Wates Family
Enterprise Trust



@Trust Links

Nature-Based Neighbourhoods

The story so far

Impact and learning 2024 - 26

October 2026

Welcome

Learning is fundamental to achieving our purpose

Reviewing and reflecting is essential to understanding our progress against our charitable objectives, and makes us ever more effective. It's a core part of running our organisation responsibly, and we ask the same of our grantees. Together, we create space to reflect, share and strengthen our collective ability to address the challenges we face.

As we set our strategy to increase access to doorstep nature over the next five years, we invite you into this learning circle.

Here, we reflect on the impact of our Nature-Based Neighbourhoods work to date, the vibrant ecosystem of work that surrounds it and what this means for our future direction.

In learning in the open, we hope that you can grow with us, challenge our thinking and explore where our ambitions align. Our door is open to new ideas, perspectives and partnerships.

Be in touch



Learning in the open

"The drive behind WFET's commitment to sustainability is simple. The environmental crises require a shift in belief and action, and far greater collaboration between all who have a stake in our urban landscapes. Our sustainability programmes promote equitable access to urban nature and greater connection between those working across the field."



Jonny Wates
Lead trustee for sustainability

Where are we now?

It's an exciting moment for our Nature-Based Neighbourhoods (NBN) work. We've invested in an approach to sustainability grant-making that's aligned with our values and strengths and we're beginning to see the tangible impact.

Over the last two years we've funded **15 organisations who promote equitable access to urban nature and greater connection between those championing its cause.**

Together, these organisations have **improved more than 450 green spaces, engaged over 21,000 people** through community activities such as workshops, events and volunteering, and **reached over 3,100 organisations and individuals** through their networks.

More importantly, we're learning about how our funding can drive change.

Our 5 key learnings

1 Trust-based, flexible funding is highly valued.

2 Convening and relationship-building can be as important as funding itself.

3 Competition for funding hinders collective action.

4 Community organisations need more time, skills and resources to collaborate effectively cross-sector.

5 Devolution and growing interest in place-based policymaking create new opportunities for community-led nature recovery.

"Society's most pressing challenges require more than funding. They demand time, trust, collaboration and a shared commitment to change. At WFET, we invest for the long term in people, organisations and ideas that have the potential to transform systems, not just deliver projects.

We are energised by the growing movement taking shape across our networks. By bringing people together, listening deeply and learning alongside those closest to the issues, we are seeing stronger alliances emerge and new opportunities for collective action.

These connections are creating powerful inroads for addressing systemic challenges and driving meaningful, lasting change.

Whether you're a practitioner, researcher or philanthropist, we hope you'll join us on the next leg of the journey to help more people connect with nature daily."



Felicity Mallam
WFET, Director

We're delighted to see strong evidence that WFET's support has increased grantees' capacity, confidence, and abilities to lead, build partnerships and influence policy.

Our funding has often acted as a catalyst for organisations to secure additional resources, strengthen governance, expand networks and increase their influence locally and nationally.

Grey is turning to **green**

and the benefits are astounding, in both number and power.

Communities are coming **together**

to build and shape the places where they live, work and play.

New **habitats** are created

along with new jobs to care for them. Air pollution, flooding and urban heat sinks are reduced, raising the quality of life for miles around.

People feel **connected**

to new nature on their doorstep and are bound to care for it as it does for them.

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Our sustainability grant-making

Connection is the missing piece

The Wates family shares a conviction that belonging and collaboration are essential to create real change in our communities.

That means taking time to listen, to understand root causes and bring people together to make personal connections, share learning and explore solutions.

Together, we learn what's working, adapt as things evolve and help meaningful change grow, keeping our eye on impact, and creating platforms that allow others to shine.

- **We fund core costs**, not just projects, so organisations can focus on what matters most.
- **We invest in people and relationships over time**, creating spaces for connection and convening conversations for collaboration and shared learning. These communities extend beyond those we fund.
- **We back ideas**, research and initiatives that address social and structural inequalities as well as immediate needs.
- **We work alongside other funders**, bringing additional resources and richer insights.



Further details on our thematic work and relational funding in practice www.wfet.org.uk

Why Nature-Based Neighbourhoods?



A tale of two cities

The correlation between the UK's most economically deprived neighbourhoods, and those most deprived of green space, leaves many doubly exposed to the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Cities are often up to six degrees warmer than rural areas during heatwaves, with people on low incomes particularly vulnerable.

The need

The Climate Change Committee's "A well-adapted UK" 2026 report highlights that we are already experiencing serious impacts of climate change, and that by the middle of the century, hotter heatwaves could see 92% of existing homes overheat, peak river flows will be up to 45% higher, last longer, and be seen more frequently, driving increased flooding.

At the same time, **the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries globally.** This is a threat to our food and health systems, as well as our well-being and culture.

The opportunity: The power of urban nature

When designed with the community, for the community, we've seen urban nature transform local ecosystems, economies and the health and wellbeing of those who live, work and play there.

Urban green and blue spaces have been shown to be a source of pride, a social glue, and to encourage pro-environmental behaviours – creating a positive feedback loop for people and nature.



Our focus

Our Nature-Based Neighbourhoods work focuses on building stronger climate-resilient communities.

1

Supporting community-led projects that boost resilience

Nature-Based Solutions and community growing can help to mitigate the effects of climate change, reduce biodiversity loss and promote the myriad social, health and economic benefits associated with urban nature and nature connection.

Communities that have a stake in shaping their neighbourhoods are more likely to care for them and reap the ongoing benefits that Nature-Based Neighbourhoods offer in return.

