



NORTHERN NETWORK YEAR 2 REPORT



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Introduction

This report covers the second year (July 2025 – 2026) of the three year *Northern Network – Green Community Hubs* lottery funded programme. The programme is funded from July 2024 – July 2027 and is a continuation of an initial pilot phase that ran between September 2022 – April 2024. The Northern Network programme is delivered by a partnership of five northern Groundwork Trusts: Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire & Merseyside, Groundwork Greater Manchester, Groundwork North East & Cumbria, Groundwork South & North Tyneside and Groundwork Yorkshire.

The *Northern Network* programme supports communities to co-design and develop Green Community Hubs (hereafter GCH) in their local area. Communities are supported by a *Green Community Hubs Project Facilitator*, each employed by their local Groundwork Trust. We will also support additional community organisations to develop their projects through the *Northern Network's* online and in person resources.

This report covers the impact of the second year of the project. In the Year 1 report, we reported on our rationale for site selection and our methodology for evaluating the project. This has not changed in Year 2 – please refer to the Year 1 report for further information on this.



1.1 Site Selection

The following places were chosen for Northern Network support in Year 2:

Area	Hub	Type
Leigh, Greater Manchester	Higher Folds GCH	Higher Folds GCH was based around HF Works, a local community infrastructure organisation on the Higher Folds estate in Leigh. The project worked with volunteers to build capacity in their area, improve their existing community garden, and train volunteers to become Forest School Leaders.
Blackpool, Lancashire	Clifton Hospital GCH	Volunteers at Clifton Hospital worked alongside staff members (nursing, OT, estates) to deliver a programme of horticultural therapy to patients and relatives at Clifton Hospital.
Anfield, Liverpool	Community Basket CIC	Community Basket CIC is a community shop located in Stanley Park, Anfield. They took on the lease for the land from the Council and have transformed it into a community allotment and wellbeing garden for local residents
Rochdale, Greater Manchester	Stoneyfield Park	The Friends of Stoneyfield Park are a resident-led group working to improve their local park in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. Working closely with Deeplish Community Centre, they developed a series of activities and events for local residents and improved infrastructure around their local park.
Eccles, Salford	Salford City Roosters RFC	Salford City Roosters Rugby Club is based in Eccles, Salford. They are a community rugby club and developed part of their grounds as a community garden for residents, supporters and neighbours to enjoy.
Carlisle	Botcherby Community Centre	Botcherby Community Centre is located just outside of Carlisle city centre. With help from volunteers and partners from the Year 1 Carlisle Hub, they created a green space which is used by a number of partners and community members. They also improved their building's energy efficiency and went on group trips.
Whitehaven	Whitehaven AFC	Group developed community garden for growing food and wellbeing space in Football club's grounds in Whitehaven, Cumbria.
Leeds	Aysgarth Greenspace Community	Project officers worked with local community residents and volunteers to develop gardening, woodwork and craft projects based around local park and community centre.
Sheffield	Wensley GCH	A youth project which focused on sports to engage young people in the area. This included climbing, cycling, hiking and canoeing.
South Shields, Tyneside	Forber Avenue Allotments	A community allotment project in partnership with Riverside Housing, working to revitalise derelict allotments with plots for local residents, and a community plot

