

Evaluation of the Northern Network Pilot

April 2024



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1. Introduction

In 2022, Groundwork's Northern Network Pilot secured funding from The National Lottery Community Fund to facilitate the creation of a network of Green Community Hubs (GCHs). The Groundwork Trusts within the Northern Network include:

- Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire & Merseyside
- Groundwork Greater Manchester
- Groundwork North East & Cumbria
- Groundwork South & North Tyneside
- Groundwork Yorkshire

Within the Pilot, activity to build the Northern Network was twofold. Firstly, the Pilot supported the development of **Green Community Hubs** across the North of England. These hubs were supported by Facilitators within the Northern Network Groundwork Trusts. Secondly, the Pilot established the **Northern Network**, an online and offline network to connect the Green Community Hubs, people, organisations and communities involved in the grassroots development and delivery of Green Community Hubs across the North of England. Please note that throughout this report, Pilot activity is described as part of the 'Green Community Hubs' or the 'Northern Network', however, both are important aspects of the Pilot.

In agreement with the National Lottery Community Fund, the Northern Network Pilot sought to achieve the following outcomes:

- A minimum of 5 investment ready Green Community Hubs,
- The creation of an online and offline network of Green Community Hubs,
- A steering group in place for each proposed hub,
- 30+ community projects will have access to technical advice and expertise to help,
- Developed projects that are sustainable and investment ready,
- A bank of resources and information that is shared across the Network which supports:
 - Best practice,
 - Connection of marginalized communities with local members and stakeholders, and
 - Greater awareness in the local community of climate awareness and emergency.
- 50 new members working collaboratively and contributing to the design of the hubs,
- 200 local people involved in co-designing services,
- 100 local people reporting greater climate awareness, and
- 200 people reporting greater connection with nature and increased skills.

The Northern Network Pilot was an 18-month scheme delivered by Groundwork between September 2022 and March 2024. Both strands of Pilot activity have adopted place-based approaches to ensure that activity corresponds with the needs of local communities and local infrastructure and assets. Effective place-based approaches do not occur in a vacuum, meaning that local needs and context need to be acknowledged and explored over time.

Whilst the Green Community Hubs delivery commenced within their chosen communities in September 2022, the purpose, support and identity of the virtual Network developed over the first six months, formally launching in May 2023.

1.1 The Evaluation Context

Groundwork commissioned Wavehill to undertake an evaluation of the Northern Network in September 2022. The evaluation has explored:

- How effectively the Northern Network has been established across the North of England;
- The added value of the Pilot;
- The overall impact and achievements of the Pilot including exploration of the impact on Pilot Green Community Hubs; and,
- Lessons learnt from the development of the Pilot.

1.2 Methodology

The information used to inform this evaluation has been drawn from the following data collection activities:



Scoping interviews with staff and stakeholders (n=6)

Interviews were conducted via video call in November 2022, involving the Project Manager and Hub Facilitators from the five Groundwork Trusts.



Volunteer and local resident surveys (sign-up n=35 and interim n=24 and follow-up n= 126)

Three surveys were distributed to volunteers and local residents who took part in Green Community Hub activities via online links or paper surveys. As will be explored in Section [1.2.1](#), it was initially intended that where volunteers and residents have continued to engage with Green Community Hub activities, they would complete subsequent evaluation surveys. However, due to limited survey completion, this has not been possible. Please note that response numbers to survey questions varied. Therefore, the total sample per question is detailed throughout this report.



Analysis of monitoring information

This includes information submitted via both online and paper forms by Hub Facilitators on the types of events held within each of the five Network Trusts between March 2023 and March 2024.



Case study site visits (n=5)

Researchers attended Green Community Hub sites to observe events and engage with staff, volunteers and local residents to ensure that case studies and reporting accurately reflected Hub activity.



Final interviews with staff and stakeholders (n=12)

Interviews were conducted via video call between January and February 2024. Interviews included management staff at Groundwork, Hub Facilitators and other staff and volunteers who delivered Green Community Hub activities.

Within this report, please note that stakeholder relates to management staff at Groundwork and other external individuals who have engaged with the Pilot and Hub Facilitators refer to Groundwork staff who were tasked with supporting the development of Green Community Hub sites.

1.2.1 Methodological limitations

The initial design for this evaluation included a longitudinal study in which volunteers and local residents who regularly engaged with Pilot activities would complete a series of surveys at different stages of their engagement. It was anticipated that this would provide a matched sample to measure individuals' perceptions of nature, their local area, nature connectedness, wellbeing and green skills throughout the Pilot.

However, engagement with initial evaluation surveys was limited. This was largely because volunteers and residents engaged intermittently, or in a light-touch fashion with activities, resulting in limited survey take-up. Additionally, Hub Facilitators typically were only funded to work part-time at Green Community Hubs. This meant they had limited time to support evaluation activities alongside delivering core Hub activity. To ensure that the impact of the Pilot could still be measured, the final survey guides were designed to be standalone surveys, meaning that volunteers and local residents could still engage with evaluation activities where they had not filled in previous surveys.

It is also important to note that limited survey engagement means that where sample sizes are small, comparisons to larger datasets, such as the People and Nature Survey, must be treated with caution.

1.3 Navigating this Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- [Section 2](#) reflects on the rationale and the implementation of the Pilot, including the Green Community Hub and Northern Network activity.
- [Sections 3-7](#) set out the activities delivered by each of the Hubs, categorised by the Groundwork Trust by which they were delivered. This includes their strategies for engaging with the local communities, the development of the delivery plan in response to community need, and the specific activities delivered.
- [Section 8](#) outlines the activity delivered through the Northern Network and the associated strengths and challenges of this activity.
- [Section 9](#) explores the delivery of the Green Leadership Programme, the activity included and the impact of the programme on green leaders.
- [Section 10](#) reviews the overall impact of the scheme, including the total impact of the Green Community Hubs and the Northern Network.
- [Section 11](#) explores the lessons learnt as a result of the Pilot. This includes learning from the Green Community Hubs and Northern Network.
- [Section 12](#) sets out the conclusions of the report and sets out key recommendations.

2. Pilot Implementation

Section Summary

- The Pilot's Green Community Hubs and Northern Network activity was borne out of the recognition that there are many communities with a desire to set up a Green Community Hub or do something 'green' in their area who need additional support to be able to do so.
- The first six months of Pilot delivery focused on research, consultation and community engagement to establish the Northern Network. Staff facilitated a series of workshops in key areas across the North of England with local residents, community hubs and other local potential members.
- The Northern Network was officially launched in May 2023. The Northern Network website branding was co-created with communities engaged in the community consultations and resources shared on the site were, and continue to be, created by Network members.

This section explores the rationale and initial stages of Pilot development. Rationale and initial steps are explored for the Green Community Hubs and the Northern Network strands of delivery separately.

2.1 Green Community Hubs

2.1.1 Rationale

The Pilot's Green Community Hubs activity was borne out of the recognition that there are many communities with a desire to set up a Green Community Hub or do something 'green' in their area who need additional support to be able to do so. Reflecting on the initial design of the Pilot, stakeholders described the high volume of requests they continue to receive from communities and community organisations looking for advice and guidance on how to establish or further develop a Green Community Hub.

'As an organisation, we get a lot of inquiries from Green Community Hubs where they don't have anything in place. [Before the Northern Network we didn't] have the resource to support [Green Community Hubs] from inception to delivery. The key point is that people don't have the knowledge and capacity [to develop the hubs] but we don't have the resource and capacity to support them.' **Stakeholder**

By supporting a set of Green Community Hubs, Groundwork aimed to address the range of barriers that may face an individual or group who want to make a change in their community, including financial barriers, skills and expertise, or confidence.

Whilst working with Green Community Hubs is well-established within Groundwork, developing Hubs from scratch provided an opportunity to understand how best to equip and empower communities to develop Hubs for themselves to meet the needs of local

areas. Stakeholders reported that supporting local leaders to gain ‘social capital’¹ was a key aim of the Pilot which, they perceived, will enable local residents to take their Green Community Hubs forward sustainably.

‘The point was to try to open up that playing field to more communities, to enable them to benefit from more accessible green space, improved habitats, and defence against climate change.’ **Stakeholder**

By adopting a place-based approach, it was envisaged that the Green Community Hubs would build on existing local assets and provide a broad range of services to build resilience and improve outcomes for local residents. Utilising existing local assets was also thought to help encourage the sustainment of activity beyond the lifetime of the programme.

2.1.2 Green Community Hub selection

Five main Pilot sites² were selected to be Green Community Hubs; Clay Pitts Park (Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside), West Gorton Community Park (Groundwork Greater Manchester), Workington Green Community Hub (Groundwork North East and Cumbria), West Boldon Lodge (Groundwork South and North Tyneside) and Horton Community Farm (Groundwork Yorkshire).

To ensure that project resource was being used effectively, the project team wanted to include a diverse range of geographies where there was appetite for activity (but little other Green Community Hub activity occurring) with high levels of deprivation, a want for positive activity/social action opportunities that respond to the growing concerns of the climate emergency, and limited previous investment from public funds.

Stakeholders also suggested that they wanted to fund different types of Green Community Hub to demonstrate the similarity of outcomes across a range of Green Community Hub activities and landscapes. Specific considerations for site areas and greater detail on hub set-up are provided in Sections 3-7.

2.2 Northern Network

2.2.1 Rationale

The rationale for developing the Northern Network was centred on the need for joined-up approaches across the North of England, to improve the skills and confidence of individuals and communities and to improve capacity within existing Green Community Hubs and community organisations. Joined-up community approaches are identified in the United Nations’ Making Peace with Nature report as key to help to reinforce changes in behaviour,

¹ The networks of relationships among people who share a certain set of informal values or norms that permit cooperation. among them.

² Please note that Groundwork staff may have held activities and/or events at other sites in a more limited fashion.

culture, systems of management and knowledge transmission when addressing environmental concerns.³

It has also been widely reported that the North of England will likely see higher rises in the cost of living than cities in the South⁴ and that the Levelling Up agenda has yet to materialise in substantially higher public investment in the North of England. IPPR North's State of the North Report outlines a need 'to further empower those across the North who are already levelling up for themselves, and make sure no place or community is left behind.'⁵ This context further emphasises the need for the Northern Network and its aims to connect and empower communities.

Stakeholders reported that whilst there are a range of Green Community Hub projects across England, many are dispersed and siloed. It was anticipated that the development of a Northern Network would allow members (including the Pilot hubs) to share knowledge and experience on a wider scale and demonstrate the collective impact Green Community Hubs can have using different delivery approaches.

'You can't create a single blueprint for a GCH. The point about it being successful is around them being led by that community and directed by what they are interested in. The delivery may be different but the impacts should be the same around nature connection, health and wellbeing.' **Stakeholder**

2.2.2 Community Engagement

Co-creation is key for the Northern Network, aiming to encourage community ownership over the partnership to ensure local residents are taking the lead on decision-making.

The first six months of Pilot delivery focused on research, consultation and community engagement to establish the Northern Network. Groundwork staff facilitated a series of workshops in key areas across the North of England with local residents, community hubs and other local potential members.

The purpose of these sessions was to test ideas, identify key challenges and better understand the support needed through the Northern Network. A series of four workshops were held in five locations; Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Lancashire, and Cumbria.

Workshops focused on the following themes:

- **Workshop 1** explored the Network values that would be important for communities;
- In **Workshop 2** Groundwork staff asked local residents to imagine that the Northern Network was a garden and to identify who they wanted to 'grow' and 'nurture' and what the outcome of this would be;

³ United Nations (2021) Making Peace with Nature.

⁴ Centre for Cities, Out of Pocket: The Places at the Sharp End of the Cost-of-Living Crisis, July 2022.

⁵ IPPR North, State of the North 2021/22: Powering Northern Excellence, January 2022.

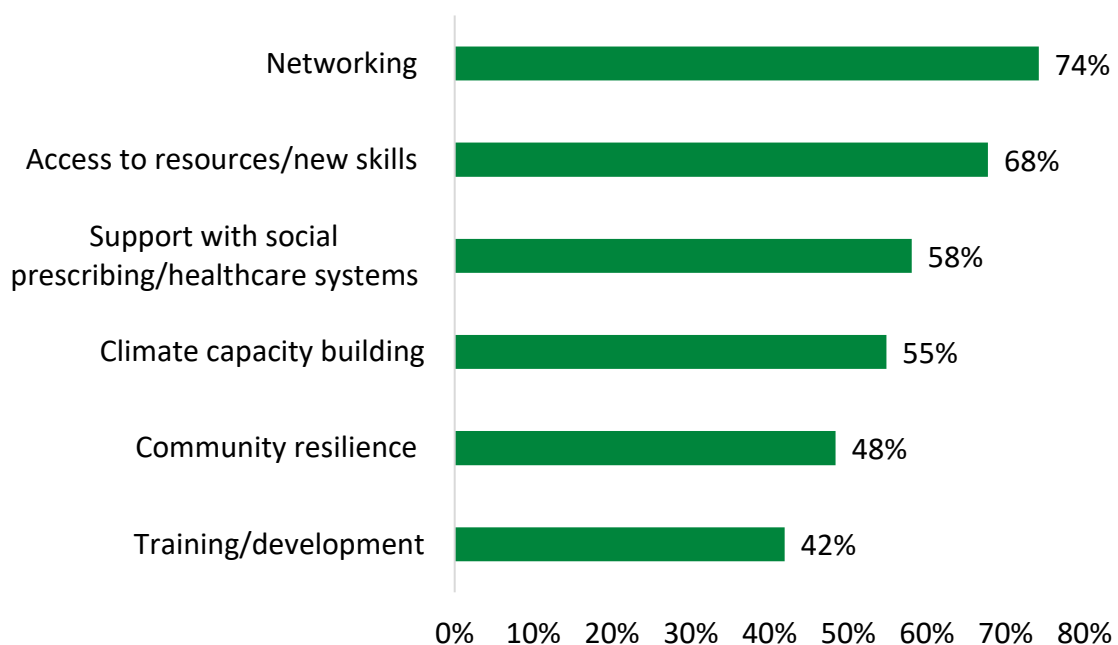
- **Workshop 3** focused on the skills and resources communities believe they currently have access to and the areas in which they would need support; and,
- **Workshop 4** allowed local residents to rank values that would be important to them if part of the Northern Network.

Community engagement workshops highlighted key support needs that local people wanted the Northern Network to support. This included:

- Disseminating learning and facilitating networking. Communities suggested that this could include sharing findings from test and learn activities, best practice on engaging with communities, and sharing of funding opportunities. It was felt this would lead to more joined up work, fewer siloed projects and more capacity within organisations.
- Supporting education around the environment. Communities expressed a desire to expand local people’s abilities through training and greater sharing of skills opportunities.

To supplement findings from the community workshops, Wavehill distributed a survey to individuals and organisations who signed up to be part of the Northern Network to explore what they were looking to gain. Data from this survey indicates that members commonly wanted to access networking opportunities, whilst around two-thirds wanted access to resources or new skills. Support with social prescribing and healthcare systems was also a common motivation for getting involved, with over half seeking this from the Network (see Figure 2.1 below).

Figure 2.1: Why did you want to get involved with the Groundwork Northern Network?



Source: Wavehill Membership sign-up survey (n=31)

When asked how the Northern Network could support local needs, members suggested that offering advice and support, facilitating collaboration and raising the profile of organisations would be valuable. Several members noted challenges associated with accessing funding, and reported that any support in this respect would be well received.

‘Raising the profile could help access funding or provide links with other organisations to support our work.’ **Member survey**

‘Providing advice and support for communities across the North to be more resilient and self-sustained.’ **Member survey**

2.2.3 Northern Network Launch

Following a review of the community consultation workshops and early findings from the membership survey, the Northern Network was launched in May 2023. The Northern Network website branding was co-created with communities engaged in the community consultations and resources shared on the site were, and continue to be, created by Network members. As a result of the community consultations, the objectives of the Northern Network were agreed as follows:

1. To bring people together:

- Building a network of people involved in green hubs across the North.
- Creating and delivering a leadership development programme.
- Creating a bank of resources, case studies and reports that support the work of green hubs.
- Delivering a programme of skills-sharing events, training, and networking sessions.

2. To build healthy and happy communities:

- Building stronger connections between green hubs and public health services for the improved facilitation of social prescribing.
- Building an evidence base for improved health and wellbeing in relation to green hubs.
- Creating and sharing resources and activities for green hubs and their communities that improve health and happiness.

3. To have the power to make a positive change:

- Mapping the climate impact of green hubs across the North.
- Evidencing the power of green hubs to take action on the climate emergency.
- Educating, inspiring and empowering communities to confidently take their own small steps to sustainability.
- Building community and climate resilience.

Whilst there were slight delays to the project launch (originally planned for March 2023) it is important to acknowledge that the co-creation of the virtual network was a vital element of project delivery. For stakeholders, it is key that the virtual site (as a reflection of the Network) is owned by members and has a clear identity that is less corporate than other resource websites. The development of the website and Northern Network in this way, stakeholders reported, has ensured that the site is 'by and for the community.' It was noted that launching in May coincided with the growing season, and it was recognised that this may have affected the number of hubs who engaged with the early activities of the Network.

3. Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire & Merseyside

Impact Summary

The Clay Pitts Park Green Community Hub has:

- Engaged 972 local residents across 69 events.⁶
- Provided 39 volunteering opportunities allowing volunteers to contribute 208 hours to the Hub.
- Worked with 16 community partners including Lancaster City Council, the Eden Project, Morecambe FC, a range of local charities and community groups and the National Health Service.
- Delivered a range of nature-based activity, including planting 2,500 bulbs and 17 trees, facilitating nine litter picking sessions and planting perimeter hedge around the park and an additional hedge on one side of the park running to the dyke to create a nature corridor.

As part of the Green Community Hub Pilot, project staff supported the development of a community group in Clay Pitts Park in Morecambe. This Hub site was chosen as, staff reported, it was previously underfunded with limited support from local authorities. Prior to the Northern Network Pilot, issues relating to anti-social behaviour were common at Clay Pitts Park, with some local residents described as 'afraid' to leave their homes. A lack of local recreational activities available for young people was also identified as a key concern.

Within the Hub, local residents, Lancaster City Council park and open spaces team, local councillors and other members have sought to increase and improve biodiversity and infrastructure within the park to transform it into a greener and safer space for the community.

The park wasn't even really there before. It wasn't on Google so the police had no knowledge of anti-social behaviour and nobody was looking after it. It wasn't an inviting place. I would never have gone in, if anything, I would go around it rather than through it.

Friends of Clay Pitts Park member

⁶ Please note that local residents may be counted multiple times if they have attended multiple events.

3.1 Governance

In the initial stages of development, a community mapping exercise was undertaken to decide the best location for a Green Community Hub in the Morecambe area. To ensure Hub activity was decided on and led by local residents, Facilitators utilised traditional outreach methods, e.g. displaying posters within the local area and hosting community meetings, to recruit community members to take forward Hub activity. The initial community members identified were local changemakers who knew the needs of the community and who could identify local groups the Hub could work with. Local groups included the Clubhouse, the Morecambe branch of Mencap, a charity supporting individuals with learning disabilities, local pubs and the local cricket club.

As a result of community outreach activity, Facilitators supported local residents to set up the 'Friends of Clay Pitts Park' group in March 2023. This included members deciding on key roles each of them would take forward and developing a group constitution. It was anticipated that this would allow local residents to take ownership and agree on changes made to the park and any activity that would be delivered. As a result of challenges with Hub activity delivery, new committee members were ratified in May 2023. Detail on the challenges faced are explored in [Section 3.3.2](#). The Friends of Clay Pitts Park Community Group continues to lead decision-making and activity delivery for the park.

3.2 Engagement and Implementation

Once the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group was established, group members, with the support of the Hub Facilitator began consulting with other local residents to better understand community needs and concerns. Initially, Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members suggested that local residents were 'suspicious' of the group's intentions because the local community were not used to action being taken in the park. This improved over time. As a result of the consultation, group members reported that residents were increasingly engaged with plans for the park and made it clear anti-social behaviour was a key priority going forward.

'[There has been] a lot of consultation which has been very helpful, it gives a good idea of what local residents are thinking and what the real problems are, as well as what would they like to spend [the Pilot] funding on. These open community meetings were really successful.' **Friends of Clay Pitts Park member**

Alongside consultation meetings with local community members, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members met with Lancaster City Council (LCC) representatives and other statutory organisations to share their plans and encourage said organisations to support Hub activity. This resulted in the group working closely with LCC agreed to replace and repair existing park equipment. This allowed the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members to develop sustainable partnerships with local services and build knowledge on how to work with local services to make changes within the park.

‘[We are] working in partnership with the council [who] gave us better links with the park keeper. We are more informed now and working with the council on a number of things in the park.’ **Friends of Clay Pitts Park member**

In the initial stages of setting up the Green Community Hub, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group and Hub Facilitator also met with representatives from the Lancashire Police Service to explore how they could best tackle anti-social behaviour issues within the park. The Group and Facilitator reported that this process was challenging as it required them, and the police service, to better understand how people felt about the anti-social behaviour and what they wanted the police and the Hub to do about it. Group members reported that this process took a long time (approximately six months) because it required them to effectively work on behalf of the community to explain to police services that local residents were scared to go outside at night due to the anti-social behaviour but had not felt able to report all incidents and behaviour to the local police. As a result of these meetings, the police services inspected the area and proposed solutions to the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group. More detail on this can be found in [Section 3.5](#).

To ensure that the Group was able to continue effectively engaging local residents with Hub activity throughout the lifetime of the Pilot and beyond, Group members developed a range of communication channels, including social media platforms e.g., a Facebook page. The Group and Facilitator also recruited a social media volunteer to manage the Hub’s communication channels. This was perceived by the Group and Facilitator as an effective way of ensuring their reach and ongoing communication with the local community.

3.3 Delivery

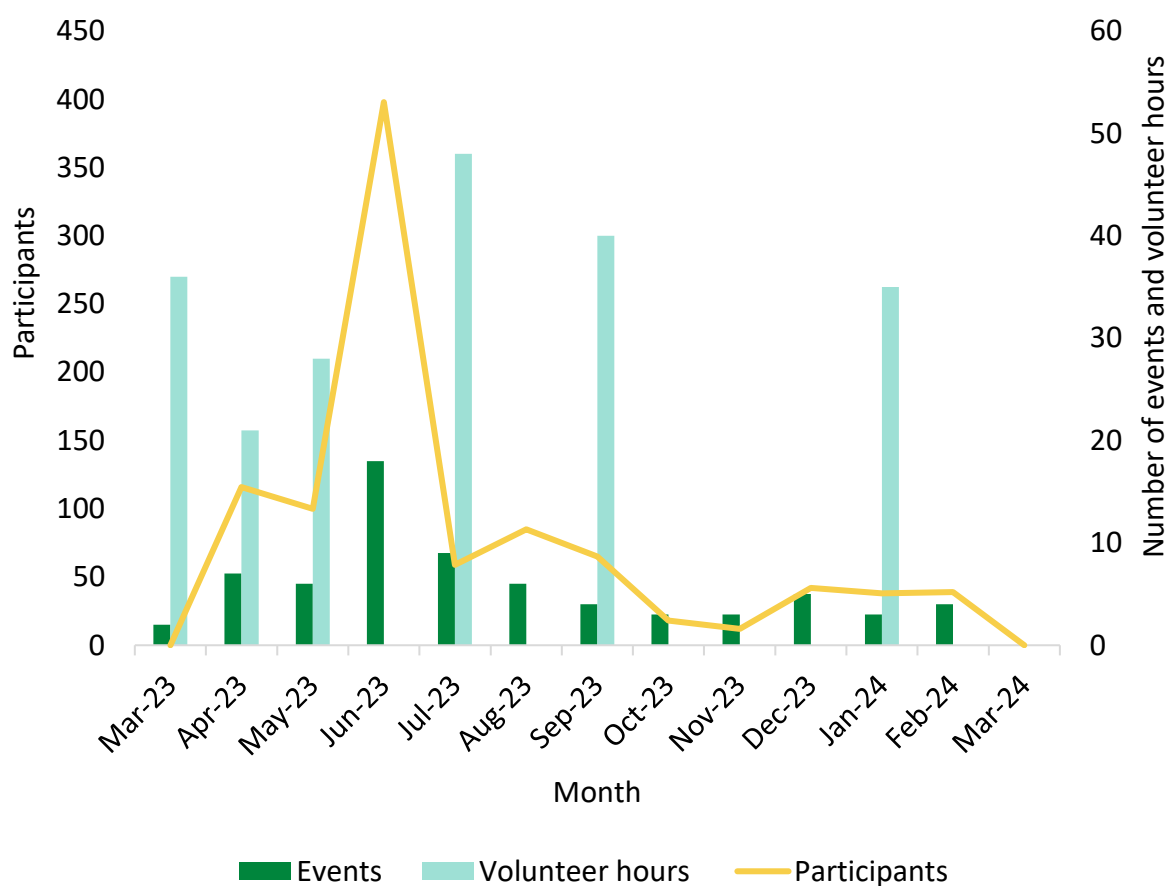
This sub-section explores the range of activity delivered via the Clay Pitts Park Hub throughout the Pilot. This includes an overview of all activity, the perceived strengths of the Hub delivery model and the challenges faced.