2

Supporting cross-sector collaboration to strengthen the movement

The next section shares the development of this approach, the rationale and how it works in action.

Context: Our journey to urban nature

Our journey to Nature-Based Neighbourhoods began in 2020 in Manchester with £300,000 of multi-year support for environmental charity, Hubbub's #InOurNature campaign.

In Our Nature (ION) brought together over 50 citywide partners to explore how to make nature inspirational, relevant and inclusive, especially in underserved and under-represented communities.



Can nature be a hook for climate action?

The direct environmental benefits of urban nature – such as urban cooling or flood mitigation – are clear. However, research shows that the more connected we feel to nature, the more likely we are to adopt everyday behaviours that are good for the environment.

We wanted to dig deeper. In 2022-3 we supported Chrysalis Research and Hubbub to explore the relationship between nature connection and climate action. The research, which draws on data from 182 participants of community projects in Manchester, highlighted the power of:

Quick wins

Taking part in community 'nature' projects for any length of time, increased participants' connection to nature. Many of these projects were not explicitly about nature, but behaviour and attitude change around sustainability were clearly visible as a result.

Empowerment

64% of people involved in nature-based activities feel more capable of fighting climate change.

Behaviour change

92% adopted at least one new green habit, such as growing food or cutting plastic waste.

Interestingly, the social element of activities was what most motivated and helped to sustain change. Full findings can be found here.

We were hooked

This early work helped us to see the potential for urban nature to create positive feedback loops within communities. Urban nature was not only providing direct environmental, health and social benefits, but it was also increasing people's sense of agency to act on climate and shifting other pro-environmental behaviours.

In addition, In Our Nature helped us to see the importance of bringing nature to people; weaving nature into daily life to ensure it was accessible, affordable and part of the community. Our focus on Nature-Based Neighbourhoods was set.

Case studies and further details can be found in the In Our Nature Impact reports (2020-2022) & (2022-2025).





Early 2024

Landscape mapping
including desk-based research and interviews.

Outcomes:

- Living map of connections and activities.

Learning:

- There's a wealth of great work on urban nature, but too often it's happening in silos with wheels being reinvented.

June 2024

Cross-sector workshop with 45 policy experts
NGOs, academia, built environment professionals and community practitioners.

Collectively we explored the barriers and opportunities to support the proliferation of Nature-Based Neighbourhoods.

Outcomes:

- Identified key systemic levers that could support a proliferation of NBN. See *Figure 1*.
- Identified a need to platform what's working at the community level to amplify influence.

Learning:

- The forum helped participants to meet others working on another part of the puzzle, feel part of something bigger - "an ecosystem", learn from others and plant the seed of collaboration.
- Multiple organisations work on similar issues in parallel without the time or opportunity to lift their heads and connect.

October 2024

Funder round table
bringing together funders and stakeholders to explore opportunities for greater co-ordination and partnership.

Outcomes:

- New connections and greater understanding of one another's strategic priorities.
- Opportunities for partnership identified.

Learning:

- Funders work at different paces and can be limited by strategic cycles, trustee beliefs and/or varied constitutions.
- Collaboration can take many forms and continued co-ordination would be of value.

Seed funding from Gower Street allowed us to continue this work.

'Policy Sprint'
with the Town and Country Planning Association, attended by 35 cross sector organisations. Aimed to identify policy opportunities to support NBN.

Policy relating to urban nature sits in many different government departments. This fragmentation leads to a lack of co-ordination.

Outcomes:

- Calls to action for refinement and development.

Learning:

- Policy fragmentation greater than participants expected.
- Policies are not enabling communities.
- Government won't achieve targets for greening if communities can't help. E.g. Community tree planting has not been counted within government targets.
- Cross departmental task forces have worked successfully overseas.

November 2024

Follow-up to June workshop
to build on outcomes & identify the barriers/opportunities to greater cross-sector collaboration

Learning:

There are pervasive barriers to collaboration:

- People are stretched – the value and benefits of collaboration. need to be explicit and quickly realised.
- There's a perception of being 'in competition' for funds.
- There's a lack of oversight – organisations are unsure of where they fit in the ecosystem or direction of travel.
- Networks do not automatically provide the conditions for collaboration.

Perceived aids to collaboration:

1. Core funding & funded time for collaboration.
2. Mapping/ oversight of the ecosystem and resources with a lead to broker relationships.
3. Shared goals.

Our journey continued...

The conditions required to support Nature-Based Neighbourhoods

As identified at a June 2024 workshop with cross-sector practitioners.