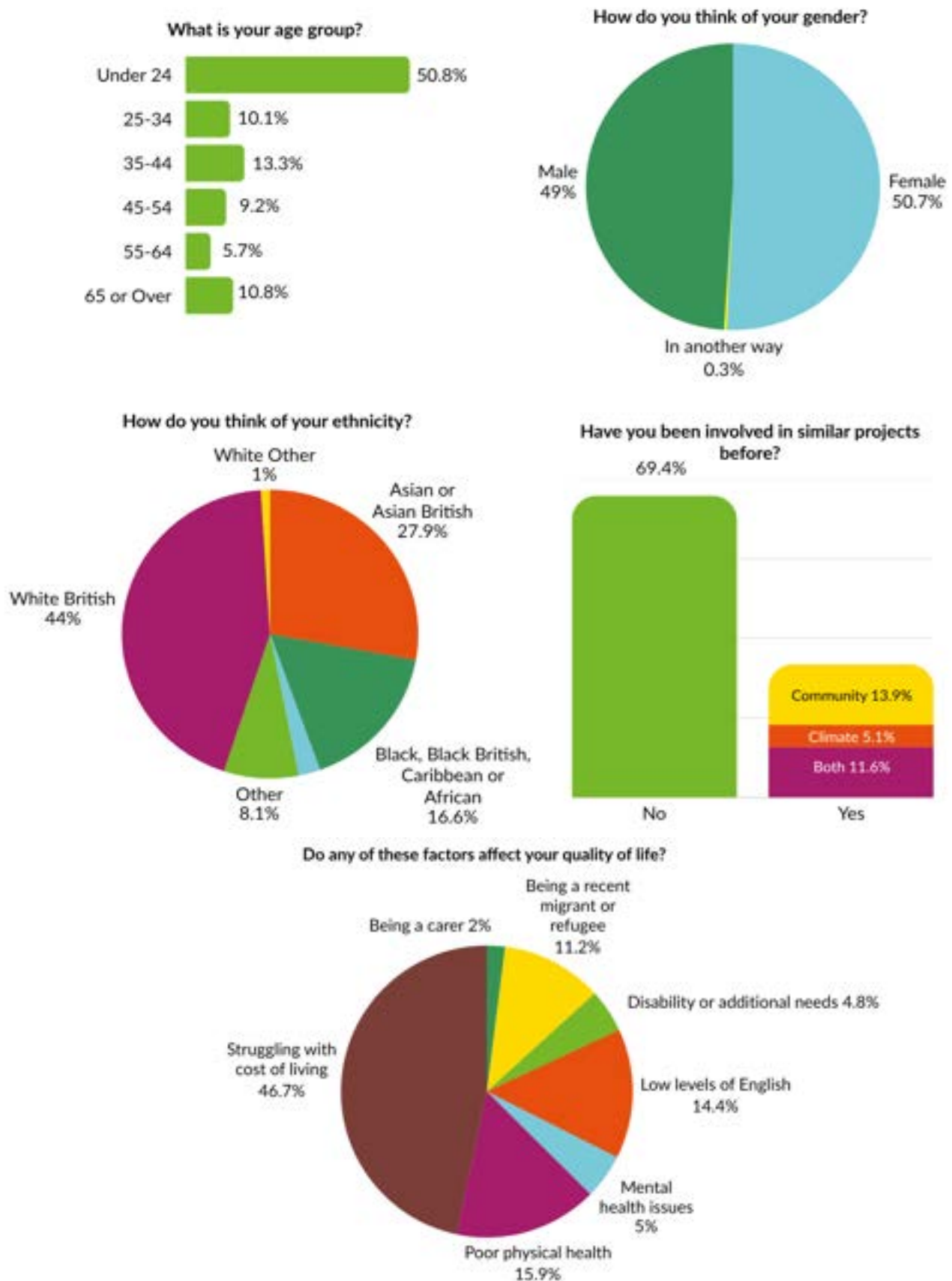
1.2 Overall Performance – Year 2

The table below shows our Year 2 performance against the targets set by the lottery.

Number	Quantity	Description	Year Breakdown	Year 2 Progress	Percentage Progress (Year 2)	Overall Progress
1	30	Places benefiting from in-depth Groundwork support to co-design and co- develop Green Community Hubs.	10 per year	10	100%	60%
2	1500	Individuals in the co-design of theses hubs.	50 per hub 500 peryear	623	125%	74%
3	9000	Community members accessing services that improve health; wellbeing; nature and community cohesion	300 per hub 3000 per year	3366	112%	69%
4	1000	Organisations connected through your online resources.	333 per year	100	30%	43%
5	1500	Organisations and community members accessing in person networking events and skills sharing days.	500 per year	910	182%	84%
6	£312,160.00	Distributed in small capital grants to the Green Community Hubs over the course of the 3 years through a Community Decision Making Grant Panel.	£100,000 per year	£100,298.71	100%	59%
7	£866,638.00	Raise £866,638 in match funding over the lifetime of the project - £518,983 due by the end of Year 2	£518,983 by end of Year 2	£725,048.68	135%	81%



We have included the following charts to show the differing demographics of people that we have reached across Year 2, across all 11 Green Community Hubs:



2. Project Development and milestones



We kept the format of the project the same in Year 2, which meant that the projects all followed the same milestones as described in the timeline above. This included creating a project steering group, developing and running community consultations, supporting training and development through skill sharing days, and applying for funding via the Community Funding Panel.

SPRING 2025

- At **Stoneyfield Park**, the group co-designed a community Eid celebration which welcomed around 200 people, strengthened relationships with local businesses and partners, and recruited 18 new volunteers to the Friends of the Park group.



