and behaviour change advice but also, in some cases, the establishment of community renewables ventures. The Energy Saving Trust led a programme to investigate:

How projects were tackling fuel poverty and driving the uptake of domestic energy efficiency measures.

What approaches were most benefiting those most in need of support.

What metrics were being used by CLS projects to monitor and evaluate their impact.

What this data reveals about the effectiveness of different approaches to community-led energy efficiency.

The research concluded that:

Community groups have the potential to play a much more significant role in promoting energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty due to their ability to be creative and responsive in terms of messaging and communication and their access to variety of 'hard to reach' audiences and groups.

Home energy advice visits represent good value for money, enabling detailed interaction with vulnerable people which is more likely to result in impact than lighter touch techniques or 'one-to-many' awareness raising sessions.

Established support agencies can deliver this advice well as they have professional systems to ensure safe home visits, to provide consistent, reliable technical advice and to capture impact, but they benefit from the support of volunteers and community groups to help target their services on the most vulnerable.

Delivering energy efficiency advice through coordinated area-based approaches rather than focusing on individual eligible households is much more likely to deliver results as it helps 'normalise' the take-up of support and the installation of measures, it enables community organisations to play a bigger role and it encourages peer support.

There is a need for simple, easy to use yet robust monitoring techniques and metrics which can help more organisations demonstrate their impact and engage in energy industry schemes focused on supporting vulnerable customers.

A stable policy and funding environment is vital so that community groups can plan programmes of support and follow through on commitments made to residents - changing government programmes and priorities over the life of the CLS programme have undermined the attempts by some projects to deliver much needed support to vulnerable people.

Drawing on this research and the wider lessons learned from CLS projects, a Community Energy Efficiency Toolkit has been developed to help other communities take effective action. The toolkit - which contains resources on home energy advice visits, training and education and demonstration homes, has been shared widely across the community energy sector and with other stakeholders such as local authorities and energy suppliers. It is available from the Community Energy England website: <http://hub.communityenergyengland.org/resources/home-energy-efficiency>

Resilience

The work to build climate resilience in local communities - in particular among vulnerable residents - reflected the intention of CLS to support the delivery of both environmental and social outcomes. This work was prominent in areas which had recently been impacted by flooding - Irwell Valley in Greater Manchester and Sustain Eden in Cumbria - but was also factored into other project activities such as planting trees to combat the effect of urban heat islands and improving insulation so that homes have more effective temperature regulation.

On behalf of the Learning Partnership BRE carried out research to explore the impacts delivered and the challenges faced by CLS groups. They held stakeholder workshops to explore ways in which community groups could play a more active part in ensuring local areas are better able to adapt to a changing climate.

The research concluded that there was an important role for local voluntary organisations to play in gaining the trust of vulnerable members of the community and providing a more granular level of detail to feed into risk maps and climate scenarios developed by local authorities and bodies such as the Environment Agency. It was also concluded that community groups were an underutilised resource in ensuring that residents took simple, low-cost measures to protect property from damage.

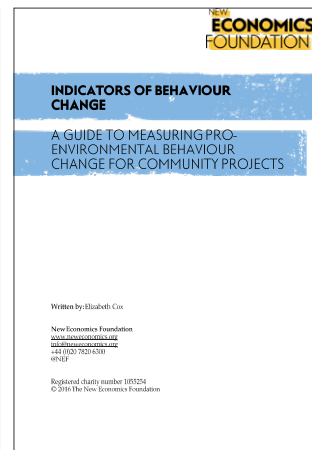
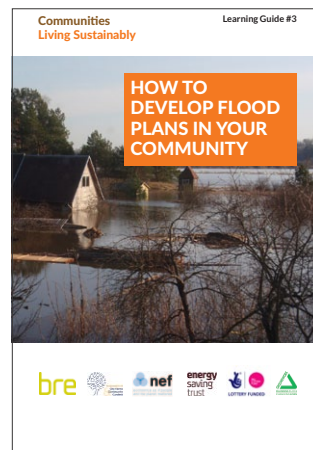
Building on this research BRE created an information directory for community groups interested in carrying out resilience work in their area. The directory provides a number of climate adaptation case studies and links to a number of tools to support practical implementation.