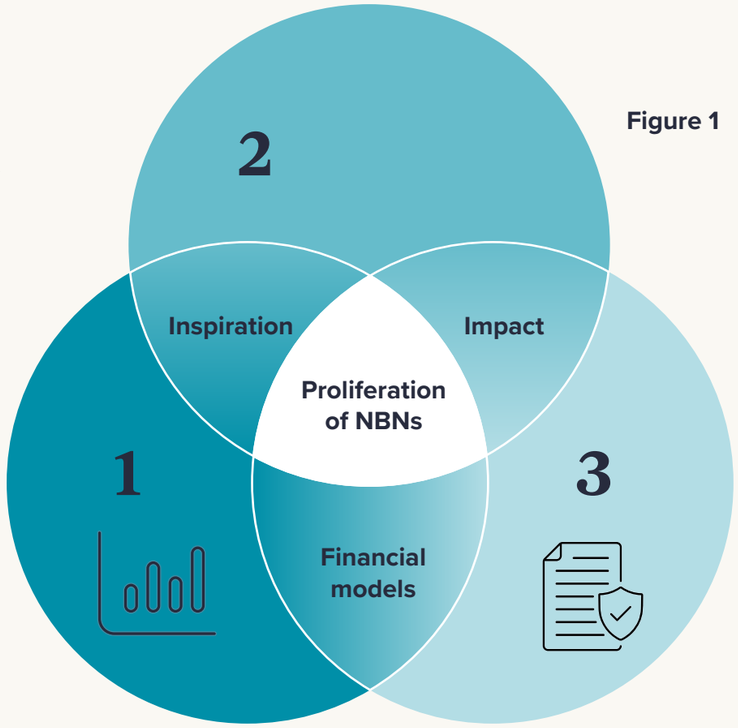


Figure 1

1 Economy

- Placemaking
- Enterprise models
- NBN value propositions
- Valuing and creating green jobs
- Creative use of existing contracts
- Businesses connect with their communities

2 Community

- Community assets
- Peer to peer networks and a sense of belonging to a movement
- Designed with and for the community
- Local authority - community engagement
- Nature embedded within solutions to community needs

3 Policy

- Joined up cross-department strategies
- Health, environmental and planning policies value nature
- Increasing green economy opportunities for NBN

Defining our role

In 2024, we hired our specialist in community engagement and urban nature to lead our programmatic activity and to understand how and where we could be most catalytic in supporting the proliferation of Nature-Based Neighbourhoods.

This has led to the development of Our Approach.



"I'm holding on to the new and interesting connections made with people from different organisations and geographies with a wealth of knowledge I've not been exposed to before. All with a shared enthusiasm for working together."

June 2024 Event participant, Citizen's UK

"I'm excited about the work WFET is doing to bring together people from very different parts of the ecosystem."

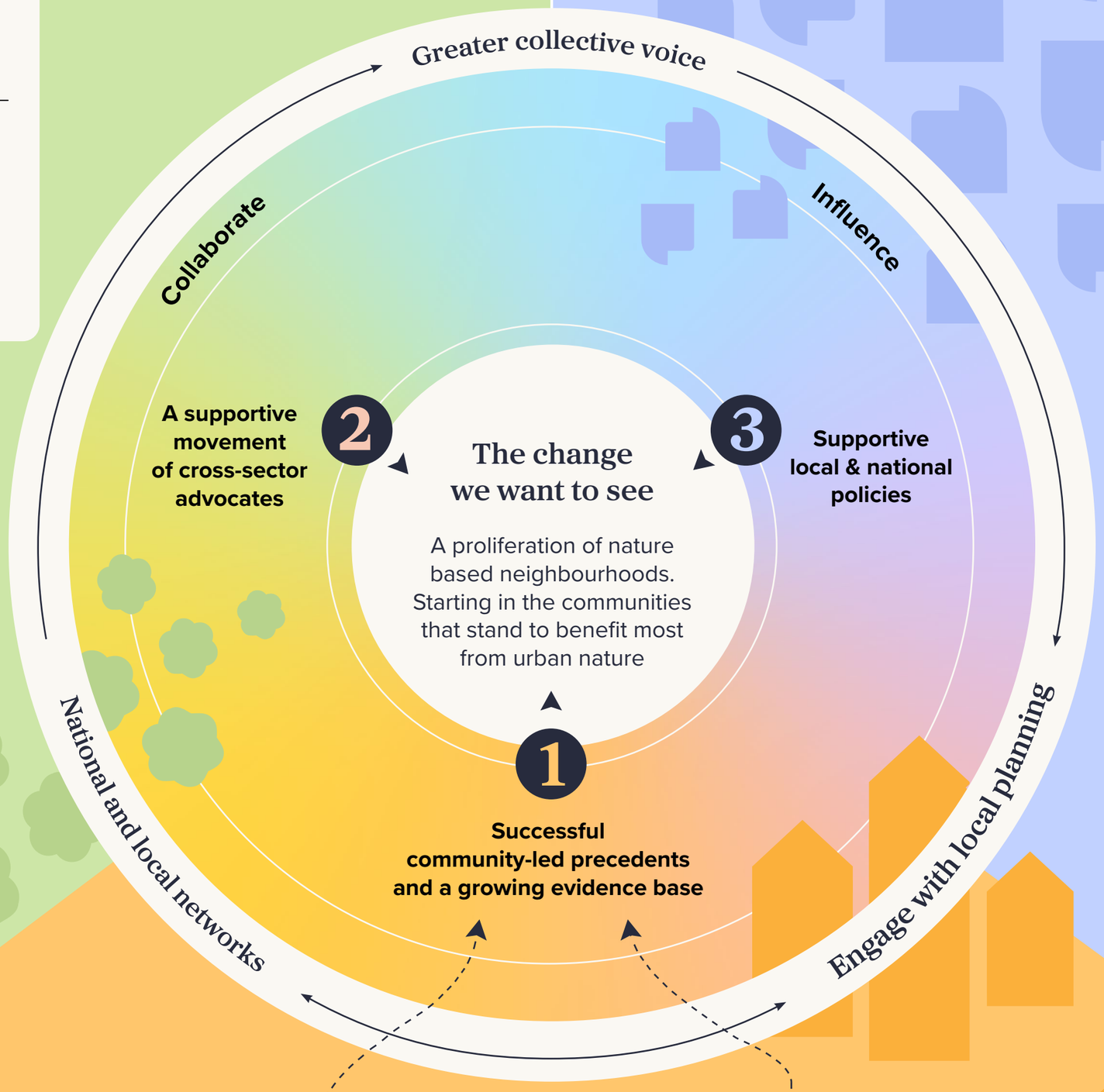
June 2024 Event participant, Moral Imaginations

"I'm excited about the diversity and expertise of people that attended the event who are ready to catalyse collective action to accelerate nature into neighbourhoods."