3.3.1 Overview

Figure 3.1 below shows that throughout the Pilot, the Clay Pitts Park Hub engaged with 972 participants⁷ across 69 events. Additionally, 208 volunteering hours were contributed to the Hub across 39 volunteering opportunities. Figure 3.1. also indicates that there was a peak in events and engagement at Clay Pitts Park during late spring and early summer. It is likely that the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group were able to engage more local residents once they had gained momentum with their activity delivery and as a result of good weather during ‘growing’ seasons.

⁷ Please note that participants may be counted multiple times if they have attended multiple events.

Figure 3.1: Engagement with the GCHs in Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside, March 23-
March 24



Source: Groundwork Monitoring Information

Overall, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group and Hub Facilitator ran the following events at the Hub:

- **Nine one-off events**, including litter picks and planting days;
- **39 regular outdoor activities**, which consisted of community garden sessions;
- **21 external member events**, led by Lancaster City Council Youth and Community workers, Morecambe Football Club Community Sports, The Clubhouse Learning Disabilities charity, The Melting Pot Community Performing Arts, and Charles Street Army Cadets Morecambe.

The sub-section below provides detail on key activity delivered throughout the Pilot.

3.3.2 Activity Detail

As part of their community consultation outlined in [Section 3.2](#), the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group decided with other local residents that they would use Northern Network funding to develop a community garden and replace old equipment in the park e.g. benches and children's play equipment. To reveal the equipment and continue reaching new members of the community through the Hub, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group and members such as Lancaster City Council, hosted a celebration day in April 2023. Details of the event can be found in the case study over page.

Case Study: Clay Pitts Park Celebration Event April 2023

The celebration event that unveiled new equipment for the Park. These included three new picnic benches purchased by the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members, and a zip wire used by local children. The zip wire was newly installed by the Parks and Open Space department at Lancaster City Council.

On the day, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group invited local residents to come, meet them, and chat about plans for the Park. This included viewing and discussing new interpretation boards in the Park to support local wildlife and taking part in an activity to sow a wildlife meadow. A newly designed Park sign was also unveiled which had been made by Lancaster City and Morecambe Council, contributions from the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group and Groundwork. The Group also held a treasure hunt for younger children, provided refreshments, and homemade cakes. In total, 17 local residents attended with additional Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members and council realm office staff also in attendance.

The event was prepared by the Friends of Clay Pitt Park's subcommittee consisting of local residents, and a new relationship, which had been established with Lancaster and Morecambe City Council Realm Office and LCC Parks and Gardens Dept. Mencap, a partner charity, also opened its clubhouse building to provide refreshments.

This event gave local residents the chance to meet each other. Many people attended with their children who live near or close to the Park. It gave the subcommittee the chance to explain to local residents about plans and funding bids for the Park. They also launched their Facebook page to keep in touch with local residents. In total, 13 children participated in sowing the meadow. They were encouraged to check on its progress and look for butterflies and bees in the summer. Some local residents in attendance had disabilities and/or significant issues around isolation and were concerned about anti-social behaviour in the park. The event gave people an opportunity to meet other residents and develop new friendships and future contacts.

Overall, this event allowed local residents to meet new people and organisations and allowed the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group to introduce their aims for the Park to the community to ensure plans were engaged with and supported.

Local residents and volunteers who fed back on their experience of engaging with the Clay Pitts Park Hub commonly reported that meeting new people was their favourite part of their respective activity. Examples of this are provided below.

‘[I enjoyed the activity] because it’s spending time outside with similar minded people.’

Local Resident

‘I love meeting new people and learning new skills.’ **Local Resident**

‘I am [enjoying] making new friends and being out in nature.’ **Local Resident**

‘I feel like I am doing something positive for the community.’ **Local Resident**

The Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group were also positive about the range of activity that took place across the Green Community Hub as this allowed them to iteratively build on the Hub’s local offer and engage a diverse range of local residents. In particular, this included engaging socially excluded individuals, local residents with mental health concerns and those who are visually impaired.

The planting of a wildflower meadow (outlined in the case study above) is also a key aspect of the Clay Pitts Park Hub activity. The Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group encouraged local residents to engage in planting activity early on in Hub activity. This allowed the Group and other local residents to witness the positive impact their actions were having on the ground.

‘It is great to see how the park has developed through the delivery of activities. The sowing of a wild meadow early on got everybody involved.’ **Friends of Clay Pitts Park member**

Local residents also commonly fed back that planting seeds and bulbs has been their favourite part of engaging with Hub activity. In many cases, local residents suggested that being involved in this type of activity has made them feel good about doing something for their local area which has, in turn, had a positive impact on their wellbeing.

‘It’s improving my local area and making it beautiful.’ **Local Resident**

‘Sowing seeds makes me feel really good in myself and happy.’ **Local Resident**

‘Making the meadow [...] makes me feel better in myself.’ **Local Resident**

This suggests that involving local residents in small but tangible tasks when developing a Green Community Hub can ensure that positive changes to individuals' engagement with the Hub and their feeling of wellbeing can be positively affected early on in the process.

Hub activity has also included a wide range of other initiatives to improve the biodiversity of activity but also the sense of community ownership and pride among local residents. This included native hedgerow planting and habitat creation where volunteers were supported to develop skills around effective planting to improve the aesthetics of the park, with the aim of discouraging anti-social behaviour.

'It's great to give young people another focus such as sport and growing. There has been a dramatic change in what the park is being used for and a lot less anti-social behaviour.'

Local Resident

'[Planting hedges is a] good exercise. I enjoy improving this rundown park into a beautiful place.'

Local Resident

More detail on the hedgerow activity at Clay Pitts Park can be found in the case study over page.

Case study: A Native Hedgerow Planting Event December 23

The Friends of the Clay Pitts Park subcommittee held a native hedgerow-planting event within the Park. The event was prepared by the Friends of Clay Pitt's Park subcommittee consisting of people who live near the Park. Partners included Lancaster and Morecambe City Council Realm Office, LCC Parks and Gardens Department and the Bay Blueprint to Recovery Group.

In total, 18 local residents attended the Park including volunteers from the Bay Blueprint to Recovery Group. The event was devised to allow local residents to meet the subgroup, communicate the plans, receive feedback, and meet the Bay volunteers and tree officers from Lancaster City Council. The session was designed to improve communication and support the friends in their plans for the area. It also allowed local residents to enjoy learning a new green skill.

The event showed people how to plant native hedgerows and habitat creation, supporting local biodiversity. The chair of the Friends of the Clay Pitts Park Group led the session with local residents and felt confident after her mentorship from the Hub Facilitator. The boundaries of the Park were planted to protect local residents' gardens after a consultation with local residents. The MENCAP Clubhouse, a local charity for people with learning disabilities, also supported the event by offering refreshments and toilet facilities. The event was enjoyable for local residents and many hedge whips were planted. It gave some of the local residents the opportunity to share their knowledge and meet people in their local community. It also gave people some time outside in a green space and the opportunity to take part in physical fitness activity.

Five of the new local residents had poor mental health and 3 local residents had physical disabilities and had significant issues around isolation and had been the focus of anti-social behaviour in the Park. The event gave people the chance to meet other residents and develop new friendships and opportunities for future contact. It also reduced isolation and gave them the opportunity to relax in a green space. The chair of the subcommittee reported she felt more confident leading this group and teaching green gardening skills.

This event delivered an increase in community links, communication about the Friends of the Clay Pitts Park Group and their aims and support from local residents, and a net gain in biodiversity for the Park and local area. It increased the support for Hub's aims and better dialogue with the local residents. All hedge whips were obtained by the subcommittee from the Woodland Trust.

Based on early consultations with the local community, a community garden was co-designed between the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group, other local residents and the Hub Facilitator to make sure that the space was designed by and for the people accessing the site. The Community Garden was built over winter (2023) to ensure that it was accessible and ready for the Group, volunteers and other local residents to access it in Spring 2024. The official opening of the Community Garden took place in April 2024.

Additionally, through the Northern Network, Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members took part in a knowledge exchange event with another Northern Network Hub in Workington. Volunteers from both Hubs visited one another, allowing individuals to learn about how other Hubs in the North have taken forward their ideas. Group members reported that the visit was 'valuable' and allowed them to go and witness a range of different types of activity.

3.3.3 Partnership Activity

At the Clay Pitts Park Hub, partnership working has been a central tenet of activity delivery. Reflecting on the range of activities delivered, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members and the Hub Facilitator reported that it was key for them to ensure the Hub developed links with existing local organisations and services to ensure that Hub activity delivery was sustainable. Partners included:

- LESS
- Food Futures
- Friends of Clay Pitts Park
- Lancaster City Council Youth Outreach Team
- Morecambe FC
- The Melting Pot Performing Arts
- West End Millions
- Sandylands Primary School
- Clay Pitts Park Clubhouse
- Army Cadets Morecambe
- Lancaster City Council Realm Office
- Lancaster City Council Parks and Gardens Dept
- More Music Morecambe
- The Bay: Blueprint for Recovery
- Eden Project
- The National Health Service (including local GP surgeries).

Detail on the range of partnership activity established are outlined below. A range of departments within Lancaster City Council have sought to support activity within the Clay Pitts Park Hub including supplying a new zip wire and supporting other initiatives such as planting and litter pick-ups. Working with the local authority has enabled the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group to develop relationships with key individuals within the department and enabled them to develop experience and knowledge working with local services to develop a Green Community Hub.

Collaborations with external members such as Morecambe FC and the Army Cadets further enriched the activities delivered at Clay Pitts Park. This included sports sessions and outdoor events. Collaboration with partners has also contributed to the improvements delivered in the park, with LESS agreeing to support the Hub to build a compost area in the park. The Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group is also collaborating with The Bay, a local partnership project in Morecambe Bay between the NHS, the Eden Project and The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside. Further partnership activity is illustrated in the case study over page.

3.3.4 Challenges Faced

Despite its achievements, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park and the Hub Facilitator encountered substantive challenges in establishing the Green Community Hub, in particular, the persistence of anti-social behaviour.

Group members and the Facilitator described residents' concerns around anti-social behaviour stemming from a lack of prior maintenance or well-lit space within the park. Additionally, Group members suggested that because there was little known about the park by the local authority and police, it was difficult for the Group to identify how they could proceed with their proposed plans.

'There's an awful building in the park that is boarded up and people kept trying to break into it. It was a challenge to work with the council to identify who owned that and how we could sort it out.' **Friends of Clay Pitts Park member**

In April 2023, an anti-social incident occurred whereby individuals removed the bark from tree trunks, resulting in the trees having to be felled. This incident was upsetting for the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group due to the work they had put in to make the park a nice space for the community. As a result of tensions after this incident, the group disbanded.

However, as a result of the Hub Facilitator's persistence and ongoing engagement with local residents, a new committee was ratified in May 2023. This Group, and the Facilitator, continued to engage with local police services and deliver activity within the Hub. Over time, ongoing activity delivery and improved relationships with the local police service has ensured that the efforts of the Group have been realised. This is evidenced within a report provided by a police officer visiting the Hub in August 2023:

'On the 23rd of August I attended Clay Pitts Park at Morecambe to address ongoing anti-social behaviour at the park with one problematic location in the park. It was clear from visiting the park the large amount of work which had taken place – the park was clean and tidy and had clear signs of ownership with wildflower beds, benches, and the park was busy with youths and families playing.' **Police Report, August 2023**

Overcoming the challenges at the Clay Pitts Park Hub required consistent and regular activities to build trust with local residents, and persistent engagement with the local police, which highlighted the importance of building trust and addressing safety concerns within the community. As of April 2024, it has also been agreed that the trees felled will now be made into a bench that will be placed in the park.

When asked to reflect on any other challenges faced, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members and Hub Facilitator reported that limited time to develop the Hub from scratch has been a key issue. As the Hub was new at the beginning of the Pilot, it was understood that it had to develop new partnerships quickly to ensure it could be sustained post-funding. Whilst this has been a considerable challenge for the Group and Facilitator, effective and strong partnerships have developed over the course of the 18-months.

3.4 Impact

The Clay Pitts Park Hub has had a positive impact on nature, on local residents, on volunteers and on local organisations. This is explored in detail below.

Across the lifetime of the Hub, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group, other local residents and organisations have undertaken a range of nature-based activity. This has included:

- Environmental improvements to 800 square metres of public park,
- Planting 2,500 bulbs and 17 trees across six events,
- The creation of two wildlife native meadows,
- New birdboxes installed in the trees,
- Interpretation boards installed on planting and supporting local nature and biodiversity,
- The creation of a new community garden with 4 large, raised beds for growing food and plants,
- Planting perimeter hedge around the park and an additional native hedge on one side of the park running to the dyke, and
- Nine litter picking sessions.

The Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group and the Hub Facilitator suggested that the positive impact on nature and biodiversity will strengthen year on year due to the physical improvements made to the site. In particular, partners and the Facilitator highlighted the activity creating a wildlife corridor through establishing a meadow area for native plants.

Supporting local residents to learn about food growing and composting was also highlighted as key to supporting food security and biodiversity on site. This knowledge sharing also improved volunteers' and local residents' understanding and awareness of nature and how their actions may contribute to the long-term impact on nature.

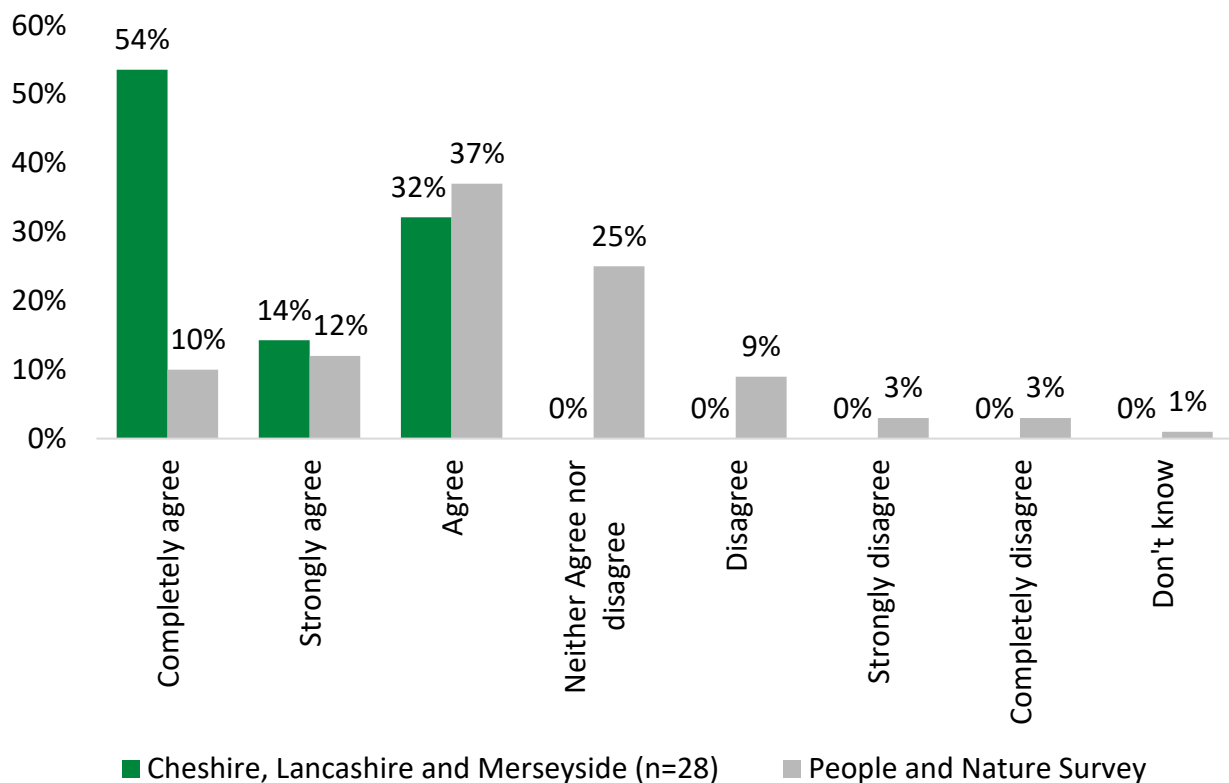
'I have learnt a lot. I can definitely plant better! [Without this project] I would never have known how to plant a hedge. I am very excited to see the plants develop and flower.'

Friends of Clay Pitts Park member

'I have learned a lot about the nature in Morecambe.' Local Resident

As illustrated in Figure 3.2 below, all local residents and volunteers agreed that they felt connected to nature as a result of the Clay Pitts Park Hub activity. This indicates that a considerably higher proportion of Green Community Hub local residents and volunteers feel connected to nature compared to those surveyed in the People and Nature Survey, which aimed to depict a representative sample across England. It is important to acknowledge that due to the small sample size, this only provides a snapshot of the impact the Clay Pitts Park Hub has provided to local residents. It is, however, positive and suggests there is a link between engaging with Green Community Hubs and feeling connected to nature.

Figure 3.2: Following participation in the Hub, to what extent do you agree with the statement 'I feel part of nature'



Source: Wavehill Participant survey (n=28) and People and Nature Survey April 2022 to March 2023 (n=24,987)

Qualitative feedback from within the survey also indicated that local residents felt more connected to nature as a result of their engagement with the Hub:

‘Being able to appreciate green spaces allowed me to see how connected humans are to nature!’ **Local Resident**

Delivering positive impacts for local residents is one of the successes of the Hub, with improved footfall to the site and increased use considered by the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members and the Hub Facilitator to be a positive impact.

‘It inspired me to do more for the local area!’ **Local Resident**

A Group member suggested that there has been a considerable transformation from the perspective of local residents, with the ongoing use of the site creating a circle of continued use.

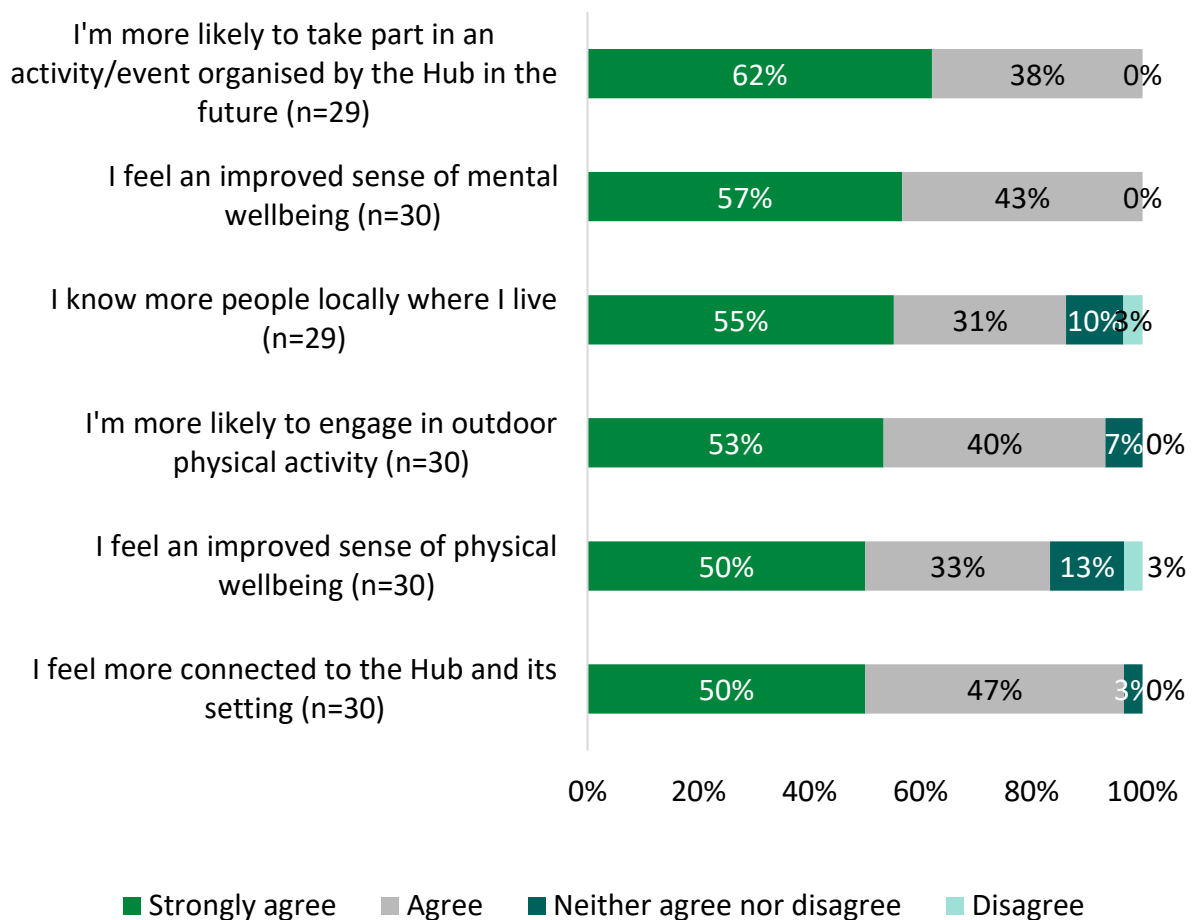
‘It’s gone from a place on its knees to a place people are using. Children are playing there that previously didn't or didn't feel safe to be there and there are better facilities now for them to use.’ **Friends of Clay Pitts Park member**

Figure 3.3 over page sets out the self-reported changes experienced by individuals following engagement with the Clay Pitts Park Hub. This demonstrates the positive impact the Hub has had on local residents. In particular, all respondents agreed that Hub activity has had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing, the likelihood that they will engage with outdoor physical activity and their connection to the Hub and its setting.

‘Today has helped me relax, life has been a bit hectic recently and I nearly didn't come to this activity today, glad I came.’ **Local Resident**

‘It was a mess but is now improving thanks to the friends and volunteers.’ **Local Resident**

Figure 3.3: Changes experienced by local residents and volunteers following engagement with hubs



Source: Wavehill Participant Survey. Total response for each question are displayed per statement.