The directory is being promoted through the Centre4Resilience which undertakes research into a range of climatic and security threats and supports government agencies, private companies and the public in how to mitigate them.

www.centre4resilience.org/communities-living-sustainably

Growing and food

Growing and food projects were a big part of the CLS story, often proving to be excellent methods for helping communities take their first steps in collective environmental action. Growing activity was used by some projects to deliver significant social outcomes, for example helping ex-offenders rehabilitate in the local community or helping those with chronic health conditions or mental illness cope more effectively and live more independently. Others put food growing centre stage in promoting health by helping people learn to prepare and cook more nutritious meals or used community food projects as the stimulus



A selection of the tools and resources produced through the Communities Living Sustainably programme

to supporting local economic development. All CLS projects benefited from the power of food to bring a community together and encourage social interaction.

The prospects for long-term sustainability of this activity without grant funding are limited, however. Most community growing projects struggle to evidence the full impact of their activities on participants' wellbeing or know how to target activities to ensure they reach those most in need of support. The difficulty in tracking participants over time given the 'open access' nature of many projects and the challenge of proving a causal link in terms of behaviour change make it challenging for many groups to build a compelling business case for commissioners.

To help address this the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens worked in conjunction with the Growing Health project run by Garden Organic and Sustain to produce a guide to measuring and evaluating health and wellbeing outcomes for community growing programmes. This incorporated the expertise and experience of CLS organisations, along with leading academics and other community growing groups.

The guide includes tools that can be used by projects delivering a wide spectrum of nature-based activities, such as green care and natural health promotion, and helps them to choose appropriate evaluation tools. It focuses on tools that measure holistic health and wellbeing and progress towards person-centred goals, giving more groups the opportunity to design, manage and evaluate their projects in a way that will support stronger funding proposals in future. www.farmgarden.org.uk/resources/whichtool

Behaviour change

Promoting and supporting the take-up of environmentally responsible behaviours was a theme that cut across the entire CLS programme, but was also the outcome that most projects found most difficult to evidence. Projects engaged with a range of academic partners to understand how best to target and capture the impact of their interventions, using a variety of survey tools to understand levels of awareness, understanding and commitment to act. Given the nature of many project activities, tracking a direct causal link between pledges made and a sustained change in behaviour was always going to be a challenge.

However, across many projects clear examples emerged of participants increasing levels of volunteering, engaging in physical activity and taking simple actions to reduce fuel bills. Many of the activities were targeted at vulnerable individuals, for example through home visits to combat fuel poverty, while others sought to encourage behaviour change through group activities delivered in schools or with businesses.

Drawing on these examples and mapping them against a number of theoretical models in behaviour change literature, the New Economics Foundation produced a guide to measuring pro-environmental behaviour change for community projects.

The guide draws on the science underpinning behaviour change interventions in terms of understanding people's values, perceptions, motivations, habits, skills, social environment and local context. It then draws on practical case study examples from CLS to demonstrate how to promote and sustain change through multiple actions to impact on these influences around four basic building blocks - attitudes to behaviours, intention to act, actions and context.

These case studies highlight practical lessons for success considering how CLS projects have successfully influenced people through peer groups, encouraged more sustainable behaviours through working with schools, used experiential learning-based approach and understood the impact of working at different project scales – from short, sharp intensive neighbourhood campaigns to broader activities influencing groups across a wider geographic area.

The conclusions of the project were that:

A wide range of pro-environmental behaviours can be supported through community-based organisations and that the integrated, area-based approach adopted by most CLS projects helped enable this

Discussions about environmental behaviours and climate change have to be rooted in real life experiences which are relevant to the local context, starting engagement processes by addressing immediate concerns and demonstrating how environmental considerations can help to remedy 'here and now' issues

Scaling up and sustaining behaviour change across a wider population requires a mutually reinforcing system of support, which may mean changes to infrastructure or local services. Behaviour change relies upon both the motivation and agency to act and an enabling context to follow through on this.

www.groundwork.org.uk/communities-living-sustainably ■■

4. What works?

Identifying good practice and replicating success

The activities delivered through the CLS programme were deliberately chosen to be diverse, testing the degree to which communities could be supported and mobilised in different settings and at different scales.

Each project evolved over time with the Big Lottery Fund encouraging lead organisations to reflect on successes and failures and recommend changes to processes and outcomes. Despite this complexity and variety, it has been possible to identify a number of common threads – ways of working which appear more likely to support positive change. The following lessons have been drawn from in-depth conversations and peer learning sessions with the projects supplemented by findings from their own individual evaluations and tested through a series of workshops with wider specialist stakeholders.