June 2024 Event participant, Arup

Our approach and rationale

Our approach comprises three mutually supportive themes. Together they create a cycle of change: communities develop solutions, connections help those solutions spread and adapt. Influence creates the conditions for even more communities to lead change with the supportive local infrastructure needed to sustain it.



Collective Knowledge & Collaboration

National & local level

Invest in the connective tissue supporting the exchange of knowledge and inspiration, camaraderie and the development of common goals

Collective Voice

Invest in connecting local stories with the national agenda

Identify the acupuncture points where collective voice can effect change

Collective Solutions

Community level

Invest in community capacity and local leadership, resourcing time and skills to network, develop, deliver and sustain local solutions

We aim to be catalytic. Platforming what works to crowd in support at a local level and inspire replication nationally



Progress and learning from our Nature-Based Neighbourhoods funding

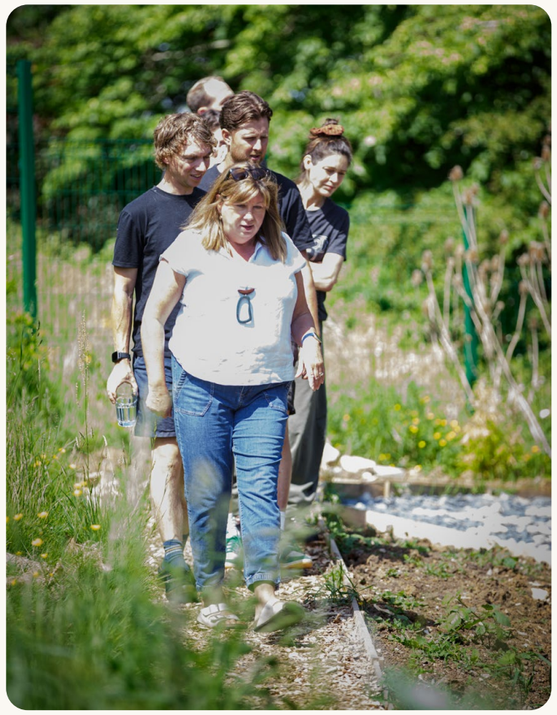
Progress and learning emerging from our NBN funding

Everyone should be able to experience the wellbeing benefits of nature. We support the creation of **nature-rich neighbourhoods, particularly in communities that stand to benefit most, by promoting equitable access to urban nature at the community level** and strengthening collaboration across sectors.

Over the past two years, we have **funded 15* organisations** working towards this goal. Together, they have enhanced more than **450 green spaces**, **engaged around 21,000 people** through community activities, and **connected over 3,100 organisations** and individuals through network-building initiatives.

**12 of these organisations have been included due to reporting cycles.*





Our grantees represent different communities, and different types of organisations and they play different roles in the complex web of activity at a local level and nationally. Our funding ranges from flexible core funding to programme or network specific funding (see case studies).

In the next section we take a deeper dive into the impact of our approach and how this is informing our funding practice moving forward.

Impact headlines

Our support

£560,000
awarded to organisations

5
cross-sector field building and learning events hosted, with 175 attendees

National research on public attitudes to green space and urban greening policy

5
learning networks engaged

Empowers grantees

15
organisations supported

3,100
organisations and individuals connected by grantee-led networks

10+
new partnerships between organisations fostered

Community benefit

38,000m² +
of nature-rich space created across over 450 sites

15
professionals trained on nature-based solutions

21,000
people engaged via hands on workshops, events and volunteering

10
national media pieces and 12 events for the sector, MPs and Councillors on nature-based neighbourhoods policy



Methodology for understanding our impact

Given the diverse nature of our funding and support, we used a range of methods to understand our impact on communities and grantee organisations.

This report draws on:

- Grantee conversations
- End-of-grant reports
- Key metrics gathered from grantees
- Grantee workshop and other grantee events
- Our trial of the Most Significant Change methodology consisting of a series of interviews exploring stories of change from the communities and from grantee organisations

We use the following Domains of Change to describe the impact we're working towards.

Domains of change

People & belonging

People feel prouder of where they live – more connected, hopeful and inspired.

Place & environment

Neighbourhoods become thriving, safer, more vibrant places where people and nature grow together.

Community capacity & leadership

Communities lead the way – more skilled, confident and equipped to shape the future.

Collaboration & partnership

Organisations and services connect like never before, building powerful partnerships that drive real change.

Voice & influence

Young people and communities are heard more – shaping decisions and securing lasting support.

Most Significant Change trial

Over the past year, we have been developing our approach to understanding and reviewing impact, including the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) methodology.

We interviewed all our grantees and asked them to collect stories of change from the communities they support. The methodology uses a standard set of questions to explore what changes theinterviewee has noticed, which of these changes was most significant, and why they believed this held most significance. We then brought grantees together to discuss their stories of change.

The interviews between us and our grantees, and between grantees and their stakeholders resulted in rich, thoughtful conversations about change: the changes people had hoped for, the ones they hadn't anticipated, why they mattered, and what they suggested about what should come next.

Grantee feedback on the process was extremely positive. We are now embedding this reflective approach across the trust's thematic work.

Our impact

All our grantees report that WFET's support has increased their capabilities. From leadership and the ability to create and influence change locally, to collaboration and partnership working.

The MSC process has helped grantees to understand how their work is shaping the fabric of communities.