The majority of surveyed local residents and volunteers (86%; 25/29) also stated that they are more satisfied with their local area as a place to live as a result of the Clay Pitts Park Hub. When asked why this was the case, respondents most commonly said the Hub has worked to improve local facilities and reduce anti-social behaviour.

‘It makes my area better.’ **Local Resident**

‘It’s improving the local park, reducing anti-social behaviour.’ **Local Resident**

‘Beautiful.’ **Local Resident**

Feedback from the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group members also indicated that support from Groundwork to establish their Green Community Hub has allowed them to learn new skills related to planting and growing and competencies related to group governance. This, alongside the tangible impact of their efforts to improve Clay Pitts Park has resulted, Group members suggested, in improved confidence and community spirit.

‘[There is] much better community spirit- neighbours that never used to speak are now engaging with each other. I’m also much more confident in dealing with different organisations now.’ **Friends of Clay Pitts Park member**

3.5 Sustainability and Next Steps

As a result of the Pilot, the Clay Pitts Park Hub and the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group have established strong partnerships that did not exist before the project. This has supported their ongoing engagement with local charities, green organisations, statutory services, the local authority and police.

The Hub Facilitator emphasised that skills sharing and capacity building within the community was a key strength of the approach taken. Through various activities, volunteers gained experience in gardening, maintenance tasks, and event organisation, contributing to the sustainable upkeep of the park. The Hub Facilitator gave the example of undertaking administrative tasks associated with governance and risk assessments alongside members of the Friends of Clay Pitts Group, so that they move towards taking on this responsibility and understand how to do this in the future.

A key success of the Hub was that consideration of the sustainability of activities was developed into the delivery of activities, including through the establishment and upskilling of the Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group and the investment in equipment to facilitate the long term maintenance of the site. Hub volunteers noted that the positive impacts on the site will create a legacy for the Hub, as they anticipate that local residents will now take greater pride and care over the park when flowers bloom in the spring.

‘We've put organisations in touch with the friends group so when we move away they can continue to develop new opportunities and activities, which is the ultimate legacy really.’

Hub Facilitator

‘If we see more colour and bulbs sprouting this year, we can do more next year. It has given us the ideas to be able to make the park nicer and now we can maintain it on our own – we’ve now got purpose to deliver the park without fear.’ **Hub Volunteer**

Looking forward, the Friends of Clay Pitts Park plan to complete the build of a new community garden with 4 large, raised beds for growing food and plants. This will include 12 apple and cherry trees to be planted in the park. The Hub is working with community members to plan and build the garden. The Bay Blueprint for Recovery will also be undertaking the ongoing growing and maintenance of the beds with the 'Friends of' Group.

A celebration event was held in April 2024 to officially open the community garden. The Group and Lancaster City Council are planning to create more native meadows in 2024 to flower during the summer. This, it is hoped, will encourage local residents to continue engaging with the Hub and will demonstrate the ongoing positive work volunteers are doing on the site.

The Hub is currently also planning a new cultural, history project of the park and surrounding area. This will include engaging with local residents to present their memories of the area through time and examine the history and cultural life of the park. This will include a photography exhibition celebrating local fishing families, the entertainment industry and the working history of the area. The Friends of Clay Pitts Park are also planning to work with the council to secure more funding for the park including lighting and sports equipment.

4. Groundwork Greater Manchester

Impact Summary

The West Gorton Community Park Green Hub has:

- Held 65 events in total representing 1,692 engagements with participants.⁸
- Contributed 334 volunteering hours across 60 volunteering opportunities.
- Worked with 32 local partners to deliver activities and improve coordination across community groups
- Delivered physical improvements including installing a sensory garden and developing a tree trail.
- Generated a considerable volume of match funding including £10,695 directly for the Hub and £19,794 indirectly through member organisations for activity within West Gorton.

The Greater Manchester Green Community Hub is situated at West Gorton Community Park, an innovative 'sponge' park which opened in 2020. The park was part of the GrowGreen Horizon 2020 research project testing out how nature-based solutions can help alleviate flooding, reduce heat stress, improve biodiversity and increase people's health and wellbeing. Through the Pilot, Hub Facilitators looked to ensure that local residents have a say in the design of the park so it is able to meet their needs. Facilitators also set up a Friends of West Gorton Community Park Group to support with managing and coordinating events on the site.

West Gorton Community Park was selected to be a Green Community Hub as it was high on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and had a diverse community of residents who lived close to the park but who, staff reported, did not always use the greenspace. Staff also suggested that the park was selected because there are not many facilities locally where people can come together but lots of appetite for activity and provision. As a key area of greenspace in an otherwise densely populated urban area, staff identified the important opportunity for developing a Green Community Hub on the site.

4.1 Governance

As Friends of West Gorton Community Park were only established for 3 months before the beginning of the Green Hubs Programme, and had not been part of a committee before, the group had further training and support needs. The Hub Coordinators suggested setting up a steering group for the Green Hub, consisting of partners operating in West Gorton.

⁸ Please note that engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities may include the same individuals more than once.

Due to the existence of a West Gorton steering group in previous years, it was agreed the council would facilitate this group, with Groundwork Greater Manchester and Friends of West Gorton Park as contributing partners.

In the first year of the project, two members of the Friends Group stepped down due to family responsibilities. Further members were then sought out and with the support of the Hub Facilitator, the Friends of West Gorton Community Park Group were ratified by an AGM in July 2023. The committee has since played a pivotal role in the governance of the site, demonstrating a growing autonomy and capability in delivering activities. This included bringing in additional members, developing training opportunities and establishing relevant policies.

In addition to the Northern Network funding, the Hub was able to secure additional funding for a range of programmes and activities. This included direct match funding of £10,695 for specific activities led by the Hub, and a further £19,794 which can be indirectly attributed to the Hub. This demonstrates the value of the Hub in creating opportunities within the local area. Match funding included the following:

Direct match funding

- £4,300 Green Social Prescribing Pilot, Natural England (2023)
- £4,995 for Nature Buddies Scheme, Natural England (2024)
- £1,400 – Corporate support

Indirect match funding

- £5,005 – for Green Yoga Collective through Wild Isles
- £10,000 – RHS grant for Armitage School
- £4789 – raised by the Friends of West Gorton Park Group

4.2 Engagement and Implementation

As part of the community-led approach to the delivery of the Hub, a range of consultation sessions were held across the community. These consultation sessions were designed to find out what people would like to see in terms of activities and improvements to the park and formed the basis of the delivery of activities. After the initial phase, continuous feedback was gathered via the Friends Group to shape activities, events, and physical enhancements people would like to see.

Activities to engage the community have been diverse and tailored to reach different demographics. This included speaking to people across the community, gathering views, sharing posters and leaflets, utilising social media and Eventbrite. The establishment of a notice board in the park was noted by the Hub Facilitator as a means of enhancing visibility for local residents and accessibility. With the achievements of the Hub growing over the delivery period, there was a recognition that the activities were drawing interest from a wider area. Whilst this was positive, the notice board was a means to ensure the engagement of residents who were immediately local.

The engagement approach also recognised the need to bring together residents who had lived in the area for a long time with newer members of the local community. This is further discussed in [Section 4.3.6](#) in relation to the challenges encountered by the Hub.

4.3 Delivery

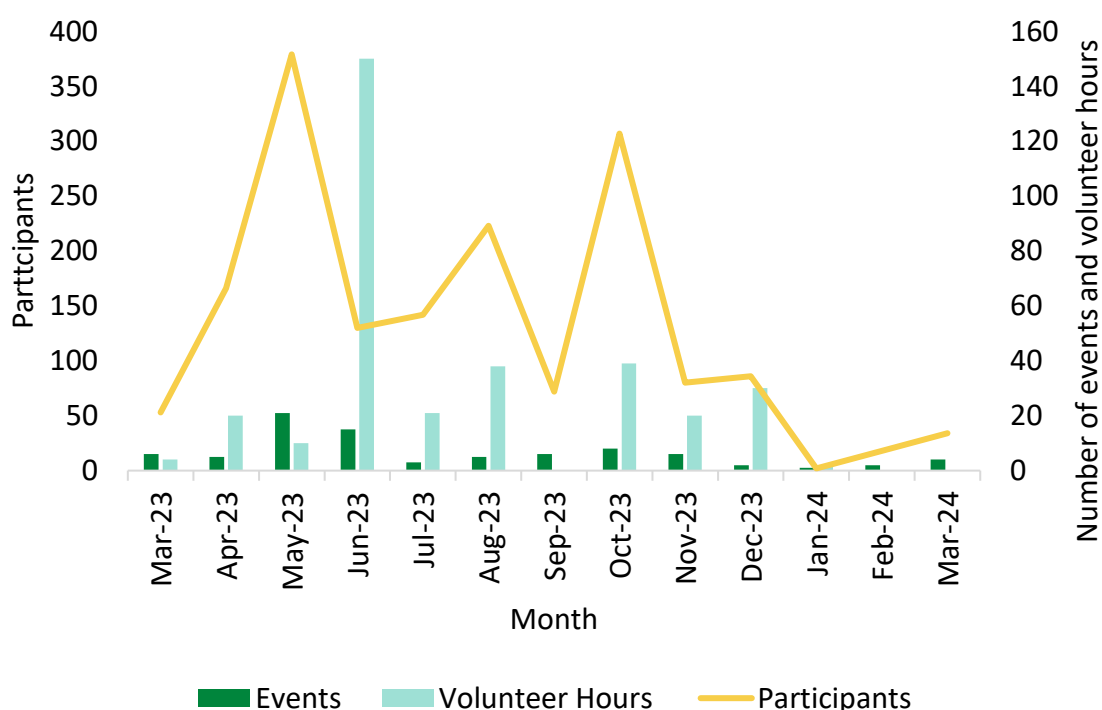
This sub-section explores the range of activity delivered via the West Gorton Community Park Hub throughout the Pilot. This includes an overview of all activity, the perceived strengths of the Hub delivery model and the challenges faced.

4.3.1 Overview

Figure 4.1 sets out the engagement from participants with the Hub, showing a peak in events and engagement during the late spring and early summer, and a rise in volunteer time during the autumn. This additional volunteer time can be attributed to the installation of the sensory garden in the summer, the start of the gardening project in the autumn, and the additional members elected to the Friends committee in July

In total, 65 events were held representing 1,692 engagements with participants. Additionally, 334 volunteering hours were contributed to the Hub across 60 volunteering opportunities.⁹

Figure 4.1: Engagement with the GCHs in Greater Manchester, March 23-March 24



Source: Groundwork Monitoring Information

⁹ Please note that engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities may include the same individuals more than once.

Overall, the Hub in Greater Manchester ran the following events:

- **28 one-off events**, including Easter, Diwali, Halloween and Christmas events, sports days, Green Social Prescribing activity and nature-based activity days;
- **3 regular indoor activities**, predominantly funding drop-in sessions and training;
- **34 regular outdoor activities** which entailed community growing and gardening sessions and mental health and wellbeing sessions.
- **19 external member events**, led by the University of Manchester, Manchester City Council, Keep Britain Tidy, and other local groups.

The section below sets out further detail on the activities delivered throughout the Pilot.

4.3.2 Activity Detail

The delivery of activities has been responsive to community input and priorities from the outset, with the Friends of West Gorton Community Park running regular seasonal events at the park for the local community. The Chair of the Friends of West Gorton Community Park Committee noted the large reach of these events and the success in engaging families, highlighting the demand this demonstrates for this type of activity.

Local residents were incredibly positive about these events, particularly highlighting the opportunity to connect with other local residents and provide a safe place for children to play outside.

‘It was nice to meet new people and get to know more going on in the area.’ **Local Resident**

‘[My favourite part is] seeing kids having fun.’ – **Local Resident**

‘[I enjoy taking part because] being with other people is therapeutic, no stress.’ – **Local Resident**

In addition to seasonal events, the Hub supported a regular gardening group to get volunteers together to look after the sensory garden and to carry out wider nature-based activities on the site. The Hub Facilitator noted that the gardening group had experienced variation in engagement across the seasons, as they struggled with having a sheltered space in the park. However, those who did attend provided positive feedback, suggesting that a sense of ownership over the space and satisfaction in planting from bulbs was the highlight of the garden group activities.

‘[My favourite part is] growing my own plants, planting them.’ **Local Resident**

The Friends of West Gorton Community Park were successful in securing £1,000 from the Greater Manchester parks team to put towards the development of a sensory garden, which is the first sensory garden to be opened in the City of Manchester (out of 447 parks).

Following feedback from local residents that they could not identify the tree species in the park, tree identification signage has been added across the park, with a tree map and walk created as a resource. This demonstrates the iterative approach to the delivery of activities, which was responsive to the abilities and commitment of volunteers as well as understanding how running events on site worked in practice.

‘We’ve been trying to spread out the work amongst the group and get other volunteers to help, the events are ambitious so it’s important to get more support. It’s been a journey of testing out what works for the park and for the volunteers and staff.’ **Hub Facilitator**

Activity Example: The Big Green Autumn Festival

The Big Green Autumn Festival in November was held at the park, with a range of members and local organisations invited to run stalls, host activities and network with other attendees. Attendees included several community organisations from Greater Manchester, local residents, and representatives from the local authority Parks Team.

The event was a great opportunity to come together with other local green community organisations and meet members of the Groundwork and Northern Network team. There was an opportunity to explore stalls, take a tour of the park and get stuck into some practical workshops, including planting plug plants and creating bird feeders out of natural materials.

Attendees provided positive feedback for the day, including:

‘We enjoyed making the bird feeders and [the Hub Facilitator] explaining how a tree trail could work.’

‘[It made me feel] amazing with shared vision and ideas.’

As part of the relationship building with local organisations and the delivery of programmes of activities through match funding, the Hub delivered a social prescribing programme in partnership with the local GP practice. This made an important contribution to building better relationships with the local health sector and widened the reach of the Hub. It also connected together people who felt isolated and unable to engage in larger community events.

Additional Green Community Hub activity detail is provided in the case study below.

Case study: West Gorton Community Park Green Community Hub

Based in Greater Manchester, West Gorton Community Park is a thriving hub for people and nature. This case study delves into the Park's innovative features and the range of benefits it brings to the community; the Park includes a paved area for community events, a wildflower area, a tree trail, play areas, raised beds for growing food, and a sensory garden.

Nature-based solutions

West Gorton Community Park was established as a Pilot study, showcasing the integration of nature-based solutions as part of a push for healthier, more liveable cities. It illustrates how green spaces can be transformed to enhance urban resilience, manage floods, and contribute to climate change mitigation. The Park also serves as a model for scalable solutions, demonstrating how its principles can be applied on a smaller scale in various urban settings. The Park's



unique design provides an effective mechanism for flood management using a sustainable drainage system to prevent water run-off. This works by channelling excess water from the roadsides which flows through into the Park, collecting in a swale. During heavy rainfall, the swale fills up, effectively holding and slowing down the waterflow. The swale also features resilient vegetation capable of adapting to diverse temperatures and weather conditions which helps to stabilize the banks of the swale and support the absorption of water.

This mechanism alleviates pressure on local sewerage systems. Through these interventions, the Park holds an impressive 98% of the water that enters the site, underscoring its substantial impact on flood prevention.

The Park also features permeable paving which also prevents runoff and allows water to filter through and be collected underneath. The clever layering and design of the Park ensures efficient water distribution to support plants. This integrated approach enhances the sustainability and functionality of the green space.

Friends of West Gorton Community Park

Groundwork supported the establishment of a 'Friends of West Gorton Community Park' group to empower local residents to manage the Park themselves. A group of highly-engaged volunteers, the 'Friends of' group run events throughout the year for local children and support with the maintenance of the site. This includes the opening of a brand-new sensory garden, which is the first sensory garden to be opened in the City of Manchester (out of 447 parks!).



Community Events

As both a hub for nature and people, the community park hosts a range of events, including the Big Green Autumn Festival in November.

The festival was a great opportunity to come together with other local green community organisations and meet members of the Groundwork and Northern Network team. There was an opportunity to explore stalls, take a tour of the Park and get stuck into some practical workshops, including planting plug plants and creating bird feeders out of natural materials.

Future and legacy

The nature-based solutions in the Park will continue to be monitored and contribute to wider research as to how this type of green infrastructure works in practice. Equally, after several local residents said they did not know what the trees in the Park were, the Community Hub is in the process of establishing way-markers to help visitors to the Park identify the tree species. This includes a QR code with more detailed information which will help give visitors to the Park a greater knowledge of the nature on their doorstep. The design of the posts was made to prevent vandalism or damage, which will leave an important legacy of the Community Hub for the long-term.

Now the 'Friends of' group is established, it will continue to be sustained by the committee and local residents. The group has several community events planned including the switch-on of the Christmas lights, as well as the ongoing delivery of group sessions such as the Mini Park Rangers and the monthly gardening sessions.

The Hub has recently been awarded funding from Natural England to deliver a Nature Buddies scheme which will train individuals in the community to help deliver green social prescribing activities in the community park.

4.3.3 Partnership Activity

Working alongside local partner organisations has been key to the success of the Hub, ensuring that its activities work alongside community organisations. Overall, 32 partners have collaborated with the Hub, including:

- Armitage Primary School
- Bennett Street TRA
- Biffa
- Gorton Central
- Gorton Horticultural Society
- Manchester Museum
- Ardwick Climate Action
- Ardwick Green Spaces Network
- Clowes Street TRA
- Cycling UK
- Diocese of Salford
- Friends of the Earth
- Friends of West Gorton Park
- Greater Manchester Police
- Gorton Monastery
- Greater Manchester Women's Support Alliance
- Green Yoga Collective
- Guinness partnership
- Healthy Me Healthy Communities
- Manchester City Council
- Natural England
- Northern Roots
- Reach Community Garden
- Royal Horticultural Society
- Sustainable Northmoor Urban Growers (SNUG)
- Tesco
- The Orchard Project
- Thriving Together CIC
- University of Manchester
- West Gorton Community Centre
- West Gorton Community Forum
- West Gorton Medical Centre

4.3.4 Successes

A key strength was the commitment to empowering the Friends of West Gorton Community Park Group to plan and manage activities independently, with commitments to hyperlocal and community-led activities which are inclusive of all communities. The work of the Group was recognised through several local award nominations, including the Chair winning a Community Champion Award.

Another success has been the scale and range of match funding which has been accessed to be able to run a range of additional activities for example, The Green Yoga Collective and school gardening clubs. This not only provided much-needed funding for delivery activities but also contributed to the sustainability of Hub activities.

The number of families and local residents getting involved with events held at the Hub was impressive, and demonstrated clear demand for family activities. The range of learning opportunities provided by the Hub also provided positive outcomes for those attending, including establishing a permanent tree trail, planting sessions and willow weaving training.

4.3.5 Challenges

Challenges for the Greater Manchester Hub have included the absence of sheltered spaces on the site and securing the relevant permissions for some of the physical improvements. Staff noted that once there was a park ranger in place from the local council, they were able to build momentum more easily.

Another challenge was managing the volume of attendees for some of the larger community events. Due to the popularity of the events, both staff and volunteers are conscious of the need to ensure local residents attend and feel included. The scale of these events also presented a challenge in terms of collecting evaluation data to determine the potential impacts on attendees.

Staff also suggested that the dynamics of bringing together both older and newer residents has been a key challenge throughout delivery. To overcome this, the Hub Facilitator noted that a range of advertising methods, including both online and hyperlocal face-to-face, helped ensure a balance of attendees to events.

‘People have got to know it now so they come from further afield for events so it's not just the locals that always engage. It's a balance of how it's advertised so it is local residents mostly that can attend.’ **Hub Facilitator**

Whilst a key success has been the establishment of the Friends of West Gorton Community Park, staff highlighted that ongoing support from Groundwork was needed throughout. Some committee members stepped back from their roles part way through the process, and separately some community tensions made partnership working challenging at times. Whilst it was recognised that this is not uncommon for community work, it demonstrated the important role of a paid Hub Facilitator in providing continuity and capacity.

Finally, whilst attendance at one-off events was strong, volunteers noted that establishing regular volunteers for planting activities had been challenging, with sufficient attendees to complete the activities but with engagement typically on a one-off basis.

4.4 Impact

West Gorton Green Community Hub had a positive impact on nature, on local residents, on volunteers and on local organisations. Further detail can be found below.

The **impact on nature** at the site centres around improvements made by the gardening group and the installation of the sensory garden. This included hedge planting, bulb planting and food growing on site, as well as bulb, seed and herb planting with local residents for them to take home. The park itself was established as a climate resilient park and was designed with biodiversity in mind, as a result, there were not significant natural improvements needed for the park. In addition, activities supporting greater connection to nature may provide greater indirect benefits for nature in the longer term. Activity connecting people to nature included a wide range of activity which may benefit nature, for example, tree walks, opportunities to engage with the sensory garden, community events hosted at the park, and the 'Bio Blitz.'

The impact on local residents has been wide-ranging, with several participants saying that meeting new people was their favourite thing about the activities they participated in.

'I enjoy meeting local residents in the community.' **Local Resident**

'[My favourite part is] meeting new people, I'm shy and don't get out much.' **Local Resident**

'I love being out in the fresh air meeting people.' **Local Resident**

The Hub Facilitator also emphasised that the support from and environment fostered by Groundwork has had a positive impact on individuals in the Gardening and Social Prescribing Groups' wellbeing. The Facilitator highlighted that this positive environment encouraged individuals to feel safe.

'It's walking distance from my house...I receive support from others and I also give support to them too.' **Local Resident**

'The social prescribing has been lovely and feedback was about meeting new people who are going through similar things, sharing stories.' **Hub Facilitator**

More detail on the Green Social Prescribing Programme can be found in the case study over page.

Case study: Green Social Prescribing Programme

The West Gorton Community Green Hub held a Test and Learn green social prescribing research pilot at the start of the project. This enabled Hub staff to explore how to best work with the health sector and create a green social prescribing programme that suited local needs. Following this, Hub Facilitators set up an Autumn programme of 6 sessions between September – November where people were referred in by the local West Gorton Medical Centre. In total, 10 unique individuals attended the sessions. 8 joined for two or more sessions

This is a new partnership alongside West Gorton Medical Centre, due to the Test and Learn pilot with the practice earlier in the year. Hub staff reported that they previously had a relationship with the centre, however, this had been lost to a change in staff. Through this project, Hub staff have been able to reconnect with the centre and rebuild a relationship with the new practice manager.

As a result of the sessions, participants were able to meet new people, share their stories, hobbies, passions with others, learn about growing and plants and spend time in nature. All participants reported that the activities made them feel ‘quite happy’ or ‘very happy’ and many were disappointed that the sessions were coming to a close, registering interest in future projects in the area.

‘To be with other people is therapeutic, no stress’ **Local resident**

‘I receive support and ideas from others, and I also give support to them too’ Local resident

‘Fun, learn new things, meet new people’ **Local resident**

‘Get to know more things going on in my area’ **Local resident**

‘Good to interact with people and make friends with people from other backgrounds’ **Local resident**

A mother and daughter who regularly attended the sessions reported that the sessions really helped them to get out of the house and that they enjoyed applying their new green skills at home. The daughter, a wheelchair user, enjoyed making seed bombs and was able to take them home to grow flowers in their garden from her wheelchair.

The wider impact on local residents can be seen through strong attendance at community events, particularly during festivals such as Easter, Halloween, Diwali, and the Christmas lights switch-on. Volunteers suggested there were upwards of 100 people, local families and residents, attending some of these events, and there are likely to be positive outcomes relating to community-level wellbeing effects and feelings of belonging from these events.