1: It's all about place

The success of CLS projects was in large part due to the fact that they were led by organisations embedded in their local areas, with an understanding of the history, current situation and future potential of 'their place'. Understanding cultural variations made it easier to establish trust with the wider community and understanding local geography and risk factors meant activities and services could be more effectively tailored to respond to the most pressing environmental issues. These very localised factors meant that exact replication of activities from one area to another was unlikely to yield the same results. However, the peer learning approach adopted within the programme gave project leads the opportunity to hear about approaches in other areas and reflect on how best to adapt and apply them in a different situation.

2: Long-term change needs to be community-led, but professionally supported

In most cases CLS projects were developed and led by local 'anchor organisations', bodies which already had some legitimacy in the local area and which were able to link the concerns and aspirations of local people with the strategies and resources of local authorities, local businesses and other stakeholders. Lead organisations were focused on catalysing and supporting local project activities in their area. However, for the changes brought about to last, 'professionals' recognised the need to step back and enable local residents to take control. This does not happen easily and there is a need to be realistic about what community groups can achieve on their own. Working in this way means being prepared for things to change – consultation is meaningless if it doesn't result in things being done in a different order or in a different way. It also means embracing diversity and working hard to ensure all voices are heard from the start.

CLS projects put particular emphasis on establishing community governance structures to lock in cooperative ownership, for example the Greening Wingrove CIC and the community energy organisations created in Harborough and Dorset. Helping more communities become better able to manage their own assets and services is increasingly important as public sector budgets become further and further stretched. However, that doesn't mean handing over the keys and walking away. There is also an ongoing

PROJECT PROFILES



GREENING WINGROVE

Greening Wingrove is a five year community partnership led by the Workers' Educational Association. It supports the people of Wingrove, Newcastle upon Tyne to live sustainably, putting power back in the hands of local people and fostering community spirit.

A central part of the CLS project involved the creation of a community garden out of a derelict bowling green, complete with its own pizza oven and art installations. This is now used to host a range of community activities, including regular coffee mornings.

The Community Innovation Fund is run every year as an initiative to put money directly in the hands of local people, inviting bids from residents and community groups keen to try out their own ideas.

Vertical Veg Street is an initiative involving experienced gardening professionals helping to grow food outside the front doors of residents, encouraging participants to save money by growing their own food while improving the appearance of the neighbourhood.

With the help of National Energy Action the project engaged a language tutor to produce a set of activities and information about energy for non-English speakers, helping learners reduce their bills while improving their language skills.

The project kickstarted a range of activities aimed at reducing waste, with sessions on upcycling, fix-it cafes and clothes swaps.

Greening Wingrove created new facilities and new opportunities for people to come together and share ideas, skills and enthusiasm, laying the foundations for a stronger community better equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

www.greeningwingrove.org.uk



L8 LIVING SUSTAINABLY

L8 Living Sustainably is a five-year initiative in Toxteth, Liverpool, focused on promoting local food growing and recycling and reusing materials.

The project developed a network of over 20 growing sites in the form of a Patchwork Urban Farm across the wards of Princes Park and Riverside. Community members interested in growing were linked together and helped to raise awareness of the project in the wider community.

Events were held on the themes of Waste Not Want Not and Trash to Treasure. Creative projects used recycled materials such as broken tiles to create mosaic artworks while on a more practical level furniture was refurbished for distribution to those in need.

Loving Lodge Lane was set up as a community festival celebrating the area while making it cleaner and greener through fun activities such as wheelie bin art.

Community Living Rooms involved people gathering on neutral ground to enjoy each other's company while learning practical upcycling skills such as making draught excluders from old tights and hot-water-bottle covers from old jumpers.

The project had a specific focus on engaging with the Roma community in the area, hosting a week of activities for children exploring their Roma identity, culture and heritage.

L8 Living Sustainably had particular success in engaging people from the area's BAME communities and other vulnerable groups and proved that living less wastefully was good for the pocket as well as the planet.

www.l8ls.co.uk



ONE PLANET MIDDLESBROUGH

One Planet Middlesbrough is a long-term initiative that aims to address the social, economic and environmental challenges faced by people across the town, working closely with the council and other agencies to support the development of more sustainable infrastructure and services.

The Middlesbrough Affordable Warmth Partnership provides free energy efficiency training, practical demonstrations on low-energy cooking and referrals to home energy efficiency measures and schemes.

Growing Middlesbrough was established as a partnership to improve access to food that has been grown or produced within 50 miles of the town. It acts as a network of local food producers, retailers and enthusiasts that work together to satisfy demand for local food and drink.