> "You [WFET] connect up all the bits. You have a good idea of what's happening around the country, and that's invaluable."
>
> - Carly Butler, University of Derby, on WFET

To increase impact we have taken a regional approach to funding in areas such as Derby and Manchester which has supported greater local connectivity.

Case studies

Here we've included a selection of grantee case studies with a specific focus on how WFET funding and wrap-around support has affected the following domains of change:

Collective Solutions
Growing community capacity & leadership

Collective Knowledge
Supporting those working across the field to come together

Collective Voice
Inspiration & influence

Down to Earth Derby

People & belonging | Place & environment | Community capacity & leadership | Collaboration & partnership | Voice & influence

Our support: WFET and Down to Earth Derby share a vision for a city based commercially successful venture with nature and community at its heart. We want to support Electric Daisy to become a blueprint for third spaces of the future. (£162,500 over 3 years)

Led by Jamie Quince Starkey, Down to Earth Derby uses nature-based regeneration to turn forgotten urban spaces into vibrant hubs where communities, culture and nature grow together. They work with creatives, businesses, councils and educators to support local people to feel the benefits of nature.

Since 2023, WFET has been the lead supporter of their Electric Daisy flagship site. Once the neglected site of a former supermarket in the city centre, Electric Daisy is now a vibrant, community space celebrating food, growing and local culture. Their events programme ranges from 'veg and vibes' live music, to 'Gro Bros' - a men's social which stealthily incorporates growing, to toddlers' messy play in nature.



Over the last 2 years, they've welcomed over 20,000 people to the site, greened 620m^2 of the city centre and hosted 25 skills workshops while creating and sustaining 19 employment opportunities.



In August 2026, Jamie sat down with the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to share Down to Earth Regeneration's nature centred approach to place making and building community in Derby.

"The support from WFET was financially fantastic, even more so the belief in our mission and vision, and holding us accountable, made massive difference to us. It raised our profile, credibility and our confidence to engage with other organisations and become a big player in the Derby nature scene, and Derby generally."

- Jamie Quince Starkey, Founder Director at Down to Earth Derby

Sow the City

People & belonging | Place & environment | Community capacity & leadership | Collaboration & partnership | Voice & influence

Our support: WFET provided Sow the City with multi-year core funding to grow the organisation in line with their vision. The grant has been catalytic in supporting new funding partnerships, policy engagement, and building sector-wide networks. (£60,000 over 3 years)

Sow the City (STC) is a Manchester-based social enterprise on a mission to create greener cities and connect people with nature.

Since founding in 2009, they've provided training for over 20,000 people and transformed almost 50,000m^2 of land into community green space. They had never received core funding until a 3-year grant from WFET in 2024.

In 2025, Prime Minister Andy Burnham, in his former role as Mayor of Greater Manchester, asked STC to set up a Green and Blue Space Action Network for Greater Manchester (GBSAN). WFET's core funding allowed them to say 'yes' without hesitation.

Over the last year, the GBSAN has grown into a thriving movement with more than 300 cross-sector members. These events have helped reconnect green and blue infrastructure with the Greater Manchester 'Live Well' agenda and have elevated discussions around access to nature, health and wellbeing at a strategic level.



WFET funding has also enabled STC to increase its influence on local and regional policy. Through engagement with councils, elected members and strategic partners, the organisation has helped advance discussions around the Right to Grow agenda, community stewardship and the role of nature in improving health and wellbeing.

The grant has been catalytic in strengthening the organisation's long-term sustainability, and impact. By providing capacity to pursue major funding opportunities, WFET's investment contributed to STC securing a significant new three-year partnership with the National Trust and National Lottery Community Fund, supporting future GBSAN expansion and neighbourhood greening projects across Greater Manchester.

Finally, core funding has enabled the launch of the Community Green Leaders Programme, helping emerging community organisations develop leadership, governance and planning skills while building confidence, collaboration and resilience across the sector.

"You've helped us to leverage further funding which will be transformational."

- Jon Ross, Founder, Sow the City

Manchester Urban Diggers CIC (MUD)

People & belonging | Place & environment | Community capacity & leadership | Collaboration & partnership | Voice & influence

Our support: WFET provided Manchester Urban Diggers with multi-year core funding enabling them to develop their leadership team, strengthen revenue streams and realise their growth ambitions. (£47,688 over 3 years)

Manchester Urban Diggers (MUD) is a social enterprise working to create a fair, sustainable food system and a replicable model for regenerative, localised, community-focused farming in urban spaces.

Since they formed in 2019, they've supported 30+ food growing projects and developed a rich offer of training programmes, community events and design consultancy.

Core funding has given the time and space for the directors to focus on business development, their own training and capacity building. Allowing them to proactively develop their vision and strategy to support viable employment opportunities in urban farming, and local supply chains.

The funding enabled Co-director Sam to join the Manchester Food Board and champion MUD's approach to local food resilience. It also supported professional development for all three directors, helping them build skills, networks and relationships with local leaders, businesses and the council.

These connections and headspace have already led to the aquisition of a new 2.7 acre plot of land and significant funding to bring it back into production, and separately, a tender to deliver vocational market gardening training for unemployed people with Manchester Adult Education Service.



"The more you start talking to partners, the more you feel confident in those meetings. I went into a neighbourhood team meeting... and we've had about six or seven different jobs, and loads of things have come off the back of that meeting. I wouldn't have had capacity to do that if it wasn't for WFET."