For individuals who attended events or participated in activities, all individuals who responded to our survey agreed to a certain extent with the statement ‘I feel part of nature’. This demonstrates how access to green space has contributed to individuals’ perceptions of feeling connected to nature. It is important to note that due to the small sample size, this only provides a snapshot of the impact the West Gorton Community Park Hub has provided to local residents. It is, however, positive and suggests there is a link between engaging with Green Community Hubs and feeling connected to nature.

Volunteers who engaged with the Greater Manchester Green Community Hub gained knowledge and skills in managing the site, running events, and accessing funding. The Hub Facilitator highlighted that through volunteering with the Hub, some of the volunteers at the Friends of West Gorton Park Group are more active and engaged with their wider community and stakeholders. Notably, the Chairperson of the Group won an award for contributions to the community due to their involvement in the project.

‘[The Friends of West Gorton Park] are now engaging more with local MPs, stakeholders etc. That’s an ongoing relationship and makes them feel they have more of a voice on other issues too.’ **Hub Facilitator.**

Wider local organisations have also benefitted from engagement with the Green Community Hub. Groundwork funded The Green Yoga Collective to run taster sessions in response to the community’s ask for outdoor exercise opportunities, and then supported them in finding further funding to run a full programme with a group of migrant women from the local area. The Hub Facilitators noted that other partners, such as Manchester City Council and Thriving Together CIC, will continue to run their activities at the site.

4.5 Sustainability and Next Steps

Efforts to secure additional funding and support, such as through local businesses and fundraising workshops, indicate a commitment to achieving longer-term sustainability amongst Friends of West Gorton Park Group. Confirmed funding includes:

- £26k over 3 years through the Friends of the Earth Postcode Gardener project – employing a local person as a local gardener to enhance 50 greenspaces across the postcodes centred in West Gorton and Belle Vue.
- £30k for a youth environmental action programme which is in the scoping phase.

The involvement of new committee members and the increasing autonomy of the Group further contribute to the project's sustainability and organisational resilience. Due to positive engagement with other local stakeholders, Manchester City Council and neighbourhoods' teams committed to running events and facilitating others to do so at the Hub on an ongoing basis.

Equally, the physical aspects of the delivery will continue to provide benefit to the local communities. For example, the permanent Christmas tree will save money through not having to replace this every year, whilst the notice board and sensory garden tree trail will continue to be in place for ongoing learning and sharing of opportunities.

Through the match funding generated through the Hub, activities will continue to be run on site, including the Green Yoga Collective programme for women who have migrated to the UK and the Nature Buddies wellbeing programme which will run during the summer of 2024.

5. Groundwork North East & Cumbria

Impact Summary

The Workington Green Community Hub has:

- Held 143 events representing 1,685 engagements with participants.
- Involved the contribution of 243 volunteering hours to the Hub across 40 volunteering opportunities.¹⁰
- Worked with 22 partner organisations supporting co-delivery of project activities and through local networks.
- Delivered nature based activity including the co-development of 3 new garden areas in the town centre: Bee Happy Garden, Sensory Garden, Yoga Garden and support for the Grow Well Community Garden.
- Generated £10,798 match funding through additional national and local grant schemes

Groundwork North East & Cumbria launched the **Workington Green Community Hub** in mid-September 2022 with a partnership and community event, inviting the community to share ideas about how they could shape their Hub. The area was chosen to be a Green Community Hub, staff said, as it is a deprived area with some wards featuring high on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. It was also identified that people did not access local green space on their doorstep for a range of reasons, including a lack of awareness of the space, physical and mental health concerns, a lack of transport access and the cost of transport.

5.1 Governance

To ensure the activities of the Hub were rooted in the needs of the local community, a steering group was developed with a range of stakeholders who helped to identify gaps and develop ideas for new projects. The steering group included local partners from different sectors including local authorities, churches, third sector organisations and other local businesses.

The Hub also generated a range of additional match funding, including two Natural England Green Community Hub Fund grants (£9,998 total) as well as £400 funding from the Cumbria Youth Alliance.

5.2 Engagement and Implementation

Following the launch event for the Hub, once projects were identified and events activities were organised, the Hub Facilitators used a range of methods to spread the word about the Hub, including via a social media presence, leaflet drops, and a growing network built through word of mouth.

¹⁰ Please note that since the majority of the activities were regular session, engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities are likely to include the same individuals more than once.

While certain areas, like the town centre, saw success in engagement, the North side of town was more challenging due to the general distrust of organisations. Additional funding from Natural England facilitated community events tailored to feedback, resulting in regular attendance and a more diverse participation base.

The Hub also worked with local members to create momentum for the Hub, including advertisements on local radio (BBC Radio Cumbria) and working in collaboration with Workington Town Council who displayed information about the events on their electronic advertising board in the town centre. As a result of this partnership working and through engagement with stakeholders on the steering group, the Hub built a 'green hub' network of partners and sent emails relating to events and activities so that they could share with their contacts.

5.3 Delivery

This sub-section explores the range of activity delivered via the Workington Hub throughout the Pilot. This includes an overview of all activity, the perceived strengths of the Hub delivery model and the challenges faced.

5.3.1 Overview

Delivery at the Green Community Hub encompassed a mix of indoor and outdoor activities, including regular sessions of art, gardening and woodwork, with children from local primary schools, on sustainability at local colleges, community learning, and a wildlife club. Some of these activities are facilitated by the Hub staff, whilst others are delivered by partner organisations in collaboration with Hub staff.

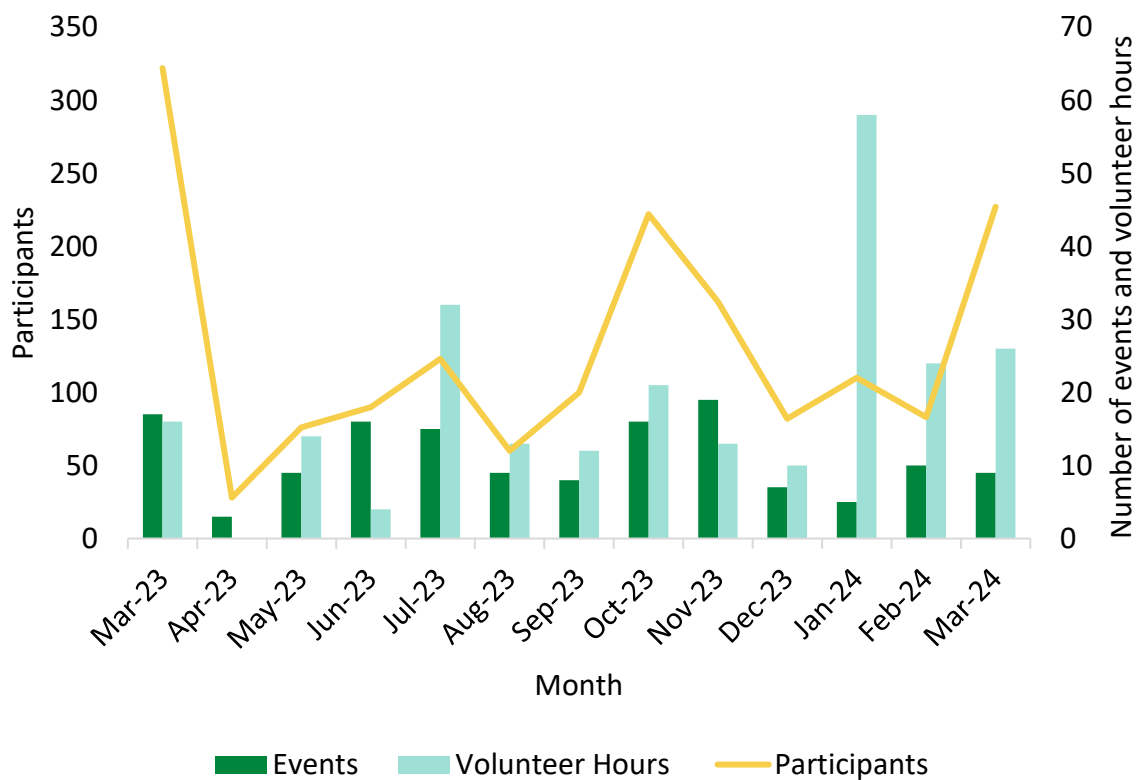
Figure 5.1 over page sets out the engagement from participants with the Hub over time, showing a peak in volunteering in July, and consistent engagement with participants between March and September. Overall, the Hub in Workington ran the following events:

- **26 one-off events**, including family days, Winter Bulb Planting, Apple Celebration Day, Laughing Yoga, Ecotherapy, Harvest Festival events and representing the Hub at other events or day festivals held across Workington;
- **58 regular indoor activities**, including regular arts and craft sessions, the mindful child programme, sustainability workshops with Lakes College, Welly Wednesdays with Victoria Infant School visits, wildlife clubs, and nature journaling sessions; and,
- **59 regular outdoor activities** which entailed community gardening sessions and wellness walks.

In total, 143 events were held representing 1,685 engagements with participants. Additionally, 243 volunteering hours were contributed to the Hub across 40 volunteering opportunities.¹¹

¹¹ Please note that since the majority of the activities were regular session, engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities are likely to include the same individuals more than once.

Figure 5.1: Engagement with the GCH North East & Cumbria, March 23-March 24



Source: Groundwork Monitoring Information

More detail on the delivery of activities can be found below.

5.3.2 Activity Detail

The main activities carried out through the Hub were through the regular gardening and crafts group, which met weekly and were hosted at the Workington Town Council Community Building which sits on the edge of one of the parks in Workington. The gardening group supported the installation and development of 3 new garden areas in the town centre: The Bee Happy Garden, The Sensory Garden and The Yoga Garden. The Bee Happy Garden involved planting ‘bee friendly’ flowers, plants, herbs and creating bird feeders as well as providing funding for a bench and engaging with local schools to create, develop and fund a garden sign.

The Hub supported the Grow Well Community Garden, providing funding for an energy assessment of the building in the garden, and a permanent screening for the building which will be used for pollinator attracting plantings and night scented plants for moths. It also increased biodiversity by creating bug hotels, dead hedging, planting hedging for wildlife, creating bee hotels and bird boxes.

The Hub also held various events at the garden to raise awareness and increase volunteer numbers and provided £5000 to Workington Town Council to retrofit the building in the garden.

‘Since I have been involved with the Green Hub I have become more confident within myself and with other people, I have also learnt new skills, such as building raised flower beds and planters, I’ve also learnt how important nature is to my wellbeing, watching the plants and flowers flourish over the past year, growing from seeds, then picking the produce. Since starting on the programme, it has given me a good reason to get out of the house and meet new people and friends.’ **Gardening Group attendee**

Those who came along regularly to the gardening group who fed back on their experience commonly reported that working as a team and meeting new people were their favourite parts of the activity they engaged with. Individuals also commonly noted the positive effects of spending time in nature on their own wellbeing. The following quotes set out examples of the feedback provided by the gardening group on their favourite part of the activity.

‘I really enjoyed coming to the Green Hub and nature themed art club as I loved being in the garden and doing the arts that I absolutely love...it made me so happy coming to the clubs and seeing everyone and making friends and it also took my mind of my ongoing pains and situations [My favourite part has been...’] **Gardening Group attendee**

‘I have been isolated for many years so joining the garden club was scary but the group is very friendly and it is really helping to improve my life.’ **Gardening Group attendee**

It was decided that the Hub’s funding pot should be allocated towards energy assessments and building renovations for a disused building which was inside the Grow Well Community Garden. This was intended to provide further space for the Green Community Hub partners to use and a space to store equipment to facilitate the ongoing delivery of the gardening group and improve the character of the park.

Other expenditures supported the development of a green map of Workington, gardening tools, a garden sign, benches and volunteer expenses.

The Hub Facilitator also carried out a range of training through the Pilot. This included training to become a ‘Master Composter’, working with Garden Organics to find a new composting demonstration site in a residential area to support more sustainable food waste disposal and to spread the message of composting at all events and activities. The Facilitator also became a ‘Climate Champion’ for CAFs and as a result was able to deliver sustainability workshops at the local college.

In addition, a community learning programme was established to deliver a wide range of education activities and training to a diverse range of members in the local community. This element of delivery was supported by Hub match-funding. The Knowledge Exchange programme gave residents from Workington Green Hub and Morecambe Bay Hub the opportunity to connect and learn new skills as well as visit different locations to gain a wider perspective of what a Green Community Hub can be.

A range of other one-off events and activities were also undertaken by volunteers alongside other local partner organisations. This included:

- Creating squirrel feeder boxes with Cumbria Wildlife Trust and installing them in a local nature reserve.
- Supporting Cumbria Wildlife Trust's squirrel conservation project by arranging awareness raising events in the local community.
- Supporting Riverside Housing with a Tree Planting event at The Backfield in Salterbeck.
- Supporting Ashfield Junior School with Tree Planting on school grounds.
- Supporting High Harrington Community Centre to put in a (successful) bid to develop a community garden, with work to be completed during summer 2024. This project has secured hedging and has helped plant it around the centre of Workington. Volunteers and local organisations have also donated a range of gardening equipment to this project.

Greater detail of activities held across Workington are illustrated in the case study over page.

Case study: Workington Green Community Hub

Based in Workington, West Cumbria, the Green Community Hub was established in August 2022. Led by a locally-based coordinator, the Hub is situated in the heart of town, close to a number of key areas of green space which form the basis of the project's activities.



Through the coordinator, the project has facilitated a number of projects which have involved local members and developed ongoing relationships with organisations including;

- Workington Town Council
- Cumbria Adult Learning
- Cumbria Youth Alliance
- Natural England

Having built a strong working relationship with the Town Council, the Hub has performed an important role in bridging the needs of local communities with the available green space and community infrastructure. This includes the development of a Bee Happy Garden, where weekly gardening sessions are held and facilitated by the Hub manager.

In addition, the project is in the process of organising a schedule of nature-themed educational activities, training, and courses for 5 local communities around Workington, involving over 16 different member organisations.

Partnerships

Partners highlighted the significance of meaningful community involvement in the project's development, with the Hub already providing continuity and a point of contact. It also showcases the benefits of pooling resources and fostering partnerships to create a more impactful project.

The level of engagement of people in the community demonstrates the value of engaging local community members in decision-making processes and co-creating solutions. As an area of high deprivation, with a number of short-term projects working in the area in recent years, stakeholders noted there is a risk of disillusionment from beneficiaries and members of the public, who are less likely to engage with a new project if they do not trust it will continue.

Project staff noted the challenge of securing long-term funding and strategies for building sustainability beyond the project's duration. Project staff are keen to train community members to ensure the continuity and growth of the community groups.

Grow Well Project

Based in Vulcan Park in Workington, Grow Well is a community garden that has been running for five years. Over the years, the community garden has faced challenges, such as a decrease in the number of volunteers, but they have also seen positive developments. They have become part of the Green Community Hub, which has brought in additional volunteers and support. The community garden has also focused on promoting biodiversity, creating wildlife-friendly spaces, and encouraging social interaction among volunteers and visitors.

The community garden has had positive feedback from both passersby and schoolchildren who have appreciated the transformation of the derelict site into a colourful and well-maintained garden. Having a regular volunteer group facilitated by the Community Hub lead was noted as a contributing factor to the success of the project – a longstanding volunteer at the garden noted that having the Hub involved contributed to the long-term running of the group.



‘The bigger picture was we were looking at how the community garden would be sustained...so it’s good from all sorts of angles that we became part of the Hub.’ **Grow Well Lead Volunteer**

Community members also mentioned the impressive work of the Green Community Hub in implementing projects such as nature walks and linking different sites in the town.

5.3.3 Successes

A key strength of the Hub is the consistency with which activities were delivered over the course of the scheme. The Hub Facilitator recognised that to build trust with local communities there was a need to demonstrate a commitment to delivering within the area over a period of time.

Additionally, the Hub successfully established relationships with local stakeholders and other community groups. Hub staff made considerable efforts to work with the existing gardening group and to build positive relationships with Workington Town Council. This has established the foundations for longer-term partnerships, post Pilot-funding.

‘We've built up a partnership network with organisations and businesses so now they deliver some of our sessions, cooking sessions and ecotherapy sessions for example. Those links weren't there before this, or were existing but have grown a lot.’ **Hub Facilitator**

In addition, the creation of the steering group with partners from different sectors was an enabler of this success, ensuring decisions were led by local community members and that local stakeholders also had a voice. Due to the success of the Hub, volunteers were asked to present and showcase the Hub at various big events, including at the local university, at community festivals such as Whitehaven Pride Festival, Reach Out Festival, Festival of Nature, and Cultural Bazaar. The Hub has also become a valued member of multiple networks, such as Cumbria Sustainability Network, Cumbria People in Nature Network, and the Food Sustainability Network.

The partners for the Hub are outlined below:

- Active Cumbria
- Cumberland Council
- Cumbria Action for Sustainability
- Cumbria County Council Food Waste Services
- Cumbria CVS
- Workington Library
- West Cumbria Rivers Trust
- Cumbria Wildlife Trust
- Cumbria Youth Alliance
- Escape Education
- Forestry England
- Garden Organics
- Grow Well
- Helen’s Herbs
- iCan Health and Wellbeing
- Mindful Guru
- National Trust- Wild Ennerdale
- Nirvora Wellbeing
- North West Mental Health
- Northside Community Centre
- Outdoor Partnership
- Restart Project
- Riverside Housing
- Together We
- Workington Town Council

5.3.4 Challenges

Building trust and overcoming apathy within some areas of the town required persistent effort. It was noted that getting the word out and promoting the Hub in the early stages of the project was challenging and took considerable time. Equally, time constraints emerged as a significant challenge due to limited capacity before additional staff were onboarded.

Staff also suggested that keeping on top of social media and trying to continuously promote Hub activity whilst also delivering activities presented challenges. On an operational level, finding ‘free’ land to create a community orchard and securing the relevant permissions on sites was also challenging.

5.4 Impact

The Hub Facilitator highlighted several improvements for nature or biodiversity as a result of Green Community Hub activity. Activity within the Grow Well Community Garden was focussed on habitat creation. This included building bird boxes, bee hotels, bug hotels, planting hedge saplings, installing trailing arch, building and installing hanging baskets. In the Bee Happy Garden, activity included planting bulbs and creating bird feeders as well as raising awareness of the garden and working with a local school to develop a welcome sign. Overall, activity has environmentally improved 605 square metres of land across Workington.

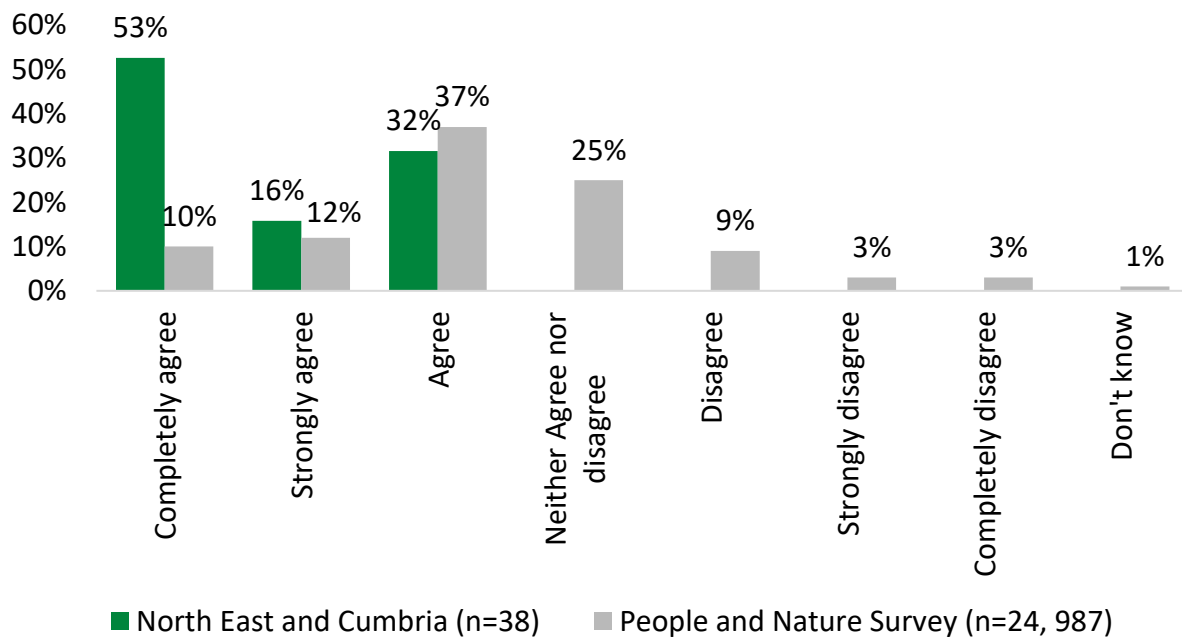
For local residents, the impact on individual wellbeing and feelings of belonging were highlighted by the Hub Facilitator as important, alongside improved access to green space. Staff found that those who attended activities demonstrated a deeper connection to the local community and to other members within the local community.

‘We aren’t a professional support service but by attending regular sessions participants have reported an improvement in mental health and wellbeing.’ **Hub Facilitator**

‘Connecting with nature through art not gardening for example has really enabled people to access green space. Especially the art session group, they're telling us they're more aware of nature around them, more likely to take notice of it.’ **Hub Volunteer**

For individuals who attended events or participated in activities, over three-quarters ‘completely agreed’ with the statement ‘I feel part of nature’, as shown in Figure 5.2 below. This demonstrates how the consistent delivery of activities has contributed to individuals’ perceptions of feeling connected to nature. It is notable that no respondents suggested that they disagreed with this statement.

Figure 5.2: Following participation in the Hub, to what extent do you agree with the statement 'I feel part of nature'



Source: Wavehill Participant survey (n=38) and People and Nature Survey April 2022 to March 2023 (n=24,987). Please note that the Wavehill Participant survey number also includes participants who completed Natural England survey forms where measures were comparable.

This strong connection with nature was echoed by the Hub Facilitator, who experienced volunteers and participants demonstrating small behaviours which suggested improved nature connection and nature-positive behaviours. Staff noted that many of those who took part were from more traditionally underrepresented groups such as refugee and asylum seeker residents, individuals with dementia and carers, LGBTQ+, unemployed and economically inactive residents, elderly, youths, individuals with learning needs such as autism, residents from deprived areas.

'A connection to nature makes me feel good and I like connecting to other people.' Local Resident

Volunteers at the Hub noted the positive learning process they had been part of through the delivery of the Hub, with the considerable impact on their confidence.

'It has all been a learning process...at points in the weekly sessions we haven't got the knowledge for gardening so had to learn as we went.' Hub Volunteer

'I had lost my confidence before this, I wouldn't have spoken in public.' Hub Volunteer

For other local organisations, the Hub has played a Facilitator role to enable them to connect with local residents, including for the council and other organisations who run activities through the Hub. As outlined above in [Section 5.3.3 Successes](#), the Hub has had a positive effect on the networking between organisations, with the Hub Facilitator suggesting there has been improved partnership working amongst other organisations since the Hub started.

‘We've helped a lot of organisations reach their target groups. For example, the council had a target to deliver food waste workshops - we've been the link between the community and the organisations.’ **Hub Facilitator**

‘Having this meant we got more match funding to deliver learning activities which wouldn't have happened.’ **Hub Facilitator**

5.5 Sustainability and Next Steps

The legacy of the Green Community Hub can be characterised by the proactive and confident volunteers and relationships built with other local organisations, both of which will ensure the ongoing delivery of activities. For example, going forward it is anticipated that the Cumbria Wildlife Trust will continue to run Workington Wildlife Club.

Additionally, the Hub's partnership with Riverside Housing has ensured that the hedging planted will continue to be maintained. By planting trees on school grounds, the Hub has also facilitated the opportunity for school children and teachers to continue maintaining them.