- Three practical training sessions brought together 34 **Northern Network** members and Green Community Hub volunteers to build confidence in promoting their work. Sessions covered social media, printed materials, storytelling and sharing practical examples from other community hubs.



- Salford City Roosters Green Community Hub** launched. Residents, partner organisations and local stakeholders came together to launch the new hub and shape plans for a future community garden. An open call for ideas, skills and volunteers gave local people an opportunity to influence the project from the beginning.

SUMMER 2025

- Summer Holiday HAF club took place at **Community Basket CIC**, in Liverpool. Children took part in nature activities including pollinator surveys, journey stick making, litter picks and fruit tasting.
- Wensley Green Community Hub** brought residents together for a summer community BBQ and football tournament. The event welcomed more than 40 local people, helping neighbours meet one another, share ideas for the hub and shape an activities programme that many would go on to take part in over the following months.

Northern Network members met at **GroZone** in Northwich and **GROW** in Sheffield to exchange ideas, explore funding opportunities and discuss common challenges. One of the most popular sessions explored the challenges and opportunities presented by AI for community organisations, particularly when preparing funding applications.

WINTER 2025

At **HF works**, five raised planting beds were completed alongside new paving throughout the garden, creating an accessible space that could safely accommodate volunteers, school groups and community activities ahead of the growing season.



BEFORE



AFTER

More than 50 local people attended a May Day coffee morning and plant sale at **Forber Avenue**, raising over £300 to reinvest in site improvements, growing activities and future community events. The event also demonstrated the group's ability to generate its own income and plan for the future.

SUMMER 2026

AUTUMN 2025



SPRING 2026

Members of the **Northern Network** opened their spaces to local communities through a coordinated summer open day campaign, encouraging more people to volunteer, take part and build local partnerships.

The final phase of the **Stoneyfield Park hub** focused on helping the Friends group become self-sustaining through volunteer recruitment, governance support and new communication channels. Alongside this, the group contributed to a Green Spaces Fund application that would help secure future activity in the park.

St Vincent's secured funding to retain a key project lead for **Aysgarth Green Space** while pursuing longer-term funding and custodianship of the site. Community groups will continue gardening, crafts and family activities beyond the project, supported by new equipment, training and landscape plans that will underpin future funding bids.

seeds

2.1 Steering Groups

Developing a community-led steering group is a crucial part of the project, to help ensure project longevity, authenticity and to help drive the project forward. We have included two case studies that demonstrate the different ways that steering groups engaged their communities and had an impact on driving forward the development of the GCHs:

GORDON RIGGS TRIP AND PLANTING AT STONEYFIELD PARK

The steering group went on a day out to Gordon Riggs, to buy plants for the planters to fit with an idea L had of rainbow themed planters. Each planter had a different colour scheme, meaning that together they make a rainbow- promoting and celebrating happiness, inclusion and equality within the community.

The steering group led on designing the type and placement of plants. They planned and chose the plants, keeping an eye on how much of their budget that they had to spend.

The next day, we were able to plant them with schoolchildren from Deeplish school who came on a school trip. During the planting the steering group led the session with Groundwork staff supporting; they gave a talk on tool safety, showed the children how to loosen the soil around they plants so they can be removed from the pot without damaging them, and how to plant them carefully and respectfully.

This activity not only got local community members engaged in improving their local green space, but really encouraged the steering group to take responsibility for the activity. They were able think more organizationally about budget management, risk assessment and prevention, activity structure appropriate for a given age group. Critically assessing these processes alongside managing the practical elements of the activity has helped to build their capacity as a Friends of the Park group to deliver community engagement activities independently of Groundwork.



CLIFTON HOSPITAL STEERING GROUP

The Steering Group developed practical systems and resources to help Occupational Therapists engage patients in gardening and green therapy activities. Volunteers promoted involvement through recruitment posters across the hospital site, online promotion, and information shared with ward clerks. They also worked with the facilitator to develop engagement tools that could be used independently with patients.