- Sam Payne, Director & Founder, MUD

University of Derby Nature Connectedness Network

Collaboration & partnership

Voice & influence

Our support: WFET has funded The University of Derby's Nature Connectedness Network (NCN) since it began in 2023. Our funding has enabled national cross-sector practitioners to collaborate, influence policy and bring new legitimacy to the field of 'nature connectedness'. (£44,903 over 3 years)

The grant enabled the University of Derby to transform an informal series of meet-ups into a formal interdisciplinary network for those working on nature connectedness, bringing together community practitioners, academics and policymakers. The network supports shared learning between researchers and those with practical experience.

The network continues to grow, with members leading sub-groups such as education, health and business, and developing new ideas and collaborations. **Recent surveys show that 50% of members have actively collaborated since joining.**

The network has generated joint funding bids, new partnerships and projects, valuable learning opportunities, and a "new sense of legitimacy" for the field of nature connectedness.

It has also influenced national policy, leading to an entire chapter on Nature Connection in the DfE's National Education Nature Park resources and helping secure the inclusion of nature connectedness and outdoor adventure in its enrichment framework.

Through the Most Significant Change (MSC) process, we received extensive feedback on the changes brought about by the network which consolidates our thinking on the value of networks done well.

"We've got a kind of solidity about the network now that just wasn't there before. It feels very much alive. All of the connections, conversations and enthusiasm happening behind it make it feel that way."

- Carly Butler, University of Derby, NCN Lead

"Having a finger on the pulse has made it a lot easier to take my academic work and angle it to be most useful in the real world [...] it's served as invaluable glue to pull the community together so that now it has some coherence [...] it's not only brought people together, but it's also created a space for leaders to lead."

- Researcher, University of Derby

"I think it gives a really good opportunity for amplifying stories and building networks and finding out who else is doing this type of work. I feel that was really hidden a couple of years ago."

- National Trust Employee

Derby Nature Collective

Community capacity & leadership

Collaboration & partnership

Voice & influence

Our support: WFET provided seed funding for the establishment of the Derby Nature Collective, allowing cross sector organisations in Derby to self-organise, collaborate and garner local support. (£19,956, one year)

Our work in Derby led to the creation of the Derby Nature Collective (DNC). In 2024, grantees and local partners highlighted a challenge: many organisations shared a vision for nature recovery but were often working in isolation. How could they connect and collaborate more effectively?

In partnership with Natural England and Derby-based design agency Katapult, we convened workshops with representatives from more than 20 nature-focused organisations. Together, they developed a shared vision and Theory of Change for a nature-rich, thriving city.

The Collective established monthly meetings, developed a pipeline of projects and secured funding for a coordinator and branding.

Support from Natural England enabled an opportunities map of the city's green offerings and in-depth community conversation.

A year on, sustained investment from participants has built real momentum. DNC is hosting events, running campaigns, winning funding bids and co-developing projects in priority areas. Members now have a clear understanding of each other's work, leading to stronger relationships, great accountability and more effective collaboration.

"We do some great things for nature around Derby City... however, a lot of it is disjointed. There wasn't that one voice championing nature conservation in Derby and sending a positive message to the public."

- David Wimslow, Parks Manager, Derby City Council

"The DNC is the single most effective group that I sit on to understand what is happening locally [...] we are still individual organisations with our own agenda, but working to identify where the common goals are. Where can we be greater than the sum of our parts?"

- Katherine Clarke, Head of Wilder Communities, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

"Derby is a very small place. Everybody knows everybody, but things weren't necessarily interconnected. Now we've got a starting point for something huge in the city. There is a hub of all this activity, everyone's interconnecting and we're all holding each other accountable".

- Jamie Quince Starkey, Founder and Director, Down to Earth Derby

The Town & Country Planning Association

Collaboration & partnership

Voice & influence

Our support: WFET's supported the TCPA to engage cross-sector with NBN related policy interventions, leading to 3 new influential partnerships and national research with More in Common. (£37,404 over two years)

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) works to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places through campaigning, research, training, policy influence and practical support.

Over the last two years, WFET has funded the TCPA's urban nature work, including contributions to policy consultations and coordination of the Green Infrastructure Partnership (GIP), a network of 2,000 organisations spanning the built environment and community sectors united by a passion for Green Infrastructure.

In addition, the TCPA championed a Nature-Based Neighbourhoods 'Policy Sprint' and helped the GIP develop policy recommendations that informed More in Common's WFET-funded, Parks, Pride and Place research. The funding has led to three new partnerships.

Funding has also helped TCPA clarify the value of its networking and policy work, strengthening confidence in both its evidence base and its role in supporting organisations on the ground.

GIP members have benefited from TCPA's renewed focus on the partnership and its efforts to unite members around shared policy priorities.

"WFET support was a real boost for the GIP. It's given us a new lease of life. The conversations have changed with new voices coming in, especially those working in communities. We're more focused on policy and the role we can collectively play, and have greater confidence in our ability to do this work."

- Celia Davis, Interim Director of Operations and Impact, TCPA

"The most significant change has been bringing together members so that they feel like a movement rather than individual organisations. It's significant because it's a push back against competitive behaviour and a move towards cooperative behaviour."

- Amber Alferoff, Learning & Development Manager, Social Farms and Gardens

"Previously we would have been in competition, but WFET funding has allowed us to collaborate."