The Hub's gardening group which linked up with Grow Well Community Garden will join Grow Well and will continue to volunteer with them going forward. The Hub Facilitator is also putting provision in place to ensure the nature art/journaling group will continue by ensuring procedures are in place to allow sessions to be run by volunteers.

In terms of the sustainability of nature-based improvements, the hedgerow and trees planted in various areas around Workington will continue to grow, increasing habitat for wildlife and providing a positive contribution to biodiversity. Equally, the bird boxes and squirrel feeders that were installed will continue to support species. Staff noted that Workington Nature Partnership and Cumbria Wildlife Trust will look after these in the local nature reserves going forward, and that the gardens created are open to the public and will be maintained by partners such as Workington Town Council.

From the community learning programme, local residents have had the opportunity to learn a wide range of new skills which they can apply in future. For example, Sustainability Workshops at the local college have given students tools to help reduce their carbon footprint. Cooking sustainably has given attendees knowledge on how they can grow or source local produce in their cooking. Horticulture sessions have given attendees skills in gardening which can be used in their personal lives and could also be applied in different employment settings and volunteering roles. Ecotherapy has given attendees tools for being mindful in nature and how they can manage stress and anxiety.

6. Groundwork South & North Tyneside

Impact Summary

The West Boldon Community Hub has:

- Held 159 events representing 2,396 engagements with participants.¹²
- Involved the contribution of 1,197 volunteering hours to the Hub across 113 volunteering opportunities.
- Worked with local members to deliver activities and improve coordination across community groups.
- Delivered nature-based activity including development of an allotment area, planting trees and building raised beds.

The Green Community Hub in South Tyneside is located at West Boldon Lodge.

Constructed by the National Grid in 2010, West Boldon Lodge is a purpose-built educational centre in South Tyneside. Prior to this project, the site was not well known amongst members of the local community.

6.1 Governance

As the site is owned by the National Grid, there are barriers to community governance as Groundwork must adhere to the health and safety precautions stipulated by the National Grid across the site. More detail on the challenges this has posed is included in [Section 6.4.1](#).

Community organisations were approached to use the site for meetings and activities, to encourage use of the site and build awareness. Subsequently, West Boldon Residents Association used the site for their monthly meetings for a period of time.

6.2 Engagement and Implementation

Initially, the Hub delivered three engagement days on site for local charities, community groups, residents' associations and other voluntary sector partners. This was an opportunity to present what the Hub hoped to achieve, and how these organisations could utilise the site to enhance the lives of their service users and the local community. The Hub engaged partners such as Marsden Road Community Centre (another Groundwork site) and Change, Grow and Live (CGL) from South Shields. Targeting organisations that actively supported participants that may benefit from the Hub has facilitated greater engagement from those

¹² Please note that engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities may include the same individuals more than once.

that may not otherwise attend. For example, partnering with CGL facilitated greater engagement from dementia carers through support groups attending the Hub.

Activities to engage the local community have been varied, aiming to involve a broad range of groups and individuals in the community that otherwise would not be able to engage owing to financial or physical barriers. The Hub distributed leaflets in local community hubs and advertised their activity on Facebook. Regular posts about events, workshops, and updates aimed to keep the community informed and engaged, encouraging participation among community residents. Throughout delivery, community groups were invited to deliver workshops at the Hub, which broadened the activities on offer, provided capacity to the team and subsequently supported widening the reach of the Hub.

The Hub Facilitator noted that funding provided by the project has been a key part of the improvement of the green space at the Lodge, providing materials to support different groups to engage, such as shelter and play activities. This setting offers an ideal environment for hosting activities and groups focused on wellness and environmental engagement. Funding has further enabled activities to be delivered free of charge, which was not available at the site previously. This demonstrates a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, enabling a wider demographic of people to engage with the Hub through removing financial barriers.

‘[Activities] reached out to families that would not originally have attended the Lodge as they did not have the financial ability to book into paid sessions.’ **Hub Facilitator**

6.3 Delivery

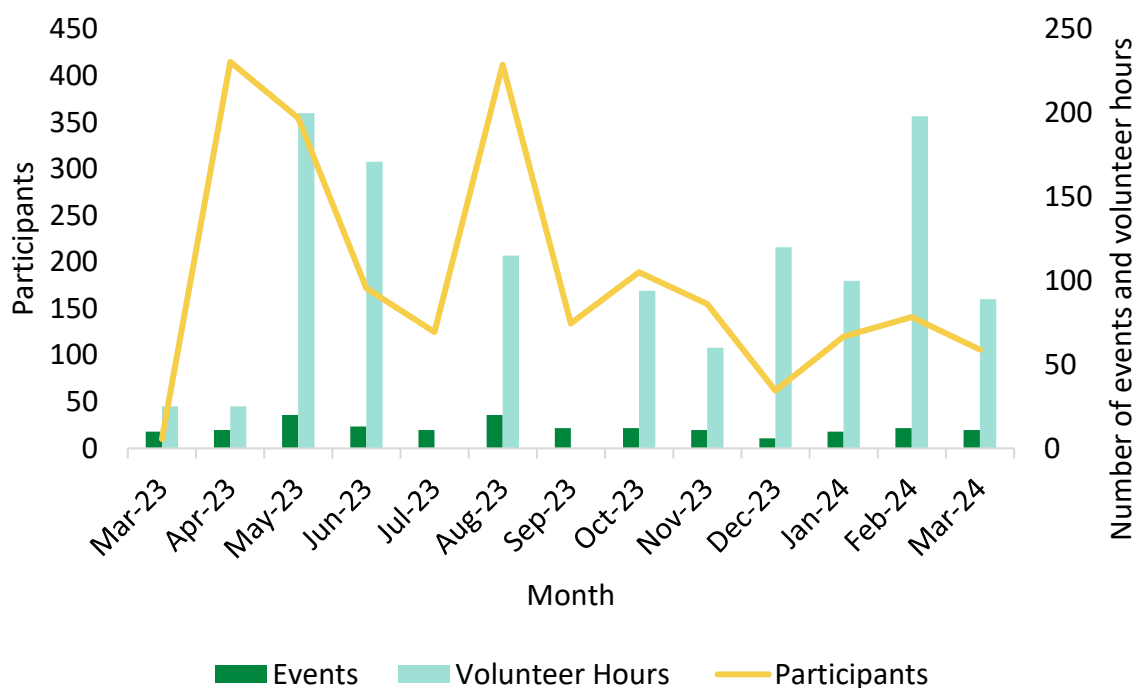
This sub-section explores the range of activity delivered via the West Boldon Lodge Hub throughout the Pilot. This includes an overview of all activity, the perceived strengths of the Hub delivery model and the challenges faced.

6.3.1 Overview

Figure 6.1 over page sets out the engagement from participants with the Hub over time, showing peaks in line with school holidays, owing to increased activity. In total, 159 events were held representing 2,396 engagements with participants. Additionally, 1,197 volunteering hours were contributed to the Hub across 113 volunteering opportunities.¹³

¹³ Please note that engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities may include the same individuals more than once.

Figure 6.1: Engagement with the GCH in North & South Tyneside, March 23-March 24¹⁴



Source: Groundwork Monitoring Information

Overall, the Hub in West Boldon ran the following events:

- **29 one-off events**, including author workshops, artist led sessions, animal care events, nature days, and seasonal family open days;
- **8 regular indoor activities**, such as a reading group, a mental health awareness session and an indoor community meeting;
- **106 regular outdoor activities** for example the conservation volunteer group, facilitated use of the green gym, and other regular outdoor sessions; and,
- **16 external member events**, such as a support group for addicts and an arts group.

6.3.2 Activity Detail

The Hub has delivered a range of activities, whilst also enabling community groups to use the space free of charge to deliver their own workshops or events. The Hub hosts a weekly parent-led event supported by CHOICE Wellbeing Services, offering arts and crafts activities in an accessible and inclusive environment. This activity aims to provide hands-on and emotional wellbeing for parents and carers, while also fostering a support network among attendees which extends beyond the weekly sessions.

¹⁴ Gaps in the graph are owing to gaps in data provided.

Partnerships with organisations like CGL have facilitated support group activities, such as meditation sessions for drug and alcohol carers. These activities provided participants with valuable relaxation techniques in a natural setting.

The development of an early years play and exploration area at the Lodge has enriched the Hub's offerings, complementing existing facilities and expanding opportunities for sessions and events. Examples of activity are provided in the case studies below.

Case Study: Free Family Arts Sessions

The Hub, in partnership with Carol's Art Sessions, delivered arts sessions during school holidays targeted at families on lower incomes. The sessions provided opportunities to make art with natural resources, followed by free play time in the green space. In addition, Carol's Art Sessions uses the Hub facilities to deliver weekly arts sessions for the local community.

These sessions enable families to engage that otherwise would not have the opportunity, subsequently encouraging inclusion through breaking down barriers, and providing space for families to connect and make memories. They further enable increased awareness amongst families about the Hub and its offer to the community.

As a result of engagement in weekly sessions, some participants have signed up to volunteering at the Hub, demonstrating the successful impact of partnerships and supporting the legacy of the Hub.

'It's simply amazing that families can come here and do things they would never otherwise be able to do.' **Community Member**

Summer Festival

The Hub hosted a festival themed children's event, delivering activities such as face-painting, crafts, African drumming and a circus tent. There was also playtime in the fairy realm and mud kitchen on site. The event was planned and in conjunction with Marsden Road Community Centre, which is another Groundwork site, contributing to creating stronger connections with organisations in the community.

The festival comprised of 45 spaces across two sessions, both of which were full. One which was only for the residents of Horsely Hill who came via a bus provided by Marsden Road Community Centre. Given poor public transport access to the site, this enabled residents without a car to experience the Lodge. The second session was for West Boldon Lodge regular families, but at a reduced cost compared to existing activities on site, to enable those more impacted by the increased cost of living to attend.

The opportunity to plan an event was new to volunteers, and provided them with good examples of the types of events that can be delivered on site. Upskilling volunteers with the experience of event planning contributes to sustainable delivery at the Hub moving forward.

6.3.3 Partnership Activity

Facilitators noted that increased partnerships have enabled greater knowledge sharing and support provision regarding engaging the local community. This strong working relationship can be utilised moving forward to broaden the activities on offer through collaborative funding bids.

Overall, 18 partners have collaborated with the Hub, including:

- Amanda's Creature Comforts
- Boldon and Cleadon Library
- Boldon Primary School
- Carol White Arts
- Change Grow Live
- Cultural Spring CIC
- Vision and Hearing Support
- Northern Lass Lounge
- One 4 All – Homeless / Soup Kitchen
- South Tyneside Council SEND
- Tiny Tweeties
- Your Voice Counts
- West Boldon Residents Association
- Billy's Lifeline – Life after Suicide Loss
- Change, Grow, and Live
- CHOICE Wellbeing Services
- Luna Blu Creative Therapy Sessions
- Marsden Road Community Centre

6.4 Impact

West Boldon Lodge Green Community Hub has had a positive impact on nature, on local residents, on volunteers and on local organisations. Further detail can be found below.

The **impact on nature** at the site centres around the development of an existing allotment area, building trenches to provide drainage and prevent flooding, and building raised beds for planting. The impacts of the Hub at West Boldon Lodge have been focused on improvements in access to green space for local residents. Not only have there been considerable improvements to the site, including installation of a play area and the development of a forest school area, but there are ongoing improvements to nature through the allotments and gardening sessions.

‘I could spend every day here, it’s so peaceful.’ **Community Member**

‘I feel like I'm helping the environment.’ **Local Resident**

‘The local community is much more informed about what we are doing at the Lodge, it’s really helped us reach out to local people.’ **Hub Facilitator**

Whilst there is insufficient data to disaggregate the impact on individuals, amongst the four respondents to the survey, three engaged in regular sessions whilst one had attended a one-off event. These participants indicated that working in the outdoor environment in different habitats made them feel part of nature.

‘My children love it and it’s brilliant to see them running around having fun in an environment they don’t normally get to play in.’ **Local Resident**

‘I like the mix of structure and free play that their events have to offer. I feel happy and lucky to have somewhere like the Lodge to take my children to.’ **Community Member**

Connections with existing community groups have been valuable in creating a network of engaged and active users of the site, whilst providing additional capacity to deliver services to the community. It has provided these groups with a free space whereby they can facilitate increased community engagement. Equally, the delivery of the project has developed the working relationship between the education team working at the site and the community engagement aspect, through increased funded staff capacity. This has not only strengthened the collaboration to deliver activities on site, but improved capacity within both teams.

‘[Connection between the Groundwork and Lodge teams] has cemented us and that wouldn’t happen before. When we discuss funding and next steps now it’s as a whole.’ **Hub Facilitator**

There were also pre-existing volunteers at the site who maintained aspects of the grounds, however through the Hub these volunteers have accessed additional training and developed a community allotment. Through increased community participation, the Hub has increased volunteer numbers which will support maintenance moving forward.

The impact of the Green Community Hub is further illustrated in the case study below.

Case Study: West Boldon Lodge

Constructed by the National Grid in 2010, the West Boldon Lodge is a purpose-built educational centre in South Tyneside with a large forest realm. Prior to the Northern Network, it was underutilised by the community, holding ticketed events at a price point inaccessible to all. Staff aimed to provide an outdoor community centre and a community asset, offering both outdoor and sheltered activity.

Funding has been used to increase project officer and conservation volunteer time on site and the instalment of a pirate ship play area.

Community engagement

Staff explained that the Northern Network has enabled engagement outside of only the education team that currently uses the site, to facilitate community use. A number of group sessions are now available, targeting groups that otherwise would not engage in nature-based activity, for example low income families, SEND children and the homeless.

Involvement with Northern Networks has supported reaching those who are interested in green agendas but have never attended the Lodge. It has also provided a green space for community groups to deliver sessions such as arts activities, yoga and meditation, forest schools and allotment use.

Volunteers organised a children-focused summer festival to support first-time engagement for the community, which was fully booked, providing activities such as crafts and play. As travel is an ongoing barrier to engagement owing to the location not being served by public transport, funding enabled the provision of a bus service.



'The range and number of people we have met has been really good... We've reached out to people who we wouldn't normally be able to reach.' **Staff member**

Activities delivered included a weekly SEND group session with arts, crafts and games. This was attended by around 30 people on a weekly basis. Those engaging developed a good support network through hands-on support, emotional support and wellbeing for parents / carers, as well as an enjoyable, accessible safe space for SEND children.

Free family arts sessions have been running during the school holidays, enabling the creation of artwork to take home using natural resources, and engagement with nature. This provision has seen engagement from those that otherwise would not experience such activities, namely due to financial barriers.

'It's simply amazing that families can come here and do things they would never otherwise be able to do. It's time out from a hectic life that doesn't cost anything and you get fresh air. I could spend every day here, it's so peaceful.' **Local Resident**

Partnerships

Staff have indicated that the local community is now much more informed about delivery at the Lodge. Multiple partnerships have been formed with local community organisations, enabling shared information and support, for example with future funding opportunities. This has been formed through the utilisation of additional project officer time being spent doing outreach within the community to spread awareness of the site and ways in which they can engage. Subsequently, groups such as The Children's Association and West Boldon Residents Association hire the space for a small fee, which supports the sustainability of the Hub.



Future and legacy

Engagement with Northern Network has strengthened the workforce and encouraged cross-working with local networks such as the volunteer network.

Moving forward, the National Grid will fund additional project officer time to allow continued facilitation of community partnerships. Art classes plan to continue with a local artist renting the space to deliver their sessions. Some of those that have attended weekly arts sessions have now signed up to volunteer at the Lodge, strengthening the capacity for site maintenance. Staff hope that these volunteers will organise and deliver community sessions, similar to those that have been delivered already.

6.4.1 Challenges Faced

The Hub has faced several challenges, primarily around accessibility and transportation. Whilst there have been no challenges engaging the community and increasing awareness of activities, the Hub's lack of public transportation access and limited parking facilities have posed barriers to attendance. Moving forward, Facilitators explained that public transport access should be considered when assessing appropriate Hub locations.

The opening hours of the Hub posed another challenge that restricted participation and engagement. As stipulated by the National Grid, the Hub is not open on weekends, thus it is not possible to access the allotment for maintenance. This poses a barrier to engagement for those unable to attend the site during the week, as well as practical issues for maintaining plants and crops.

Additionally, while the National Grid may offer access to the site, volunteers and community members must be accompanied by staff at all times due to health and safety concerns on the site.

To mitigate this, the Hub has offered staff level training to volunteers to enable them to attend alone as independent volunteers. However, they are not obligated to attend the site and therefore take part on an ad hoc basis. Consequently, this poses a practical barrier to volunteers and community members contributing to site maintenance, as they are only able to access the site during the week, whilst a staff member is present.

6.4.2 Key Successes

A key strength of the Hub has been the increase in local awareness of activities taking place, subsequently increasing participation. Part of the funding was used to fund a project staff member with a focus on community engagement. They have worked with the Hub Facilitator, alongside the existing Lodge education team, to broaden the activity offer outside of existing educational activities. Importantly, activities have been delivered free of charge, enabling a more diverse range of community members to attend that may usually face the aforementioned financial barriers to engagement.

The delivery of the project has contributed to better connection with the community and embedded partnerships with community organisations. This will support increased capacity for delivery at the Hub, with both the provision of workshops and identification of community partners. Key to this has been consistent targeted outreach to such organisations throughout delivery, to ensure awareness of the Hub and its aspirations.

6.5 Sustainability and Next Steps

The Hub Facilitator suggested that the legacy of the Hub was transforming West Boldon Lodge into a facility which the community know is there and can enjoy. With sustainable links to community organisations and upskilled volunteers, activities will be able to continue through increased capacity and wider community member reach. Weekly art sessions facilitated by Carol's Art Sessions will continue, along with events during school holidays delivered by upskilled volunteers and site maintenance by volunteers.

This additional external capacity increases sustainability owing to low Hub staffing costs. Further, income made through room hire will contribute to running costs and workshop costs for the Hub, along with funding from National Grid to fund some additional project officer time in order to continue the community engagement aspect.

Facilitators are confident now to replicate the model in other locations, citing that the knowledge gained from their experience at West Boldon Lodge would support them in setting up new projects quicker and with ease. Ensuring accessibility is important for the sustainability and future success of West Boldon Lodge. Recognising the challenges faced in accessing the site, particularly for vulnerable groups such as those with special needs, highlights the importance of prioritising transport links and parking accessibility in delivering future activities.

Moving forward, the Hub Facilitator noted that it is important to commit to sustainability within the community, especially given the fluctuating nature of funding. Using existing resources and community connections will be essential for the continued success of the Hub. While financial resources are highly valuable, the Facilitator also placed emphasis on the use of community collaboration in making the Hub more accessible.

7. Groundwork Yorkshire

Impact Summary

The Yorkshire Hub has:

- Held 42 events representing 499 engagements with participants.¹⁵
- Involved the contribution of 452 volunteering hours to the Hub across 53 volunteering opportunities.
- Worked with numerous local partners to deliver activities and improve coordination across community groups.
- Delivered nature-based activity including installing a polytunnel and a pond.
- Generated £16,895 match funding through additional grant schemes and crowd funding.

There are two sites which make up the Yorkshire Hub, both situated on the same land.

The first is **Horton Community Farm**, an established community site on an allotment in the Great Horton area of Bradford. The second is **Morley Street Resource Centre**, an allotment site and indoor centre built to support those with visual and hearing impairments.

Staff at Groundwork Yorkshire aimed to support the Horton Community Farm team to develop and enhance their existing offer, alongside developing connections with other community partners. Groundwork extended their work in Yorkshire to support Morley Street from September 2023, aiming to help realise their aspirations to expand and utilise the site to support newly visually impaired individuals.

7.1 Governance

Horton Community Farm is run by three existing staff members, with Groundwork staff now able to support capacity for delivery and site maintenance. Given the established work of the Farm, there has been slight resistance to creating the Hub, which is discussed further in the challenges section of this report. The Hub generated a range of additional match funding, with £4,999 from Natural England and £11,896 raised through Aviva's Save Our Wild Isles Community Fund and 70 donors.

The Morley Street site also has a dedicated project worker. Support from Groundwork is supporting their aspirations to create a sensory garden for their service users. As the work of the Hub has complemented existing delivery, the setup has been successful on this site as roles and remits of Groundwork and the centre team have been clear.

7.2 Engagement and Implementation

The Hub Facilitator conducted a door knocking survey and an online survey with the local community at the outset to understand what needs were present, and what the community

¹⁵ Please note that engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities may include the same individuals more than once.

would like to see from the Hub. These were translated into Slovakian and Arabic via leveraging connections with the council, to enable wider engagement from those in the community in which English is not their first language. This provided direction for activity delivery that would encourage engagement from the community.

Engagement activities have been varied and diverse, to encourage wider participation from the community. Activity has focused on engaging those with sight or hearing impairments. Facilitators engaged with universities and local community groups to disseminate information about activities and encourage attendance. To encourage wider community engagement, the Hub Facilitator disseminated posters in doctors' surgeries, supermarket community boards and in community centres. This work complemented the ongoing social media and website publications and advertising, but worked to diversify avenues to spread awareness, removing reliance on online methods.

The Hub Facilitator also reached out to local organisations with which they had existing connections that they felt would be interested in volunteering, such as care homes and occupational therapist facilities. Open days and partnerships with organisations like Barnardo's also helped attract volunteers, including individuals with communication challenges or additional learning needs. This supports the legacy of the Hub, through the identification of committed volunteers rather than one-time visitors.

'Because we work with lots of different organisations, one of our strengths is how much we know about different people. We are a good middle person and good at getting connections.' **Hub Facilitator**

Morley Street became involved after attending an onsite Big Green Festival event in September 2023. The event was an opportunity to explain the project and how it could work with organisations and sites to create a wider offer to community members.

7.3 Delivery

This sub-section collectively explores the range of activity delivered via both the Morley Street and Community Farm Hubs throughout the Pilot. This includes an overview of all activity, the perceived strengths of the Hub delivery model and the challenges faced.

7.3.1 Overview

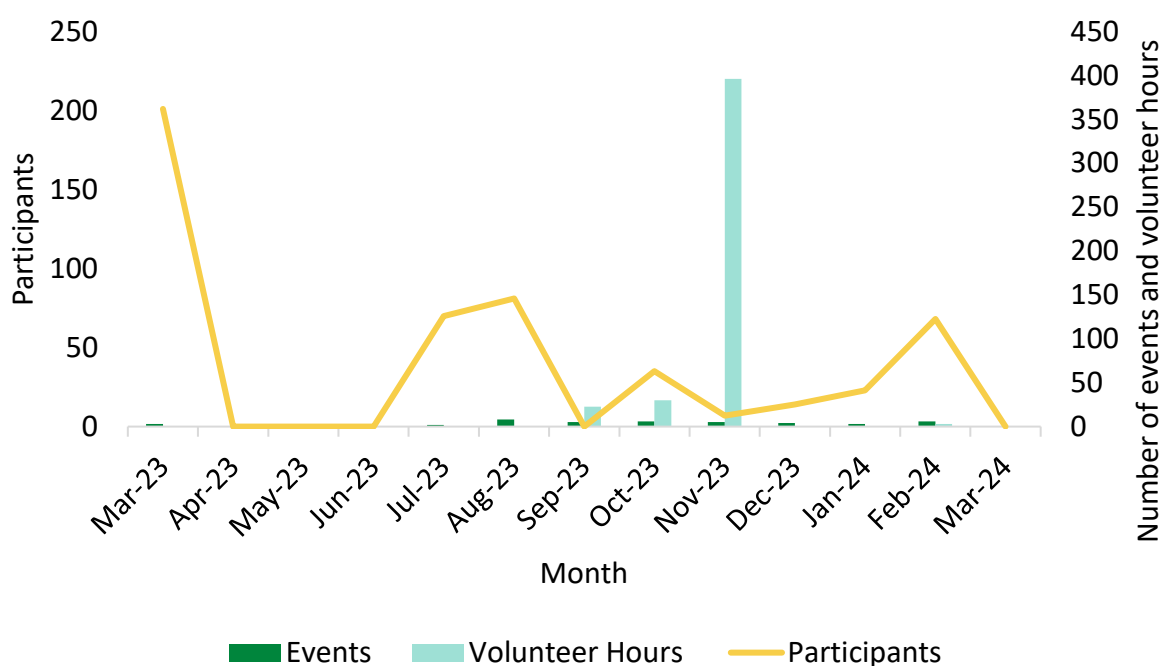
Figure 7.1 below sets out the engagement of participants with the Hub over time. Due to challenges in establishing activities at the outset, engagement data has been presented from July until December 2023. In total, 42 events were held representing 499 engagements with participants.