CLS provided the stimulus for volunteers to become Community Champions, leading activities with local residents, including workshops on energy efficiency in the home and projects to create community spaces by improving overgrown alleyways.

The project has encouraged sustainable transport by promoting walking routes to school and delivering cycling proficiency training to encourage more people to bike round town.

As well as supporting residents, the project has helped 41 businesses and community organisations identify improvements in terms of recycling, energy audits and travel to work schemes which cut waste but also cut costs.

One Planet Middlesbrough has brought together a strong network of organisations in the town to support broad-based action on sustainability and the concept of 'one planet living' is now firmly embedded in the agenda of the mayor.

www.mencity.org.uk/opm



REAL FOOD WYTHENSHAWE

Real Food Wythenshawe is a five-year project that set out to excite the people of Wythenshawe, Manchester in the idea of growing and cooking fresh, sustainable food as a way of promoting healthier, lower carbon lifestyles.

At the heart of the project is a sustainable 'Geodome', a structure that inspires young people to understand where their food comes from while generating healthy produce for local residents and college students in the area.

A growing space has been established on the site of a former church, with residents fully involved in its re-development. The 'Spud Club' was formed by keen potato growers.

A Garden City event saw 200 people getting involved with apple pressing and juice tasting of locally-sourced apples. The project mapped fruit trees in public spaces and private gardens, with donors volunteering their harvest for community use.

The Wythenshawe Park Walled Garden provides training and skills in food growing while also hosting cooking demonstrations to encourage better nutrition.

The project established UnitE, a food storage warehouse that distributes food to seven food banks across Wythenshawe, working alongside the Food Poverty Group.

Real Food Wythenshawe is an exemplar food growing project, providing practical opportunities for urban food production while using food as the stimulus for a wide range of positive community outcomes.

www.realfoodwythenshawe.com

Steve came to Abbot Lodge, a Salvation Army hostel in Salford in mid-2014. He was a recovering alcoholic who had previously been homeless. The Irwell Valley Sustainable Communities project has been supporting the hostel with setting up and running a garden on the site, which Steve became involved with during his time at the hostel.

“ *The garden was good for me. I focused on it, and it gave me space to clear my head. I look at people, who left the hostel about the same time as me, and nothing’s changed for them... I was more mentally prepared for moving on thanks to the gardening. Growing, caring for something. It puts it into perspective you know?* ”

STEVE, IRWELL VALLEY

need for community development - communities can only lead when they have the infrastructure, resources and professional support to do so effectively.

3: The environment starts where people are

It’s often said that people are not going to see climate change as a major issue if they can’t afford to put food on their table. CLS specifically set out to test whether people living in more challenged circumstances or in more disadvantaged areas could be engaged in collective action leading to personal behaviour change. The answer is a resounding ‘yes’, precisely because projects understood the need to focus on the current state of affairs in their local community and to work from there. They knew what mattered to local people, understood their motivations and set about exploring how local needs could be met in a more sustainable manner.

The local food networks developed by CLS Dorset and Sustainable Harborough worked because they went with the grain of existing activity. Projects set within diverse urban communities – L8 Living Sustainably and Manor House PACT – used the environment as a way of reaching and engaging with marginalised

groups to bring them into a wider programme of community support. In Irwell Valley and Eden projects focused on an immediate environmental threat in the form of flooding to make the links between sustainability, community infrastructure and the real cost of climate change.

4: Putting the time into partnerships pays off

All of the CLS projects attribute some of their success to the strength of local partnerships. In some cases CLS built on the work of a pre-existing partnership structure, while in others the development phase of the programme was focused on establishing effective working relations. What makes a good partnership has been well rehearsed in a number of settings. Good communication and a common understanding from everybody about their remit and responsibility are crucial.

It was often the case within CLS that specialist partners led discrete strands of work focused on specific aspects of sustainability. Selecting and testing the commitment of these partners was an important part of the process. However, what really made the programme successful was the time spent by partners ensuring this diverse specialist delivery was integrated so

“ One of the most important elements of a sustainable community is a good network... Maintaining these networks takes time and effort but it is incredibly worthwhile. When people know one another and can come together easily then they can develop activities to meet their needs. A community that can find solutions and looks after itself is resilient and can help solve a variety of bigger problems, problems that often elude policy makers.

SUE SHEEHAN, DIRECTOR, INCREDIBLE EDIBLE LTD

that activities and ideas could cross-fertilise and participants could see the connections between behaviours and outcomes. The role of project leads as integrators and partnership managers cannot be underestimated. Neither in future programmes should it be under-resourced.