- Celia Davies, Interim Director of Operations and Impact at the TCPA

More In Common

Collaboration & partnership

Voice & influence

Our support: Our work with the TCPA and wider sector lay the foundations for a major piece of research on national attitudes to urban nature which continues to evolve with rising interest from academia, NGOs and policymakers. (£45,360, one year)

In early 2025, we supported think tank, More in Common (MIC), and the Green Infrastructure Partnership to collectively question the policy interventions needed to support nature at a neighbourhood level. This gave rise to research on public attitudes to green space, Parks, Pride and Place. **It sought to test the hypothesis that 'the public care more about green space than politicians think.' Spoiler alert, they do.**

This research, based on a survey of over 3,000 Britons and focus group conversations in the likely key electoral battlegrounds of the next General Election, finds that a national mission to restore and improve the quality of Britain's parks and green spaces could play an important role in increasing public confidence in the government's ability to improve Britons' lives and communities.

The research expressed public sentiment that green spaces aren't just "nice to have" - they're the beating heart of local social infrastructure. They're where people connect, decompress, take pride in where they live, and feel part of something shared. They matter to people, no matter their background or political beliefs.

Ahead of the report's publication, we hosted an event with More in Common to share the findings and help organisations apply them to their own work. The findings of the research have been shared widely, with MPs at a roundtable, in blogs, events and webinars, in parliamentary consultations and in the media, including the Financial Times.

- **2024** **TCPA-led policy sprint** - cross-sector policy mapping
- 2025 **TCPA and MIC-facilitated workshops** - identifying policy recommendations
- 2025 **MIC-led national research** - Parks, Pride and Place report
- 2025 **Stakeholder engagement** - Policymaker and sector roundtables hosted by WFET and MIC
- 2026-27 **Guidance & toolkits development** - Practical resources for communities and local authorities

Next steps

With WFET support, the TCPA and UK100 are building on these insights to help mayors, councillors and MPs put them into practice. New briefings will demonstrate how nature-based neighbourhoods can support local priorities, including health, wellbeing and nature recovery.

Our funding will also support research into how councils work with communities on nature-based projects, alongside practical support for communities seeking to engage local decision makers.



We discovered

The public, irrespective of political leaning, care deeply about urban nature and feel it has tangible benefits for their mental health.

The most popular proposed policy was tightening the protection of green spaces in the planning framework so that any green spaces removed or damaged by development are replaced locally. Providing access to nature in schools was second most popular, and reforming Biodiversity Net Gain planning rules so that nature uplift must be applied locally rather than anywhere in the country was third.

For those in regions with Pride in Place funding, the maintenance/improvement of green space was seen as the second most popular use of Pride in Place funding - behind only public realm improvements.

You can find a summary of the report here and the full report here.



What have we learnt?



Learning about our grant giving and wrap-around support

In our quest to understand what our grantees find most useful, we gathered their feedback on the impact of WFET's support from pre-application through our grantee get-togethers to the end of grant reporting.

We supplemented these grantee interviews with anecdotal conversations and feedback provided via Grant Advisor UK.

Top descriptors for this funder

14	Builds relationships
10	Responsive
11	Friendly
9	Gives more than money
8	Insightful
7	Openminded

Summary of grant applicants' reviews of WFET via Grant Funder.

"It's just the vibes you give - a sense that it matters to you. There's a genuine interest and energy [...] you connect up all the bits between [...] you are not just the people who give the funds, but also you have a good idea about what's happening around the country across all sorts of different areas. That's particularly valuable. So it feels like there's support as well as funds."

- Carly Bulter, Nature Connectedness Network

"You've provided us with flexibility and the ability to respond to what arises. We've valued being put in touch with others, and being able to talk through the next phase."

- Kate McCabe, Urban Foundry

"Your convening work has really helped us to define our place, and connect with others [...] in the most supportive way"

- Fiona Kennedy, Hubbub UK

These conversations showed that our grantees value:

- The **flexibility** and **trust** demonstrated in the relationship
- The **one-to-one expert support** and guidance from WFET
- The **introductions** and **connections** facilitated by WFET
- The opportunities for **peer-to-peer learning** and inspiration
- The sense of **being part of a bigger landscape** of activity and the opportunity to explore and clarify their organisation's role in that landscape.



Learning on the ‘ecosystem’ of existing work

We’re lucky to connect with a vibrant ecosystem of organisations and individuals supporting urban nature. We’ve been inspired by their dedication and the breadth of innovative approaches.

Our future thinking is informed by five key takeaways from these connections:

1

The need for a more unified movement

Just as responsibility for urban nature spans multiple government departments, its benefits and relevance cut across a wide range of areas, from local food security, social prescribing, and community care to sport, play, and civic pride. **There are opportunities for greater dialogue between those working across these fields, enabling joined-up collective approaches with greater influence and impact.**

2

A culture of competition often gets in the way

In a time of funding scarcity and growing interest in urban nature, competition for funds is greater than ever. **Investment in collaboration takes time, headspace and confidence to take risks.** Things many cannot afford right now. **Resourcing the connective tissue can benefit individual organisations and the sector as a whole.** Actively co-funding those who would previously have been in competition has allowed for new approaches and combined heft.

3

Communities know the change that is needed

What they need is the sustained support and flexible funding to enable them to lead change, and develop models to sustain it. Local power requires local structures and skills. We also heard that time and headspace to connect with peers, local partners and national precedents would inspire and sustain that change.

4

Devolution and rising interest in place provide fresh opportunities

Local Government Devolution and rising political interest in ‘community power’, provide a timely opportunity to embed NBN within emerging local governance structures. New strategic authorities, spatial development strategies and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) will shape investment and planning priorities while elected mayors have new powers to convene and address local challenges.

However, local government reorganisation creates uncertainty about roles, boundaries and processes, the shift to larger authorities may weaken neighbourhood influence if community engagement is not prioritised, LNRSs vary in how accessible they are to communities, and there is a risk that schemes such as Pride in Place could be directed towards existing council priorities rather than resident-led projects.