Additionally, 452 volunteering hours were contributed to the Hub across 53 volunteering opportunities.¹⁶ The spike in volunteer hours seen in November 2023 is because of Facilitators taking on weekly Friday volunteer sessions at the Farm.

Overall, the Hub ran the following events:

- **10 one-off events**, including activity days, butterfly days, and litter picks;
- **30 regular outdoor activities** such as a regular community gardening session, a community growing/cooking session and a regular Friday volunteering session.
- **2 external member events**, including attendance at another site’s open day and a forest school activity.

Figure 7.1: Engagement with the GCHs in Yorkshire, March 23 to March 24¹⁷



Source: Groundwork Monitoring Information

The section below provides detail on key activity delivered throughout the Pilot.

¹⁶ Please note that engagements with participants and volunteer opportunities may include the same individuals more than once.

¹⁷ Gaps in the graph are owing to gaps in data provided

7.3.2 Activity Detail

Horton Community Farm

Horton Community Farm offers diverse weekly volunteering events focusing on nature-based activities such as pond planting and wood whittling, alongside recreational activities like outdoor yoga. Special events, including spring children's activities and skill-building workshops like willow and wreath making, have also enriched the activities offered on the Farm.

The Facilitator took over the running of existing Friday volunteering sessions at the Farm, which has contributed to a key impact of improving capacity at the Farm to complete operational activities. For example, it has enabled Farm staff to focus on operational activities such as fundraising and bid writing to further enhance available delivery and site facilities. Through the delivery of these sessions, a number of new volunteers have been recruited, further contributing to capacity. Towards the end of the project, Morley Street volunteers began joining these sessions to support activity, highlighting the transition to collective delivery at the Hub between both sites.

Infrastructure improvements funded through the project have enhanced the Farm's accessibility and functionality, subsequently positively impacting biodiversity. Improvements have included activities such as reskinning the polytunnel, installing water taps, improving raised beds, and building shelters. The Hub has also improved the signage at the site, including adding translated signs to improve inclusivity for those who may not speak English and creating a welcoming entranceway to encourage the community to enter the site.

A key activity delivered at the Farm was the installation of a pond. Facilitators then delivered a pond dipping session as part of their Big Green Festival in June 2023. The day was attended by members, potential members, and potential referrers of clients and volunteers to utilise the site. Using a freshwater habitats survey, those attending were invited to identify and examine creatures found in the pond and analyse its condition. This resulted in a score putting the pond in the 'good condition' category, which will be used as a base score to assess against in coming years.

Case Study: Bradford College ESOL students

The tutor found out about Horton Community Farm as a real world place to practise some of the words learnt recently, and to be in a different experience to the classroom. Gardening enables visual demonstration of how to use the tools and can easily be copied without access to the same language. The group spoke multiple languages from French to Arabic so the only common language to communicate throughout the group is English.

There were multiple tasks available to suit the groups energy levels such as pruning blackberry brambles back, but most of the group wanted to get stuck in removing turf and creating three growing beds. The area was transformed in a short space of time and the grass was removed to a nearby area in wheelbarrows. The group also enjoyed knocking down some of the old brick bases from greenhouses that were on the plot many years before.

‘It’s a happy thing to do and really relaxing.’ **Community Member**

Morley Street Resource Centre

Funding through the project contributed to architectural work at Morley Street to design the landscape of the allotment to ensure infrastructure improvements were conducive to the delivery required. For example, providing raised beds easily accessible to visually impaired individuals and space to practice using aids such as guide dogs and canes. Activities such as art sessions and wood whittling were delivered by Facilitators, to enable volunteers to contribute to the design process. Within this, Facilitators spent time clearing vegetation from the site to ensure the space was usable moving forward. Volunteers also attended visits at other Green Hubs to find inspiration for their own garden. Those attending noted the benefit of seeing other sites and how it helped to visualise their aspirations moving forward.

As a result of Pilot networking day held at the Farm for local organisations, the Facilitator worked with the Sleep Charity to organise delivery of sleep hygiene sessions with volunteers. This highlights the value of Facilitators actively engaging with local organisations that could utilise the Hub and provide useful services to volunteers.

‘The group at Morley Street are really easy going, relaxed and not regimented in activities which is great for the attendees as the main thing they get out of the sessions is having a chat and socialising, whilst also gaining the benefits from fresh air, being outdoors and as gentle or intense exercise as they want to partake in.’ **Hub Facilitator**

Case Study: Wood whittling at Morley Street Resource Centre

The wood whittling session was Peter's fourth visit to Morley Street Resource Centre. He is recently blind and is still adjusting to a new world. The group at Morley Street means that he can meet up with likeminded people who may have faced similar problems to what he's experiencing. The group, who all have visual impairments and are registered blind (two of whom were also deaf), are great at giving feedback and knowing their own abilities and suggesting solutions.

Workshop staff explained the safe use of a knife to the group, before teaching them how to whittle wood into different shapes. Staff ensured the group were sitting in a circle without a table to enable easy interaction between staff and participants, as well as providing an interpreter to support those that were deaf, to encourage full participation.

Peter really enjoyed the session as did the whole group, and all were able to take their work home. Participants noted that they felt very relaxed and said that it was very hypnotic and therapeutic. One participant had done whittling before they lost their sight, so this workshop provided the opportunity to build confidence in their skills in a safe and caring environment under supervision.

7.3.3 Partnership Activity

Working alongside local partner organisations has been beneficial to the Hub, with local organisations collaborating to use their respective resources. As the Morley Street Resource Centre is next to the Farm, the Facilitator noted that this has supported a close working relationship, and provided opportunities for mutual support and knowledge sharing.

Overall, a number of partners have collaborated with the Hub, including:

- Growing Hope Programme for Sanctuary Seekers
- Sleep Charity
- TCV Yorkshire
- Morley Street Resource Centre
- Bradford City Council
- Local Allotment Holders
- Barnardo's
- Grow to School
- Leeds Mindfulness Co-op
- Bradford Food Partnership

7.3.4 Challenges Faced

The Hub Facilitator suggested that the key challenge for the Hub was working on an established project that existed prior to the programme and wanted to diversify its programme of activity. This required relationship building with existing management to understand how the work of the Hub could complement existing work. There was an element of negotiation required when organising events at the Farm, exacerbated by the fact that the Farm had lost the majority of their own funding during the project.

Consequently, there was some confusion around who had ownership of project delivery, with a perception that Groundwork were running events on the farm site, rather than working in partnership with the Farm to increase capacity and activities. Governance also posed challenges for project delivery as there were delays in grant agreements being signed by site management staff.

To mitigate these challenges, Facilitators provided capacity to deliver volunteer sessions as mentioned above, and supported fundraising activities. In addition, £6,500 of project funding was committed to capital improvement works, to increase capacity to deliver all year round and increase profitability.

This provided key learning for Groundwork staff, whereby existing established delivery and subsequent governance should be considered when identifying appropriate Hub locations.

The site was subject to ongoing anti-social behaviour, namely causing damage beyond repair to the reskinned polytunnel. Groundwork Facilitators aimed to mitigate this through increased engagement activity with local young people, however as this was later in the project, it did not fit with the Farm's existing delivery plans. Farm staff were able to obtain additional funding elsewhere to reskin the polytunnel.

Obtaining feedback through online survey methods posed a challenge for visually impaired Morley Street volunteers, as they were unable to provide their feedback independently. Providing accessible feedback pathways such as discussions and sensory responses should be considered by both the evaluation team and Hub staff to ensure those with differing access needs are able to engage in feedback.

7.4 Impact

The sites of the Yorkshire Hub have a positive impact on nature and on volunteers. This is explained in more detail below.

Across the lifetime of the Hub, the following nature-based activity has taken place across the two sites:

- Reskinning of a polytunnel
- Wooden raised sacks added to polytunnel
- Plot areas cleared and raised beds installed
- Pond installation
- Creation of how-to guides for planting activities

These activities have **positively contributed to biodiversity at the Hub**. Weekly volunteering sessions have further contributed to biodiversity through increased capacity for maintenance of the site. Overall, the project has environmentally improved 114 square metres of land within the Morley Street site.

A key success of the Hub has been the increase in volunteer numbers, as this contributes to the legacy of the Hub, and ongoing site maintenance to continue positively impacting

nature. The Hub Facilitator also noted the individual-level impacts for those engaged with the activities held at the Hub, including growing in confidence, an improved sense of purpose, and a reduction in isolation.

For volunteers, improvement in skills relating to gardening have been an important outcome, further contributing to long-standing nature protection. For example, one volunteer attended the Friday sessions as they were keen to gain experience of horticulture in the UK, climate differences and methods of food growing. They weeded around potatoes in the Farm's allotment, piled up the soil around them to encourage more potato growth and to keep existing ones covered from daylight.

They have now moved on to continue their studies of the climate at college, whilst another volunteer is attending the Farm as part of their college course. This demonstrates the ability of Hub activities to provide practical experience of educational learning.

'I have learnt new skills that I know I'll need to use soon.' Local Resident

A key strength and legacy of the activities included the proactive steps towards inclusivity by the Hub Facilitator, including translating signage. This contributed to increased awareness of the site, which community members had previously noted as a barrier to engagement.

'We now have a lot more signs in different languages so people can feel like our activities might be for them.' Hub Facilitator

All fourteen individuals engaging with the Hub that responded to the survey reported positive changes and experiences following engagement with Horton Community Hub¹⁸. For example, all but two respondents agreed that Hub activity has had a positive impact on both their physical and mental wellbeing, the likelihood that they will engage with outdoor physical activity and their connection to the Hub and its setting.

'I feel an improved sense of mental wellbeing as it's stimulating.' Hub Volunteer

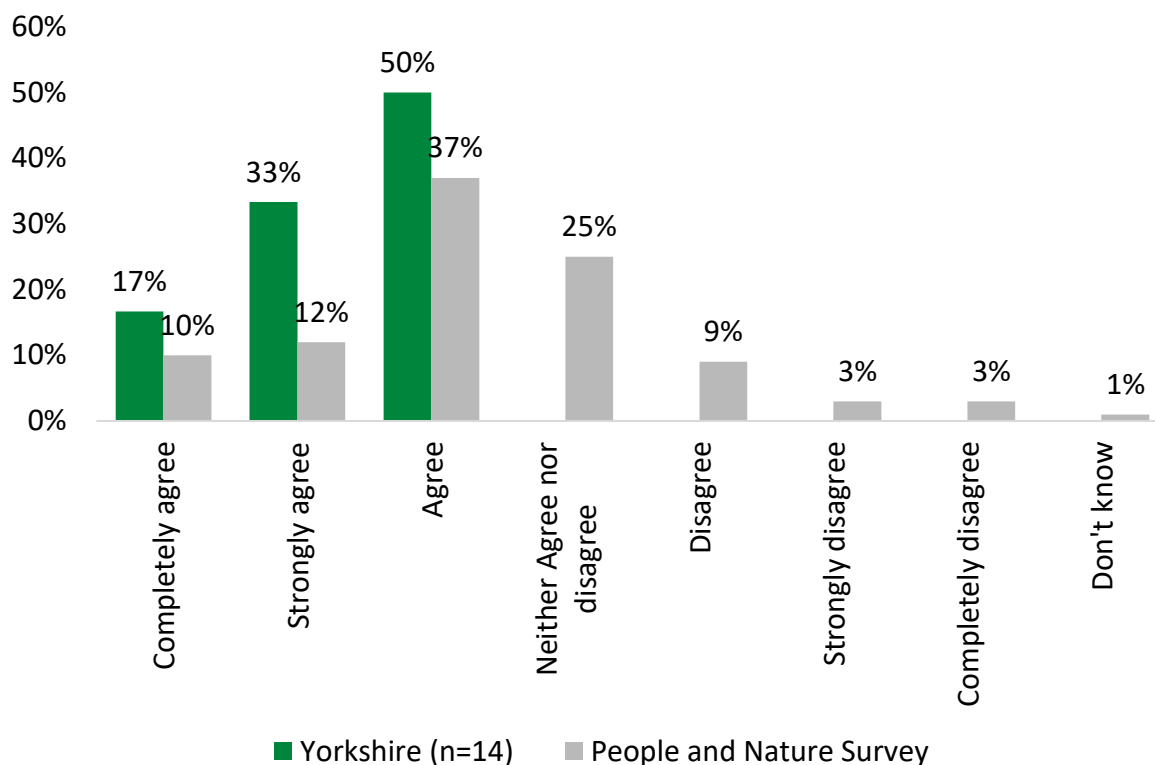
'[I enjoy taking part because] it's something to do, it gets me out of the house, stimulates the mind and gets me to meet people like myself.' Volunteer

In particular, all respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel part of nature', as shown in Figure 7.2 below. This demonstrates the positive impact it has had on local people and their connection to nature. Notably, a higher proportion of Green Community Hub participants and volunteers feel connected to nature compared to those surveyed in the People and Nature survey, which aimed to depict a representative sample across England. Whilst this small sample size provides only a snapshot of the impact the Hub has had on community

¹⁸ Please note this is not a representative sample of all engaging with the Hub.

members, it suggests a positive connection between engagement with the Hub and connection to nature, as well as improvements in wellbeing.

Figure 7.2: Following participation in the Hub, to what extent do you agree with the statement 'I feel part of nature'



Source: Wavehill Participant survey (n=14) and People and Nature Survey April 2022 to March 2023 (n=24,987)

Facilitators noted the positive impact of Morley Street volunteers visiting other Hubs, as it provided inspiration for volunteers that could be implemented on their site. An important part of this was the opportunity to build learning through knowledge exchange, both for staff and for volunteers. Funding through the project also provided the opportunity to upskill staff through training to deliver forest school sessions. This is an important legacy of the project as it enables future delivery of these sessions on site.

7.5 Sustainability and Next Steps

Engagement with the Pilot has increased both the capacity and skillset of the Yorkshire Hub, subsequently increasing community and volunteer engagement. The sustainability of the Community Farm engaging the community is promising, with the key legacy being the increase in volunteers and the continuation of their weekly sessions. This is supported by their increased skills surrounding nature, that can be utilised in order to provide ongoing maintenance of the site.

Widened delivery through Morley Street Resource Centre and engaging with new partners has enabled staff skills development in delivering sessions for visually impaired groups. This

has broadened Morley Street's capacity for inclusive activities. Overall, Morley Street now has a clearer vision of the sensory garden they would like to deliver, owing to input from landscaping architects and site visits to other Hubs.

8. Northern Network Activity Delivery

Impact Summary

- Throughout the lifetime of the Pilot, the Northern Network has reached 171 members.
- Training was core to the Northern Network offer. The training approach was iterative and ultimately reached 25 organisations and 118 individuals.
- Northern Network efforts have reached a wide range of individuals and organisations through a coordinated approach to green social prescribing and resources that can be shared with the wider sector.

The Northern Network has delivered a range of activities throughout its lifetime. This includes the overarching facilitation of the Network itself, the delivery of a green skills programme and a green leadership programme. The detail of these activities is set out below.

8.1.1 Northern Network Membership

Following the launch of the Northern Network in May 2023, Green Community Hubs and organisations were invited to join the Network. In practice, online membership of the Network involved:

- Member organisations adding themselves to an online map where members and other community organisations can contact them;
- Receiving monthly newsletters with a range of useful information and can attend networking events or Green Festivals in person; and,
- Access to a range of online resources, including extensive 'How to' learn guides and a webinar series which includes topics such as cooking with home-grown produce, support with marketing, and establishing new community groups.

Membership of the Network grew steadily, with 68 members registering in the first month of its launch, and then between 10-15 new members every month. In March 2024, there were 171 members of the Network in total.

When asked what the current barriers were for members looking to get involved in local groups and forums, organisations noted that a lack of time, capacity, or awareness of what was going on was a key barrier. The Network aimed to address this through knowledge sharing, including events, resources and networks. The knowledge sharing focused on everything from specific activities, community engagement strategies, volunteer training, to organisational processes and strategy. The online resources will serve as an important knowledge base for Network members and the sector.

'Knowing in advance when the networking events are taking place. Finding time to attend.'

Member Survey

'Short on time to find out about other organisations, or keep up with meetings, and those I am aware of don't seem applicable to us.' **Member Survey**

In addition, in June 2023, the Network held its Big Green Festival, which involved four in-person events across different Green Community Hubs. These community days showcased the range of stakeholders that were involved in the different hubs and provided an important networking opportunity with over 200 in attendance. Staff expressed that the Big Green Festivals were well received by local residents, with organisations from a range of sectors getting involved in activities.

8.1.2 Training and Green Skills Programme

Delivering training was a core aspect of the programme, which was launched alongside the membership offer in May 2022. The project team took an iterative approach to the mode of delivery of the training programme, which developed over time due to both levels of demand and feedback from members.

Initially, the intention was to create a 'knowledge sharing' approach, so that training could be delivered across different hubs and facilitated by Groundwork staff, but using the skills and expertise of host hubs. The core themes for the training included Business Skills, Green Skills, and Community Skills, with 25 organisations attending a combination of online and in-person training sessions.

However, stakeholders noted they faced challenges engaging members for these sessions and noted that organising transport over a large geographical area had been a barrier to attendance. In addition, the training coincided with planting season in May, which meant community hubs were focusing their resources and capacity on growing. This meant there was limited registration and engagement for the first round of training activities.

When planning further training opportunities, Groundwork project staff took a different approach. Northern Network members submitted requests for training courses to Groundwork that were relevant to their local and organisational needs. Training that Groundwork deemed appropriate was then supplied. Working directly with 11 Network member organisations across the North of England, a wide range of training was made available for members and their communities. These included:

- Bee Keeping
- River Fly Sampling Training
- Allotment and Growing Skills
- Walk and Cycle Leader Training
- Evaluation Training
- Dead Hedge Creation

This training approach was perceived by stakeholders as successful as it was a more place-based approach and gave member hubs more agency to provide valuable training in their own locations. However, it did also require more staff time than the initial training approach to create bespoke training opportunities. As a result of the success of this approach in empowering member organisations, stakeholders reported that it was likely this approach would be used in future delivery.

8.1.3 Green Social Prescribing

Initial community consultation regarding the desired purpose of the Northern Network identified that local organisations wanted support to better understand the funding landscape for green social prescribing and to better understand the link between green social prescribing and Green Community Hubs. With additional funding from Natural England, the Groundwork team formed the Cheshire and Merseyside Green Social Prescribing Group and commissioned research to model a financially sustainable approach to green social prescribing across the region. Group partners included Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside, The Conservation Volunteers, Grow Wellbeing CIC, Growing Sudley CIC, Netherton Feel Good Factory Community Garden, Taking Root in Bootle, and Faiths for Change. Over the course of 12-weeks, the group gathered and shared insights from green social prescribing activity providers across the North. This insight alongside recommendations on how best to identify a robust, sustainable funding model for green social prescribing were then documented in a [final report](#).

As a result of the Cheshire and Merseyside Green Social Prescribing Group's work, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) reached out to the Northern Network as they were also undertaking a research project regarding green social prescribing. As a result, the two organisations, alongside Natural England who were also delivering a Green Community Hub Pilot¹⁹, worked together with other partners to consider and explore the range of sustainable funding models for nature-based social prescribing. This has included the organisations sharing information and resources to ensure that activity in this area is in alignment. This activity has culminated in a research report accessible [here](#).

8.1.4 Identified strengths

There were a range of strengths in the delivery of the Northern Network, including:

- **The role of Groundwork as an active coordinator.** Stakeholders acknowledged that whilst there are numerous established networks for green community organisations, what made the Northern Network unique was its broad coverage across the North of England, as well as the role of Groundwork to empower communities to coordinate activities. The value of the Northern Network in this sense is its ability to facilitate connections between members and community hubs by leveraging its reach and understanding of the landscape of like-minded organisations with similar missions, delivery models, or areas of interest and expertise. This active facilitation also creates space for Green Community Hubs and local communities to share ideas and consider if and how they could do things differently.
- **The flexibility of delivery.** Stakeholders made a range of comments relating to the iterative nature of the delivery model, where staff were constantly reflecting on how the Network could best meet the needs of members and the sector in a way

¹⁹ Please note that the Natural England Pilot provided established Green Community Hubs with a £5,000 grant.

that was responsive but not reactive. In this sense, the delivery approach was community-led, with a focus on empowering community hubs rather than delivering to them.

- **A dedicated communications lead and specific branding** may have contributed to strong sign-up of membership, particularly in the early months of the Network launch.
- **The range of activities offered to members**, including both light touch support and a dedicated programme of offer meant there were many ways in which to be a member of the Network. This may have supported initial engagement with some members, therefore leading to a wider range of member organisations and greater networking benefits.

8.1.5 Challenges Faced

Evaluation interviews with stakeholders identified a number of challenges faced in the delivery of the Northern Network. This included:

- **Demonstrating added value and communicating the purpose** of the Network to members. Some initial feedback indicated that a new network wasn't a core priority for some organisations. Understanding internally what the added value of the Northern Network would be to position it in such a way as to be meaningful for community hubs was key to overcoming this challenge.
- **Operating across a large geography.** Stakeholders recognised that whilst the ability to coordinate across the whole of the North of England adds considerable value and brings a level of collective identity, there are several challenges relating to transport, including both proportionality and cost, when organising in-person networking or training events.
- **Balancing the hyperlocal with the regional.** Stakeholders recognised that many community organisations operate on a hyperlocal scale, with their priorities relating to their immediate local residents. This presents a challenge both operationally, but also in identifying and communicating the value of a regional network.
- **Negotiating a short timeline and seasonality aspects** of the delivery period posed a challenge where the upfront resource needed to design and launch the programme was greater than anticipated. In addition, the changes to the timeline created additional challenges around organisational capacity for members over the spring and summer period.

Case Study: Northern Network

The Northern Network of Green Community Hubs is an initiative that aims to connect green community groups across the North of England. The Network currently has 171 members who have access to a range of online resources, including extensive learning guides and a webinar series which includes topics such as cooking with home-grown produce, support with marketing, and establishing new community groups. These resources serve as an important knowledge base for members and the sector.

The Network also facilitates collaboration between members and the five Pilot Green Community Hubs across the North. Member organisations can add themselves to an online map where members and other community organisations can contact them. They also receive monthly newsletters with a range of useful information and can attend networking events or Green Festivals in person.