5: Making the links makes it better

Whilst the breadth and diversity of project activities supported through CLS made it a challenge to evaluate and to replicate, it made for a better programme. Vulnerable people often face a complex set of issues that need to be addressed in a holistic way. Life isn't lived through funding silos and the impacts of unsustainable living are felt in many ways – affecting our health and wellbeing, our ability to interact with those around us and, very directly, our finances. Fuel poverty is a prime example – isolating vulnerable people in cold, damp homes and reducing their ability to meet other basic needs.

One of the great strengths of CLS was the ability to provide interventions that are joined-up and to make the links that prevent people getting 'lost in the system'. By the same token, the partnerships and activities brought together by CLS allowed the creation of mutually supportive

interventions with the potential to generate virtuous circles in terms of people's awareness and action. Knowing why the River Irwell floods galvanised support within the local community for the creation of a new wetlands landscape. Many volunteers who gave their time to improve local open spaces signed up to 'cook-and-eat' sessions that helped them understand how to feed their families healthy food on a budget. CLS helped disparate activities add up to more than the sum of their parts and enabled participants to see the environment not as a limit on their behaviours but rather a springboard for improving their lives.

6: Scale makes a difference but you can make a difference at any scale

CLS enabled projects to operate at a variety of spatial scales and across a broad or narrow range of issues. One Planet Middlesbrough aimed to impact on communities across a whole town and took a holistic approach to driving change across a spectrum of behaviours, whereas Real Food Wythenshawe focused on firing up a smaller district with a passion for growing. Both approaches reaped rewards and both will be needed in future if we're going to help more places become more resilient to economic and climate impacts.

What is critical is to understand what can be achieved with different intensities of resource and to set the framework for investment and evaluation accordingly. In terms of planning it's important to go with the grain of how people identify 'their community' and how this interacts with wider considerations such as a river catchment and flood plain or the number of households able to benefit from a community energy scheme. Digital communications can enable local projects to have an impact across a wider geography, as evidenced by the work done by Sustain Eden to nurture Freegle groups across Cumbria, but can also bring together communities of interest, valuable for accessing specialist knowledge (for example, about the heritage of an area) or for fundraising.

7: It all takes longer than you think

The achievements delivered through CLS are the result of a lot of hard work over a long period of time. Projects ran for at least three years with some extending over five. Building strong partnerships and building trust with all sections

of the community takes time. Ensuring the changes brought about are sustained and the structures put in place are embedded in the local community is a complex task that can't be rushed. After five years some of the community assets and organisations developed through CLS are just beginning their journey and their long-term survival beyond the end of grant funding is by no means assured.

This needs to be set against the current context of many community organisations surviving from year to year in a very uncertain funding climate. Building on existing community infrastructure and investing in established local 'anchor organisations' can ensure an early move from development to delivery and create opportunities for early wins. This should be borne in mind by funders restless to reach beyond what they might consider 'the usual suspects'. Projects aimed at building community resilience need to be led by trusted organisations with the time and resource to engage all sections of the community, enable in-depth consultation and bring the right expertise to bear. ■

“Communities can achieve great things when given the right support, power and resources. Even in the digital age, our collective reliance on and appreciation of the environment around us galvanises action and harnesses the 'community spirit' we all say is important. What's different today is that our communities are being impacted more frequently by unpredictable economic and environmental forces while the public services we've come to rely on to keep us safe and well are getting increasingly stretched. The legacy left by the CLS programme is critical in helping us navigate this challenging future.

GRAHAM DUXBURY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, GROUNDWORK UK

Credits

Photography and illustration:

Inside cover: London Permaculture / CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Page 3: dashadima (123RF Stock Photo), Madebyoliver

Thanks to CLS Dorset, Greening Wingrove, Irwell Valley Sustainable Communities Project, L8 Living Sustainably, Manor House PACT, One Planet Middlesborough, Sustainable Harborough, and Sustainable Sheppey for additional photography.

Design:

Jon Kedwards / www.jonkedwards.co.uk

Contact us

Groundwork UK
Lockside
5 Scotland Street
Birmingham
B1 2RR

Tel: 0121 236 8565

Email: info@groundwork.org.uk

Twitter: [@groundworkuk](https://twitter.com/groundworkuk)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groundworkuk

www.groundwork.org.uk

www.groundwork.org.uk/communities-living-sustainably