Realising the benefits will depend on ensuring communities are recognised and supported as active partners.

5

Connection and collaboration are key drivers of change

We have seen that meaningful change happens when people are connected to others working towards similar goals. Whether through formal networks, local collectives or peer learning opportunities, connection helps organisations build confidence, share knowledge, avoid duplication and identify new opportunities for partnership. **This reinforces our belief that investing in the conditions for collaboration is not an ‘add-on’ to impact, but a key mechanism through which impact is created.**

Grantee learning event

In early 2026, we brought our grantees together to explore collective impact and future priorities. The event provided valuable insights into grantees' work and support needs.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with all attendees saying the day was worthwhile and that they would make time to attend again.

> "It felt very productive.... great to be in a room (and with paid-for time) with people facing similar challenges, working in the same field but in different ways."
>
> - Plant MCR

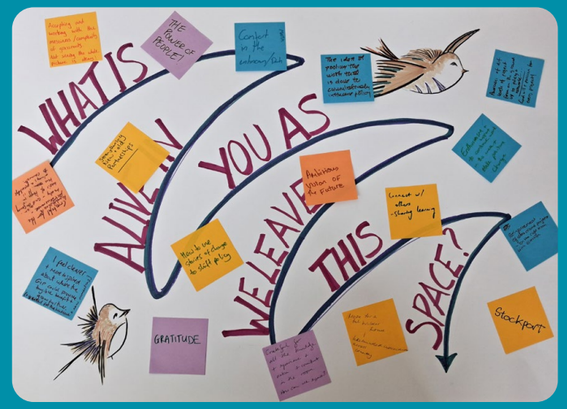


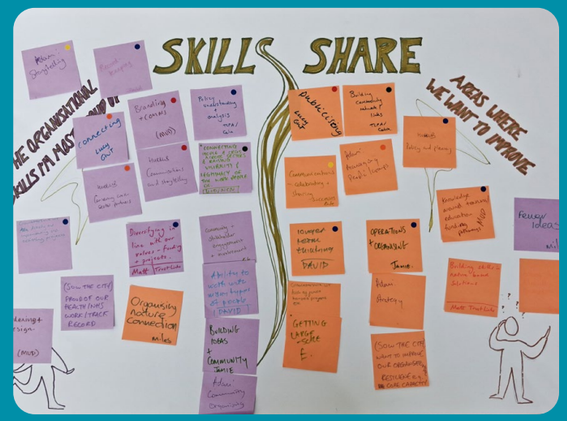


> "Valuable conversations were flowing all day, through breaks as well as the facilitated conversation."
>
> - Urban Foundry

> "It was great to feel the sense of momentum... Skills sharing was very helpful. We're planning to steal the idea for the nature network."
>
> - University of Derby

> "Inspirational to know you're part of something bigger, especially if you're feeling 'weathered.'"
>
> - MUD







Taking it forwards

Nature-Based Neighbourhoods: Growing Strong

The Growing Strong Programme is a five-year, £10,000,000 partnership with the Lund Trust.

Placing power and decision-making with local people.

What does it take to grow community?

The programme launched in six neighbourhoods in Derby and Wolverhampton in autumn 2026.

From year two onwards communities will be able to access funding for ideas emerging from co-created ‘Living Plans’.

We welcome other local and national partners to join us in growing the programme locally or ensuring the programme travels.

Aims and approach

By providing inspiration, resources and funded time for peer learning, the partnership will build the capacity of local organisations and support communities to embed nature into everyday life.

Core funding, alongside a flexible training and development budget, will help community partners strengthen networks, develop sustainable models and connect to a wider movement.

Supported by a long-term Measurement, Evaluation and Learning partner, we are learning alongside communities.



To find out more, visit our website or read our latest blog on the Environmental Funders website. Contact Mark, Programme Co-ordinator mark.hilleard@wates.co.uk





It starts in community

We invest in community capacity and local leadership. Resourcing time and skills to network, develop, deliver and sustain local solutions.

We connect experience

WFET invest in the connective tissue supporting the exchange of knowledge and inspiration, camaraderie and the development of common goals.

We back the stories that matter

We help to connect local stories with the national agenda and identify the acupuncture points where collective voice can effect change.

Join us



What this means in practice (2027-28)

1

Collective Solutions

We will enable more communites by:

- Funding community-led initiatives that embed nature in neighbourhoods and building local capacity, ownership and leadership.
- Directing over 50% of our funding to community-level action, investing in people, skills, training and mentoring.
- Building on learning from our partnerships and portfolio, sharing insights and scaling effective approaches.

2

Collective Knowledge & Collaboration

We will strengthen collaboration across sectors by:

- Funding and creating opportunities for organisations to connect, learn and collaborate.
- Bringing together diverse perspectives.
- Contributing to working groups, steering groups and learning networks to share evidence and influence practice.
- Developing collaborative funding partnerships that amplify impact.

3

Voice & Influence

We will inspire and influence by:

- Supporting communities to engage in local decision-making through funding, training and mentoring.
- Working with local authorities to demonstrate how community-led action can help deliver nature recovery and wider local priorities.
- Supporting compelling local storytelling to build understanding, engagement and support.
- Connecting grantee learning and impact to national conversations, demonstrating the contribution of Nature-Based Neighbourhoods to broader social and environmental goals.

The emerging evidence from our work to date gives us confidence to continue investing in and evolving our approach as we learn with others. I'm proud to share the approach that will guide our work in the coming years. We'd love to have you join us or simply to share ideas or learning.



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Sustainability Policy