The value of the Northern Network is its ability to facilitate connections between members and community Hubs by leveraging its reach and understanding of the landscape of like-minded organisations with similar missions, delivery models, or areas of interest and expertise. Crucially, the Northern Network acknowledges that there are many existing networks for green community organisations, but what makes the Network unique is its reach across the North of England, and the expertise and capacity of Groundwork UK to facilitate its work. The Network strikes a balance between support on hyper local scale and on a regional scale, with knowledge sharing focused on everything from specific activities, community engagement strategies, volunteer training, to organisational processes and strategy. Furthermore, they offer training grants, enabling members to bid for funding to enhance their staff's skills and develop their own community Hubs.



Initial consultation with members suggested that community groups were looking for support with training. However, they faced challenges engaging members for these sessions and noted that organising transport over a large geographical area had been a barrier to attendance. The Network has prioritised its time to recognise it must work within a feasible geography and the projects' own organisational capacity.

Members involved in the Network suggested a range of motivations for getting involved, including understanding local members, meeting like-minded members, and sharing resources.

‘[I’ve joined the Network] to work in collaboration and create a strong network of grassroots organisations.’ **Network Member**

Networking opportunities, support with systems, and skill development were identified as key priorities for the Network. In the short term, the Network is focused on refining its online resources, making them engaging and valuable for members. This resource Hub, designed to live beyond the lifetime of the current project, aims to create a legacy for the Network.



9. Green Leadership Programme

Impact Summary

- Through Northern Network activity, seven emerging green leaders were supported to empower them to support community infrastructure in their own local areas.
- Green leaders reported that the programme has given them space and time in which they could effectively plan how to take their projects forward and overcome challenges.
- All green leaders were able to identify short and longer-term actions they planned to take forward post-programme.

This sub-section explores the Green Leadership Programme delivered as part of the Northern Network.

9.1 Context

The Green Leadership Programme was borne out of a recognised lack of tailored leadership and development opportunities to support individuals and communities to establish and sustain Green Community Hubs.

‘There are many communities that have a desire to create a Green Community Hub or recognise they want to make a change but don’t know how to do that. The Green Leadership Programme [was developed because some organisations, communities and local residents] don’t have the cultural capital to do that. There are often the barriers which relate to finance or not knowing the right people; not for lack of want or will.’ **Stakeholder**

Running between July 2023 and March 2024, the programme had additional match funding from Natural England to support seven emerging green leaders from communities across the North to develop their skills and confidence, and to empower them to develop the green community infrastructure in their own local areas.

Through the programme, the green leaders were encouraged to develop their own projects and connect with the other leaders. Stakeholders suggested that the reach of the Northern Network and the opportunity to share the facilitation of these sessions across Groundwork Trusts made it uniquely placed to deliver the leadership programme. The projects delivered by green leaders included:

- **Wild and Fruity Community Garden**
The Wild and Fruity Community Garden project is run by a group of green social prescribers who offer nature-based activities. The aim of the project is to reduce loneliness and isolation, improve physical and mental wellbeing, and introduce people to food growing and spending time in nature.
- **Everton Community Garden**
Run by the Friends of Everton Community Garden, the garden looks to welcome everyone from across the local community. The garden is maintained by a group of

volunteers who grow fruit, vegetables, plants and flowers, some of which is sold to the local community for a donation. The garden also has a wood shop onsite to help maintain the garden and raised beds.

- **Solidarity Farm CIC**

The Solidarity Farm CIC looks to work with young people struggling with mainstream education, using farm and nature-based activities.

- **The Community Bike Library**

The community bike library offers a range of services across Harpurhey, Moston and Failsworth including short and long-term bike loans, cycle training for beginners, bike maintenance sessions and other community events.

- **Out of the Ordinary (into the outdoors)**

Out of the Ordinary is a support group for parents and carers of children with disabilities and/or additional needs. The group provide a walk and talk support group for parents and carers of children to ensure parents and carers have an informal space to meet and get outdoors.

- **Ambassadors for the Canal - Canal Lengths Persons**

The CLP project aims to provide a structured and purposeful opportunity for trained volunteers to support and promote the blue and green environment of the canal, towpath and neighbouring areas as a resource for exercise and for wildlife habitats. 'Canal Lengths Men' is a traditional term for people looking after sections of canal; this will be an update of the practice and will probably include a new name for the role. This project will be carried out under the auspices of the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal Society (MBBCS).

9.2 Leader Aims and Aspirations

All seven green leaders worked within the environmental sector and/or volunteered with green initiatives prior to their participation in the Green Leadership Programme. Reflecting on why they applied for the programme, leaders felt that it was a good opportunity for them to develop their leadership and management skills, enhance their CVs and to better network with other leaders across the North,

'The networking aspect really appealed to me, I can feel quite isolated in my area.' **Green Leader**

When asked what they were hoping to achieve from the programme, all green leaders reported that they had hoped to learn from others' experiences and projects and to enhance their project management skills to ensure that they could take forward future projects in their local areas. It was also anticipated that green leaders would benefit from sharing the challenges they were facing in developing green projects in their local areas with one another.

9.3 Delivery

The Green Leadership Programme consisted of five full-day workshops across the North of England. Green leaders were also allocated a £1,250 grant and matched with a Groundwork mentor to provide ongoing professional development support throughout the programme. Detail on each of the workshops is provided below:

Workshop One: Leadership

This session was facilitated by Horton Community Farm staff and explored leadership styles, different business models and grant options. Within the session, green leaders reflected on different ways they could grow their project ideas and plan out their next six months of delivery. The session was also used to develop relationships within the group through team exercises and green leaders heard from a community leader in Liverpool who had built a community around their local woodland.

Workshop Two: Building Community

This session was facilitated by the Project Coordinator for Food, Land & Wellbeing for Faiths4Change, and included a talk from Jon Hutchinson, Programme Director for Communities at Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire, and Merseyside. Within this session, green leaders were asked to reflect on who their community was to better understand who they were looking to reach and the barriers the community may face in accessing their projects. Within the session, green leaders were also asked to explore their communities' priorities and consider how considerations of intersectionality could be applied within their work.

Workshop Three: Health and Wellbeing

The session was facilitated by staff from Pennine Oaks, a community retreat in Pendle. Within the session, staff explored different techniques to empower communities and support wellbeing through eco-therapy. Green leaders also collectively reflected on their own progress as green leaders. The day also included a talk from a Senior Advisor for Health and Environment at Natural England which illustrated how Natural England is seeking to connect people with nature to improve health and wellbeing through the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework.

Workshop Four: Sustainability

The session was led by the owner of an own eco-refill business who runs a women's business network in the North East. This session was focused on environmental and business sustainability and provided the leaders with tips to grow their business in an environmentally conscious way. The day also included a talk from a local charity leader from Teeside who explained how she grew her business from a lockdown project in her living room to supporting hundreds of families across Middlesbrough.

Workshop Five: Reflective Session

Led by staff from the University of Central Lancashire's community development master's programme, the final workshop supported green leaders to summarise their thoughts and learnings from the programme. This allowed green leaders to consider their strengths, the challenges they face and solutions to continue developing and delivering their projects.

Feedback from green leaders who participated in the training programme was very positive, with leaders suggesting that meeting and learning alongside other individuals from different areas was particularly useful.

'The networking aspect stood out, offering a unique opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals. This has been particularly crucial given the scarcity of green community resources in the North East.' **Green Leader**

'I particularly enjoyed seeing diverse projects, problem-solving, and learning from examples of best practices, including a community garden.' **Green Leader**

'Key lessons I learnt included allowing space for community input in developing sessions, especially when targeting specific groups. Emphasising the importance of community consultation has been a big takeaway.' **Green Leader**

Green leaders reported using their grant to support travel between workshops and for qualifications. For example, one green leader undertook an RHS Level 3 qualification to further enhance their practical skills. Being able to complete this qualification, the green leader reported, has been particularly positive as it has enhanced their ability to deliver environmental projects.

9.4 Impact

Green leaders were overtly positive about the impact the Green Leadership Programme has had on them and their projects. In particular, individuals reported that the programme has empowered them and given them space and time in which they could effectively plan how to take their projects forward and overcome challenges. One green leader said,

'Reflecting on my experience, the programme's emphasis on cooperative thinking and effective leadership has been pivotal. Challenges with staffing and leadership changes were addressed, and the importance of community-focused leadership became clear.' **Green Leader**

Green leaders also reported wellbeing benefits as a result of their engagement with the Green Leadership Programme. This was predominantly because of the networking opportunities provided through the programme which allowed green leaders to develop a peer support network and share experiences with one another.

‘The programme has been a positive experience, providing a platform to meet like-minded individuals and discover a sense of responsibility towards making positive changes. The connections and exposure to people involved in green projects has enhanced my happiness.’ **Green Leader**

A minority of green leaders also suggested the programme has enabled them to view the facilitation of Green Community Hub activity as a feasible and achievable career path going forward.

9.5 Legacy

As part of their final Green Leadership Programme workshop, green leaders were asked to detail their next project steps. Detail of this is provided below.

- **The Wild and Fruity Community Garden** is looking to map out how they plan to take delivery forward. This includes setting out a timetable of work, planning the year’s activities, breaking down pricing structures to better understand the current contributions to the site, building compost bays and starting to think about developing and implementing a referral pathway to ensure that individuals in need of social prescribing activity have access to the garden. The green leader is also looking to engage a wider audience with the garden, this will include hosting an open day and inviting interested parties.
- **Green leader from Everton Community Garden** is looking to set up a working group to better engage with other groups such as the Food Growers Network and Feeding Liverpool. The green leader is also exploring how they can structure their vision into different groups, for example, setting tasks, research, contacting communities, farms and growing spaces.
- **Solidarity Farm CIC** is looking to finalise their marketing and branding, including their website, to ensure that the Farm can reach wider audiences. The Green Leader is also looking to complete their Level 3 Forest School training and complete infrastructure builds on the Farm to ensure that it and they are equipped to welcome the local community.
- **The Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal project** is looking to set up their canal ambassador scheme in which they will commission people to run different sessions along the canal. It is anticipated that the scheme, alongside Groundwork support to further consolidate the project’s objectives will engage more project members. It is also anticipated that greater campaigning going forward will better publicise the restoration of the canal.

10. Impact

Section Summary

- Where measurable, the Pilot has performed well against its contracted targets indicating its success.
- Between March 2023 and March 2024, Green Community Hub Pilots held 701 events with 10,816 local residents. A total of 3,156 volunteer hours contributed to events across the Hubs, which represents 574 volunteers.
- The Green Community Hubs have worked collaboratively with a total of 126 unique partners that have contributed to the design of the Hubs and their activity.
- Overall, across all Green Community Hub sites, 1,919 square metres of land has been environmentally improved.
- All surveyed local residents and volunteers agreed that they felt connected to nature as a result of their Hub activity.
- There were a total 171 members of the Northern Network. The Network has achieved additional reach online through its website and social media channels.
- Overall, 25 organisations and 118 individuals have attended in person and online Northern Network training. Where surveyed members attended Northern Network training, they reported that the training had been beneficial.

This section explores the wider impact of the Pilot on nature, local residents, volunteers and organisations. The impact of the Green Community Hub Pilot and Northern Network will be explored in turn.

10.1 Performance Against Targets

Table 10.1. below illustrates that, where measurable, the Pilot has performed well against its contracted targets indicating its success.

Table 10.1: Performance against targets

Target	Target Achieved	Evidence
Creation of 5 new Green Community Hubs	Yes	Six Green Community Hubs have been established across five areas, with two Green Community Hubs established in Bradford.
30+ community projects with access to technical advice and expertise	Yes	171 organisations have registered as members of the Northern Network with access to resources, case studies and support.
50 new partners working collaboratively and contributing to the design of the Hubs	Yes	Hubs have worked with 126 unique partners, together with Northern Network members, the project has worked with 270 organisations across the North.
200 local people involved in co-designing services	Yes	In total, 355 people were involved in co-designing services for the Northern Network and Green Community Hubs.
100 local people reporting greater climate awareness	Likely but not quantified	It is likely that the Pilot has achieved its aims due to the widespread participation of local residents in activity days which focused on different climate-based topics.
200 people reporting greater connection with nature and increased skills	Yes	The evaluation can identify that 263 individuals have engaged with skills-based activity delivered through the Pilot, including through the Green Skills Programme, Community Learning Programmes, and other training events. All local residents and volunteers who engaged with the evaluation (101) reported having an improved connection to nature as a result of the Pilot.

Source: Project-level monitoring information

Greater detail on these impacts is explored in the sections below.

10.2 Pilot Green Community Hubs

Across all Green Community Hubs, Facilitators, volunteers and stakeholders have identified and praised a range of impacts that have occurred throughout the Pilot. This sub-section outlines the collective impact Green Community Hubs have had to date.

10.2.1 Reach

Between March 2023 and March 2024, Green Community Hub Pilots held 701 events with 10,816 local residents. As illustrated in Table 10.2 below, 3,156 volunteer hours contributed

to events across the Hubs, which represents 574 volunteers. Please note that volunteers and local residents may be counted multiple times if they have attended multiple events.²⁰ It is likely that the number of unique local residents and volunteers is lower than the figures set out below. Throughout the lifetime of the Pilot, Hubs also engaged 126 external partners. External partners have had a positive impact on Hub activity, engaging and attracting new audiences to the Hubs.

Table 10.2 shows that the Workington Hub led by Groundwork North East and Cumbria delivered the most events which can be broadly explained by their focus on weekly sessions. West Gorton Community Hub in Greater Manchester had the greatest volume of local residents. This was driven by the regular large family activity days held at the Hub.

Table 10.2 Total engagement across Hubs

Hub	No. of events	Local residents	Volunteers	Volunteer Hours
Cheshire, Lancashire and Merseyside	118	1,728	68	346
Greater Manchester	161	3,148	116	656
North East and Cumbria	239	2,530	56	270
South and North Tyneside	116	1,937	154	758
Yorkshire	67	716	180	1,126
Total	701	10,816	574	3,156

Source: Groundwork Monitoring Information

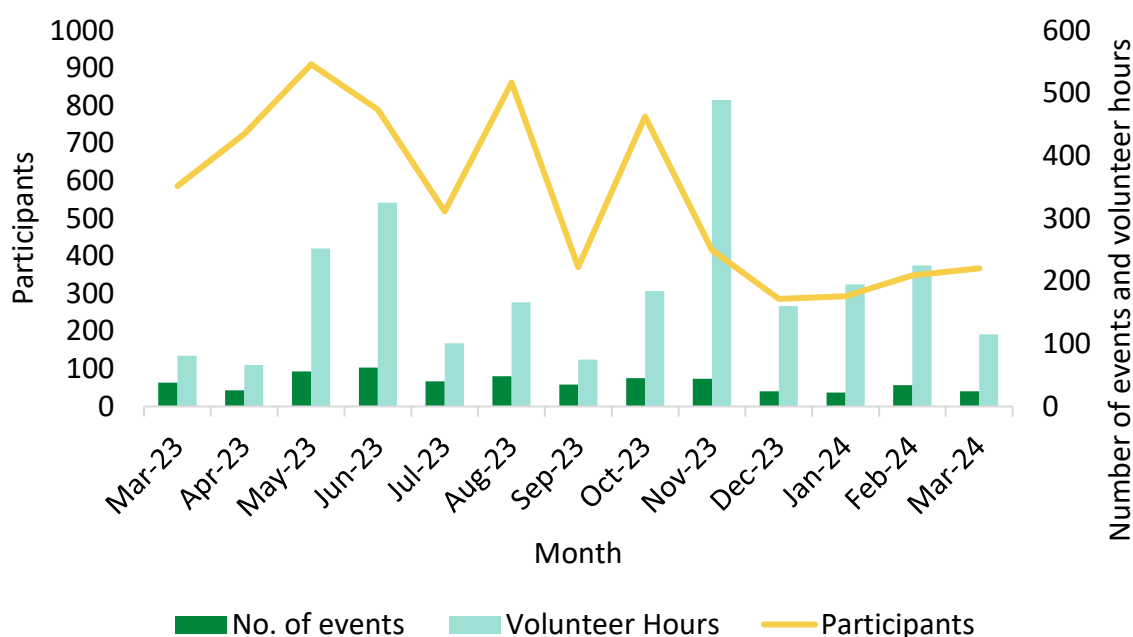
The Hubs also delivered a range of different types of activity. This includes 80 one-off events, 183 regular outdoor activities, 56 indoor activities, 52 external member events and 6 other events. This demonstrates not only the volume of events but the diversity of activities on offer.

Figure 10.1 below sets out the monthly total of events held across the Hubs, as well as the engagement with local residents and the number of hours contributed by volunteers. Across all Hubs, the number of events held increased over the summer months. This is unsurprising given the outdoor nature of many Green Community Hub events. Figure 10.1 also indicates that Hubs continued to deliver a considerable number of events until November 2023.

This suggests that once Hubs gained momentum after the launch of the Northern Network, this was sustained throughout the Pilot. Contributions of volunteers also increased across the delivery period, with the greatest number of volunteer hours registered in November 2023.

²⁰ This may include regular volunteering sessions or other regular activity.

Figure 10.1: Total events, local residents and volunteer hours for all GCHs, March 2023-
March 2024



Source: Groundwork Monitoring Information

The Green Community Hubs have worked collaboratively with a total of 126 unique partners that have contributed to the design of the Hubs and their activity. This confirms that the Green Community Hubs have successfully worked with a range of local and national members and surpassed contract targets to work with 50 new members.

10.2.2 On nature

The key impacts on nature from the Green Community Hubs are multifaceted, including through habitat creation and/or restoration through activity days. Hubs have also addressed some of the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss through education, training and connecting people with nature. It is likely this activity will provide a long term positive impact on nature. **Overall, across all Green Community Hub sites, 1,919 square metres of land has been environmentally improved.**

Hub Facilitators identified several notable improvements in biodiversity and habitat restoration to support important species, delivered through the installation of bug hotels, ponds, squirrel boxes, and bird feeders and litter picking days. Additionally, the Hubs have contributed to enhancing green spaces accessible to the community and supported the creation of spaces like the ‘Bee Happy’ garden in Workington or fostering wildlife corridors by planting wildflower meadows in West Gorton.

Whilst it was not feasible within the evaluation to ascertain how many people have increased their climate awareness, it is likely that the Pilot has achieved its aims due to the widespread participation of local residents in activity days which focused on different topics such as wildflowers, butterflies, and tree identification, with activities like bio blitzes and

educational sessions also held across Hubs. Greater climate awareness is also evidenced by qualitative volunteer and local resident feedback:

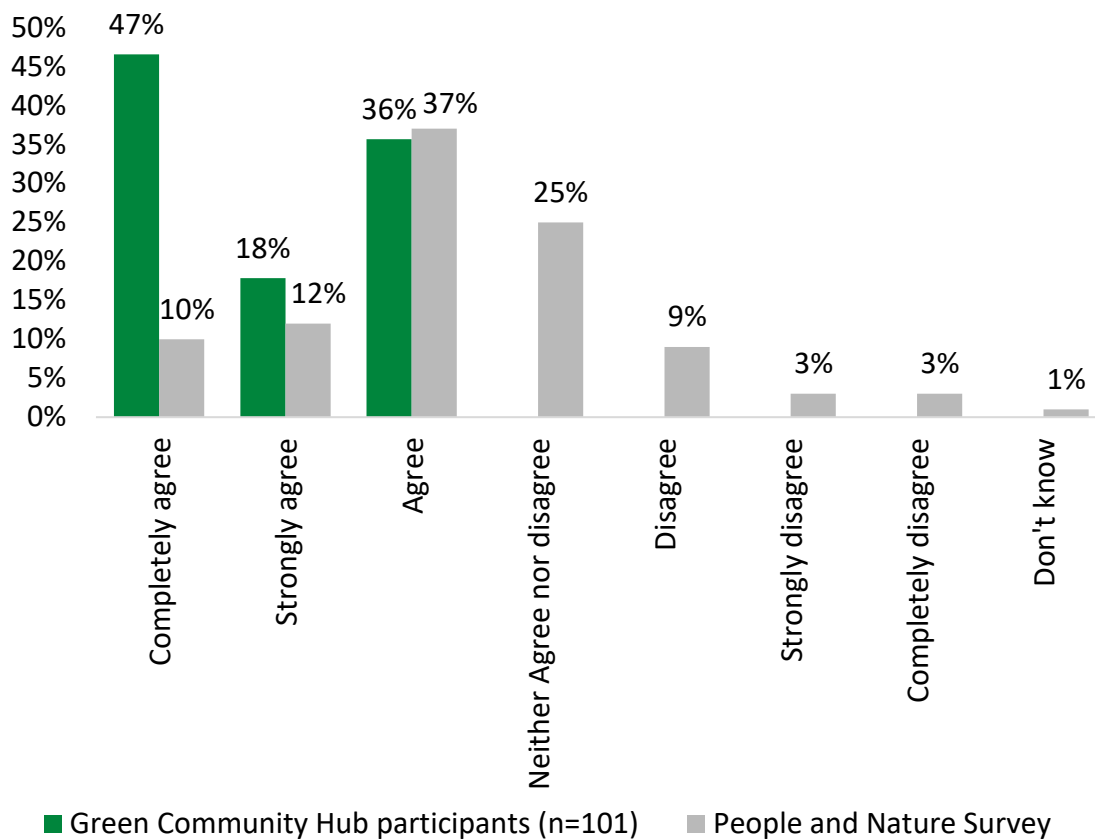
‘Planting and looking after nature [makes me feel] like I am involved.’ **Local Resident**

‘[My favourite thing has been learning] about tree identification for winter branches.’
Volunteer

Hubs have also facilitated community engagement in nature-related activities, for example creating maintenance plans for sensory gardens, conducting wildlife surveys, and establishing food-growing initiatives. This will promote the long-term positive impact on nature at the Pilot Green Community Hubs sites.

As illustrated in Figure 10.2 over page, all local residents and volunteers agreed that they felt connected to nature as a result of their Hub activity. This exhibits that a considerably higher proportion of Green Community Hub local residents and volunteers feel connected to nature compared to those surveyed in the People and Nature survey, which aimed to depict a representative sample across England. This indicates that there is a positive and considerable link between engaging with Green Community Hubs and feeling connected to nature.

Figure 10.2: Following participation in the Hub, to what extent do you agree with the statement 'I feel part of nature'



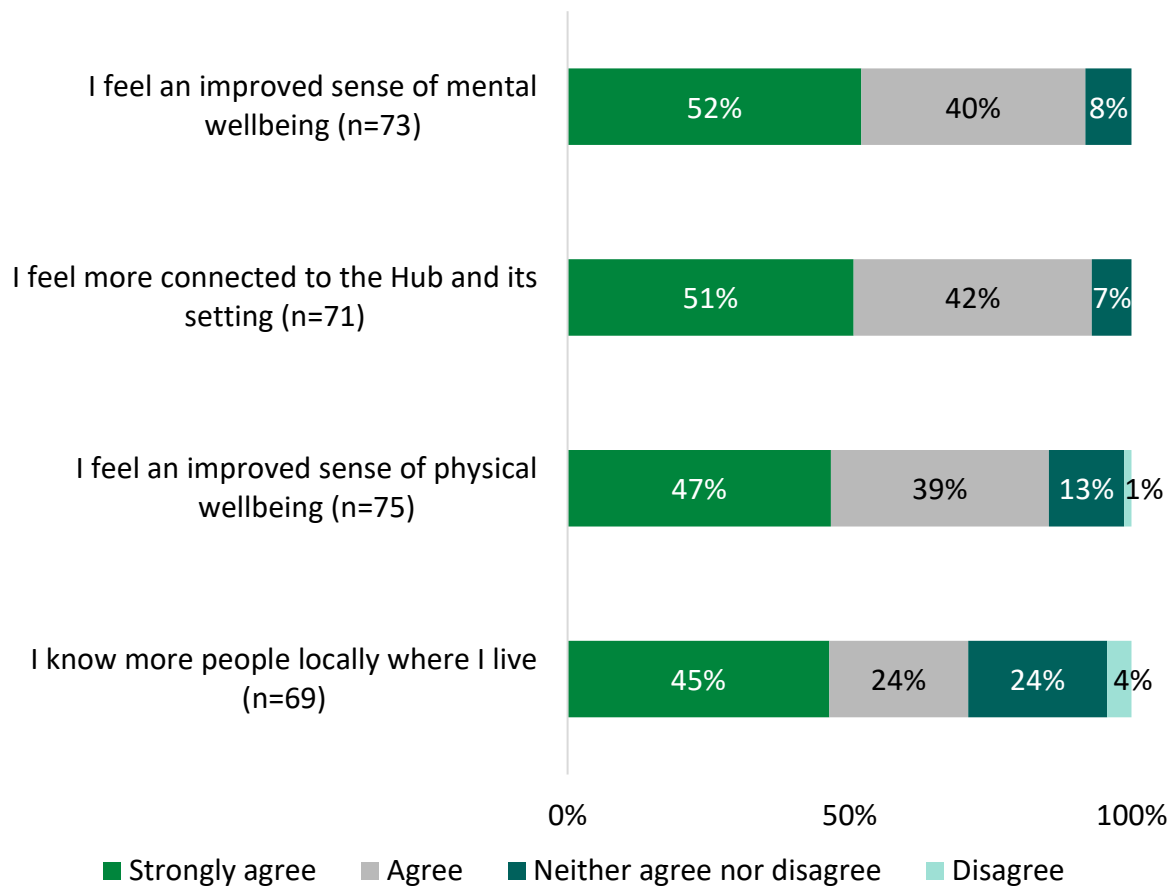
Source: Wavehill Participant survey (n=101) and People and Nature Survey April 2022 to March 2023 (n=24,987)

Only a small proportion of local residents and volunteers who engaged with Green Community Hub activities completed evaluation surveys, however, all responses indicated local people have a greater connection to nature as a result of their participation in Hub activity. It is therefore likely that the total number of local residents and volunteers feeling connected to nature is considerably higher. This indicates that the Northern Network has successfully connected local people to nature, in line with their contracted outcomes.

10.2.3 On local residents and volunteers

For local residents and volunteers who engaged with the Hubs, the impact was wide ranging. Figure 10.3 sets out the self-reported changes experienced by individuals following engagement with the Hubs, with over half of respondents (52% or 38/73) strongly agreeing that they feel an improved sense of mental wellbeing, with a further 40% (29/73) agreeing with this statement. Improvements in a sense of physical wellbeing were also notable, with just under half of respondents strongly agreeing (47% or 35/75) and a further 42% agreeing (29/75) with this statement.

Figure 10.3: Changes experienced by local residents and volunteers following engagement with Hubs (all Hubs)



Source: Wavehill Participant Survey (n=69-75)

Local residents also indicated improved sense of connection to both the Hub and their local area, with over half of respondents feeling more connected to the Hub and its setting (51% or 36/71) and 45% strongly agreeing that they know more people locally where they live (32/69).

Respondents also provided a range of reasons why the Hubs activities had this positive impact on them, suggesting that it gave them motivation to get outside, provided opportunities in a new environment, and a sense of satisfaction at making a positive contribution to their local area.

‘It gets me outside into nature which is very valuable to my mental health. I also get to meet other people.’ **Volunteer**

‘My children love it and it’s brilliant to see them running around having fun in an environment they don’t normally get to play in.’ **Local Resident**

‘A feeling that a contribution is being made to improve the town, even an hour litter picking in public places.’ **Volunteer**

In addition, Hub Facilitators and volunteers identified the following impacts on the individuals with which they engaged;

- Firstly, **for local residents who attended events, the Hubs have served as a vital opportunity for social interaction** for many individuals who may have been experiencing loneliness, with Hub Facilitators suggesting the Hubs have fostered a sense of social connection and belonging;
- Local residents have also had **the opportunity to acquire a diverse range of skills**, from gardening to art, enhancing their personal development and engagement with nature;
- Awareness-raising events about nature and environmental conservation have also contributed to **a greater understanding and appreciation of the natural world** among community members;
- Notably, engagement with Hubs has **had positive effects on mental health**, with local residents reporting reduced isolation and improved self-esteem to Hub Facilitators and volunteers;
- Additionally, the Hubs have facilitated increased community engagement and **informed local residents about available resources and activities**. Improved footfall and use of green spaces underscored the positive impact of the Hubs on community-level wellbeing; and,
- Hub Facilitators gave examples of several **individual success stories**, such as people gaining confidence and finding purpose, highlighting the transformative effect of the Hubs on some local residents' lives.

‘The Northern Network input has given us the incentive and drive to look at the neighbourhood and work on it, making it a place safe for children to engage with nature. They don't have gardens, they live in concrete jungles, so need to be able to see the colour of nature and enjoy it.’ **Volunteer**

The volunteers involved in the Green Community Hubs have also experienced a range of positive impacts on their personal development and community engagement. This includes:

- Acquiring new skills, from planting to event planning, and have gained confidence in their abilities. Many volunteers have expressed a sense of fulfilment and purpose in giving back to the community, particularly one retired volunteer who found value in contributing their own time;
- Involvement in the Hubs has facilitated connections with other volunteers and community members;
- Furthermore, volunteers have gained recognition for their contributions, with some receiving awards for their dedication; and
- Involvement has empowered volunteers to engage more actively with local MPs, stakeholders, and decision-makers, amplifying their voices on broader community issues.

‘I volunteer because I want to keep busy, learn new experiences and meet with like-minded people. This is my first week volunteering here and I am interested in gardening but since coming in person I am interested to learn about the asylum seeker and refugee project as well as the forest school sessions for children and would like to find out more about them and volunteer with them.’ **Local Resident**

10.2.4 Local Organisations

Local residents and organisations have reported a range of impacts that have occurred as a direct result of their involvement with the Green Community Hubs Pilot. Facilitators reported that the network of Green Community Hubs has provided valuable resources and knowledge for existing and aspiring Hubs, enabling organisations to learn from successful projects elsewhere and replicate them in their own communities.

Green Community Hub activity was also described by stakeholders and Facilitators as a catalyst for community engagement as it accelerated the recruitment of volunteers and improved reach into specific communities and partnerships with local organisations. The provision of grant funding to the Hubs also allowed organisations to deliver learning activities with volunteers and target communities and members that otherwise would not have been possible due to financial constraints.

‘We've got connections now that we wouldn't have been aware of that we can utilise. As mentioned some delivery will continue as members will deliver.’ **Hub Facilitator**

‘Supported the delivery of member events, we've helped a lot of organisations reach their target groups. For example, the council need to deliver food waste workshops - we've been the link between the community and the organisations.’ **Hub Facilitator**

Without the support of the Pilot, Facilitators and stakeholders also suggested that organisations would have faced challenges in securing resources for essential materials for the Hubs, such as tree trails and notice boards. Additionally, access to expert landscapers facilitated the design and installation process, which would have been difficult to achieve independently.

10.3 Northern Network

This section draws on a range of data sources to identify the impact of the Northern Network, considering the reach of the Network, the impact of the Networks on the Pilot Hubs, the impact on organisations who were members of the Network and the wider sector.

10.3.1 Network Reach

As identified in [Section 8](#), there were 171 members of the Network in total. Membership of the Network grew steadily, with 68 members registering in the first month of its launch in May 2023, and then between 10-15 new members every month. Members of the Northern

Network have access to Network resources, case studies and support, demonstrating that the Pilot has surpassed its target to engage with over 30 community projects to access technical advice and expertise.

In addition, the Network has achieved additional reach online through their website and social media channels. Both social media follower count and mailing list recipients have increased throughout the Network’s lifetime, indicating a broader awareness and commitment to remaining informed of activity. This is further evidenced by the fact that 80% of audience members have engaged with content.

Table 10.3: Digital Marketing Overview²¹

Metric type	Number
Total reach ²²	80,452
Total audience ²³	7,809
Total engagement ²⁴	6,224

Source: Groundwork Digital Marketing Data

10.3.2 Training and Skill Development Activity

Alongside the launch of the online network, the Northern Network facilitated a series of in-person training events for members to attend. Overall, 25 organisations and 118 individuals have attended in person and online Northern Network training.

The Northern Network training offer was informed by the initial co-design of the Network and focused on developing business, green and community skills. Training to date has included SuDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage System) training, First Aid training, composting and trauma informed practice.

Where surveyed members attended Northern Network training, they reported that the training had been beneficial. In particular, members praised training that supported wellbeing and health, suggesting that it has helped them better support others and themselves.

‘[The training] made me take a step back and think about my own mental health.’ **Northern Network Member**

Other feedback from members engaged in training is detailed below:

²¹ Please note that these figures potentially included duplicated counting of engagements.

²² Page Views, Emails sent, Facebook, X and LinkedIn page and post reach

²³ Website visitors, members, Facebook, X, LinkedIn and Instagram followers, Mailing list

²⁴ Website visitors and registrations, emails opened, Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn Engagement

‘[I enjoyed] The relaxed nature/ environment that the course took place in.’ **Northern Network Member**

‘[I enjoyed] Gaining insight into the subject being taught.’ **Northern Network Member**

‘The sessions are interactive and make you really think.’ **Northern Network Member**

‘Very informative session and helpful to see real life examples of SuDS in situ.’ **Northern Network Member**

Northern Network staff reported that numbers for the training sessions had been lower than anticipated. Reflecting on why this was the case, it was suggested that training sessions offered during the summer months likely had fewer attendees because members were busy delivering activity. Additionally, staff suggested that whilst there is considerable value in having a Network that covers the North of England, it is challenging to host events that are accessible to groups across the North due to the large and varied geography. Challenges associated with geography were likely also exacerbated by limited staff resource. Staff reported that limited staff capacity meant that there was insufficient time available to market and promote training activity.

As highlighted in [Section 8.1.2](#), following the initial training events in the summer of 2023, the Northern Network personalised the training offer through the development of the Green Skills Programme to ensure that they were able to reach more members. The Green Skills Programme delivered activity at 11 Northern Network member sites and included a wide range of training activity for members and their communities.

- Bee Keeping
- River Fly Sampling Training
- Allotment and Growing Skills
- Walk and Cycle Leader Training
- Evaluation Training
- Dead Hedge Creation

Staff reported that the approach adopted through the Green Skills Programme proved successful, with 93 participants engaging with training opportunities.²⁵ The ability to provide members and their local communities with training that is directly relevant to their own context staff suggested, has been a key impact of the Network as it has allowed members to take ownership of the training they need and will use going forward. Staff suggested that this approach to offering training was a key learning for the Network and will inform future in-person training provision in future delivery. This learning will be explored in further detail in [Section 11](#).

²⁵ Please note that this total is included within the 118 referenced at the beginning of this section.

10.3.3 Networking Activity

Between September and December 2023, the Northern Network also hosted a series of networking events to engage community members. In total, 45 participants attended 3 in-person events at Pilot Hubs. Surveyed members commonly reported that networking events had exceeded their expectations as the events had enabled them to meet 'likeminded' individuals and share and impart knowledge and learning.

10.3.4 Resources

Additionally, the Northern Network has developed a range of webinars and other resources to disseminate knowledge across communities and to ensure that this learning is and continues to be accessible in the future. This has included nine webinars, which are available on the Northern Network website, on a range of topics including social farms and gardens, urban nature and business. To date, the nine webinars have been viewed 346 times.

10.3.5 Groundwork Trusts

Hub Facilitators identified a range of ways in which the Network has contributed to the Groundwork Trust staff, including through sharing resources, knowledge and expertise, and improving collaboration. They highlighted the benefit of feeling part of something bigger, and motivation this brought to contribute to the Network as a collective whole.

Engagement with the Network has improved capacity within organisations through the facilitation of shared knowledge and collaboration. The opportunity to visit other Hubs within the Network has been valuable in understanding collective challenges and new ideas to encourage engagement.

'It's created one big happy team, it's cemented us and that wouldn't have happened before.' **Hub Facilitator**

'We wouldn't have gone for the bids without the Northern Network, as this prompted the ideas.' **Hub Facilitator**

'It's been beneficial to tap into other Hubs knowledge and what they've been doing to recreate it then ourselves.' **Hub Facilitator**

10.3.6 Members

Amongst the 171 members of the Network, 22 organisations or individuals provided detail on the impact of the Network on them as an organisation. However, the findings suggest there have been tangible benefits to Network membership due to engagement with the Northern Network.

Just under half (9/22) of respondents to the follow-up membership survey indicated that they had formed new partnerships as a result of their involvement in Northern Network, with the same proportion noting improved relationships with local organisations. This

suggests there will be ongoing indirect impacts of the Network due to these new memberships.

A similar proportion of respondents (9/22) also noted increases in knowledge of health and wellbeing, which demonstrates the contributions of work relating to social prescribing, including relationships developed and contributions to wider research.

Figure 10.4: So far, has the Northern Network resulted in any of the following changes?



Source: Wavehill Northern Network membership survey (n=22).

‘It has opened a whole world of organisations to us and helped us connect with the correct people.’ **Northern Network Member**

Intangible contributions of the Northern Network may also include wider impacts borne through increased learning, including improved confidence to share learning and championing good practice. This may inform the direction of delivery and strategic planning for organisations in the future.

‘There are some great people and organisations around, which gives me hope for our shared objectives.’ **Northern Network Member**

10.3.7 Green Social Prescribing

The Northern Network and Groundwork have also developed and enhanced their relationships with Natural England and the University of Central Lancashire as a result of their collective work looking at the feasibility and impact of green social prescribing through Green Community Hubs.

Member organisations reported that the Northern Network has developed a knowledge base and infrastructure that will benefit future Green Community Hubs and green social prescribing research. This includes the additional research into green social prescribing models and additional resources provided by the Northern Network e.g. the Green Community Hub map, which provides a geographic oversight of existing Green Community Hub sites.

Looking forward, stakeholders suggested that the Northern Network Pilot has provided them with a foundation from which they will be able to collectively build greater evidence around the impact of Green Community Hubs and the importance of green social prescribing within that.

‘The Northern Network are a critical member within [our social prescribing work]. If they don’t [get additional funding] that will have an impact. A lot of knowledge and resources [around green social prescribing] that would be missed [without them]. They need to be part of this [so we can] find future impacts.’ **Stakeholder**

11. Lessons Learnt

This section explores the key lessons learnt as a result of the Pilot. Please note that lessons learnt relate to the delivery of the Green Community Hubs and the Northern Network. This section also considers the additional support required to continue delivering activities and ensure the legacy of the activity is realised.

The Green Community Hubs developed through the Pilot and Hubs that engaged with the Northern Network are varied and diverse, with different infrastructures, local partnerships and challenges. However, key lessons learnt are widely applicable and should be considered for future delivery.

A paid Hub Facilitator is vital where new Hubs are being established. Whilst the challenges faced by Green Community Hubs have varied, the existence of a paid member of staff has ensured that activity momentum is retained where Hubs have faced challenging circumstances. For example, the existence of a paid Facilitator in the Clay Pitts Park Green Community Hub ensured that when the initial Friends of Clay Pitts Park Group disbanded due to anti-social behaviour in the park, Hub activity continued and a new group was reinstated. In West Gorton and Workington, paid Facilitators ensured that consistent advertising for Hub events was distributed and in Yorkshire, the Facilitator was able to persistently engage with Horton Community Farm staff to try and encourage them to continue offering Green Community Hub activity. It is important to also note that paid Facilitators were critical because the Pilot Green Community Hubs were new and required support to build sustainable partnerships and other infrastructure. Other Green Community Hubs that are more established, for example the Hubs outlined within Natural England's Green Community Hubs Pilot, may require less investment due to existing community links and activity.

A number of volunteers engaged with Hubs on an ad-hoc basis and are unable to sustainably provide the commitment needed to maintain momentum and engagement. Whilst volunteers enjoy engaging with the Hub and its activities, many are not in a position to take on this extra responsibility of delivery, highlighting the ongoing need for delivery support from paid Facilitator staff during the set-up phase of a Green Community Hub.

'It's like a jigsaw, we're the edges and the Hub and staff are the corners which are important, we're then going to fill it up and you'll have a big project that can keep going.'
Hub Facilitator

Site selection for Green Community Hubs is critical and determines how suitable a site is to be a Hub. Within the Northern Network Pilot, some sites appear more suitable to be Hubs in the longer-term than others. Due to concerns such as site access and partnership working, Green Community Hubs at West Boldon Lodge and Horton Community Farm appear less suitable in the long-term.

Limited access to the West Boldon Lodge site due to National Grid stipulations has resulted in volunteers and local residents only being able to access the site at set times, reducing the ability of volunteers to lead on activity going forward. Staff at Horton Community Farm are also reluctant to continue providing a Green Community Hub offering without external funding.

Reflecting on the challenges associated with these sites, Facilitators and stakeholders suggested that these sites were not suitable Green Community Hub sites. Looking forward, Facilitators and stakeholders suggested that selection criteria for new Green Community Hubs would place additional emphasis on the ability of prospective Hubs to be self-sustaining in the future. This includes considering public transport options, public access, and partnership opportunities.

‘I will make sure that transport links and access to car parking is key going forward with future projects. There is no point building a Green Community Hub that people do not have access to around the clock.’ **Hub Facilitator**

Establishing the Northern Network and a range of Green Community Hubs took considerable lead-in time. Stakeholders and staff suggested that establishing cross-organisational working practices and awareness raising within communities prior to active delivery takes longer than had been anticipated. It was also highlighted that additional time is needed to embed meaningful co-creation activity within communities and to support both formal and informal networking opportunities.

‘Networking is so important. Dedicated staff to be able to spend the time doing that. It's raised more awareness of activities as there's no point putting them on if you haven't networked.’ **Hub Facilitator**

As a result of challenges associated with the timescales, staff suggested that 18-months is sufficient to establish a network, however, more time is needed to maximise the impact of the Hubs and to deliver the scale of work required. Timescales were particularly challenging for the co-creation element of delivery as it requires considerable capacity to build relationships and upskill community members. This co-design aspect was a key success of the Hubs, and of the buy-in from partner organisations for the Northern Network.

New Hubs and those encountering significant challenges benefit from medium-term support. In cases where Hubs within this Pilot have encountered difficulties, the support and persistence of Hub Facilitators have ensured the continuity of activities. While recognising the long-term need for Hubs to be self-sustaining without Facilitators, it is also acknowledged that medium-term funding provides new Hubs with a robust foundation to sustain their operations. Aspiring towards a three-year programme would empower Pilot

staff to assist existing Hubs in solidifying their foundations and facilitate the establishment of new ones.

The development of a Northern Network has ensured that community groups, local residents and Green Community Hubs can interact, share knowledge and best practice. In particular, the in-person knowledge exchange days held between Northern Network Green Community Hubs have provided considerable value to those participating organisations and individuals, allowing the cross pollination of ideas across very different sites across the Northern Network. Knowledge exchange days have contributed to those involved feeling like they have the agency to make decisions about their own Hub, and that their voice and role is valued.

Training opportunities yield optimal results when guided by the organisations and communities that directly benefit from them. Initially, Northern Network training faced challenges in engaging members effectively, particularly due to the diverse geography of the region. However, stakeholders have observed that empowering organisations and communities to identify their own training needs through the Green Skills Programme and Green Leadership Programme ensured that training opportunities are both utilised and relevant for participants. It is understood that this approach to training will be adopted for future delivery.

11.1 Additional Support Required

Overall, the role of Groundwork in facilitating both the Green Community Hubs and the Northern Network were considered intrinsic to the Pilot's successes. Whilst aspects of what has been delivered will continue to contribute to individuals, communities, and the wider sector, **the capacity and coordination provided by a central organisation is important for the ongoing growth and resilience of pilot activity.** Without additional funding, it will not be possible to continue this facilitation role at the scale that has been delivered to date, with further resource needed to ensure that delivery is co-created within communities.

For the Green Community Hubs, short-term support will be needed to ensure they are fully self-sustaining, with Hub Facilitators seeing a need for advisory support for Hubs and volunteers in the medium-term where Hubs are still finding their feet. In particular, the Hubs are reliant on additional funding to deliver activities and may need additional support relating to training. The success of the Green Leadership Programme provides an example of how this type of training can contribute to the resilience of Green Community Hubs in general, and the level of resource required to deliver this type of programme.

Stakeholders also suggested that the role of the Northern Network as a Facilitator of support and networking across the North will continue to be needed going forward. In particular, stakeholders reported that this role is needed due to ongoing demand for support to create and establish Green Community Hubs and growing funding and resource pressures resulting in community groups and Hubs needing greater support to establish sustainable activity.

In feedback provided in the partners survey, Network members provided detail on what more they'd like to see the Northern Network doing to support organisations in the future. This included;

- A desire for more frequent communication and outreach to a wider audience, including newsletters, local meetings, and networking opportunities;
- An online directory of members, groups, and skills to facilitate connections; and,
- The facilitation of consortium bids for grants and contracts and wider support to access funding.

12. Conclusions

Throughout its lifetime, the Pilot has performed well against its contracted targets indicating its success. In particular, the Pilot has successfully established five investment ready Green Community Hubs and created an online and offline network of members across the North of England. This section outlines key findings from across Pilot.

The five Green Community Hubs have developed a wide range of activities across their sites to engage residents and connect them with nature and their local community. Between March 2023 and March 2024, Green Community Hub Pilots held 701 events with 10,816 local residents. Additionally, 3,156 volunteer hours contributed to events across the Hubs, which represents 574 volunteers. Across all Green Community Hub sites, 1,919 square metres of land has also been environmentally improved.

The Green Community Hubs have also successfully worked with a range of local and national partners and surpassed contract targets to work with 50 new partners. In total, Green Community Hubs have worked collaboratively with 126 unique partners who have contributed to the design of the Hubs and their activity. The Hubs also delivered a diverse range of activities with said partners. This includes 80 one-off events, 183 regular outdoor activities, 56 indoor activities, 52 external partner events and 6 other events.

The online and offline Northern Network has engaged 171 members in total. Members of the Northern Network have access to Network resources, case studies and support, demonstrating the Pilot's success at developing a bank of resources which support best practice and connection across communities. Alongside this, the Northern Network facilitated a series of in-person training events for members to attend. Overall, 25 organisations and 118 individuals have attended in person and online Northern Network training.

The Northern Network has also provided a personalised training offer through the development of the Green Skills Programme and Green Leadership Programme, ensuring that training offers are directly relevant to individuals and the communities they serve.

Overall, the impact of the Pilot has been positive and wide reaching. Almost half of all surveyed members indicated that they had formed new partnerships or improved their relationships with other local organisations as a result of their involvement in the Northern Network. As a result of Green Community Hub activity, local residents and volunteers commonly reported feeling an improved sense of mental and physical wellbeing and improved sense of connection to both the Hub and their local area.

The limited timeframe of the Pilot was a key challenge for project delivery. Stakeholders and Facilitators within the Pilot reported that meaningful engagement within communities and across the Network took longer than had been anticipated. As a result, it is suggested that future delivery provides greater lead-in time for staff to engage with local Networks to ensure activity can effectively respond to local need.

Reflecting on the longer term impact of the Pilot, Facilitators and volunteers were able to identify a range of sustained activity that will continue beyond the lifetime of the funding. In particular, Facilitators reported that the Pilot has provided valuable resources and knowledge for existing and aspiring Green Community Hubs, enabling organisations to learn from successful projects elsewhere and replicate them in their own communities. This demonstrates the Pilot's success in achieving its target to provide technical advice and expertise to a range of community groups.

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