- The Steering Group meets regularly and consists of both clinical and horticultural volunteers.
- Membership has grown from two volunteers to nine active Steering Group members, alongside regular patient participants.
- Volunteers share horticultural skills and knowledge with staff and each other.
- The polytunnel and surrounding areas have been planted to support year-round green activities.
- Seed collection and habitat cataloguing are helping to improve biodiversity and reintroduce endemic species.
- Raised beds have been planned and planted with fruit and vegetables in the patient garden.
- Tools have been photographed and labelled to support Occupational Therapists.
- Additional tools and equipment have been purchased to support project delivery.
- Planters and hanging baskets have been installed to improve the appearance of the hospital grounds.
- The garden has been entered for RHS Britain in Bloom judging.
- Pollinator-friendly and companion plants have been added to increase biodiversity.
- A simple horticultural activity guide is being developed for Occupational Therapists to use with patients independently.
- Volunteers are preparing to undertake horticultural therapy training through Thrive.

These activities have strengthened collaboration between volunteers and hospital staff while creating more opportunities for patients to benefit from therapeutic gardening and outdoor engagement.

"It is good to be part of the steering process as it joins the outside volunteers with the staff so we are all on the same page working together."

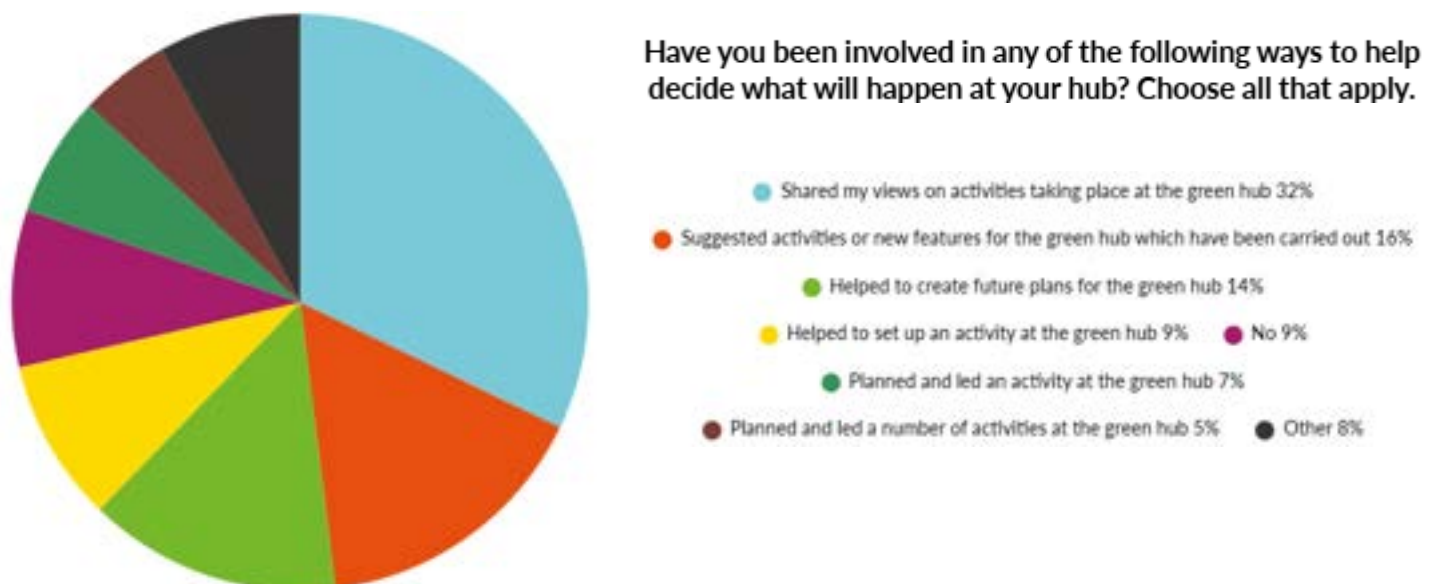


2.2 Community Consultation

A key aim of the project is to ensure that the GCHs are truly representative of their community, and that community members are able to engage with the hub not just through attendance at community events and activities, but also through helping to direct the journey of the GCH. During Year 2, we engaged 623 individuals in co-design and consultation to decide the direction of GCHs.

We tracked how GCHs were consulting their communities through asking attendees and community members to report whether they had been involved in decision making at their hub in our one off survey (143 responses in Year 2).

Out of total responses, 32% said that they had “shared their views on activities taking place at the Green Hub”, and a further 42% had either suggested an activity that had then been carried out, or planned and led the activities themselves. Altogether this is an increase in the percentage of community members who had been engaged in Year 1 and is an encouraging sign that GCH’s are reaching out to include their whole community in activity and planning.



2.3 Skill sharing and Training

We continued our programme of skill sharing and training in Year 2. In Year 2 we wanted to widen the reach of the skills programme through reaching out to Northern Network members and creating Northern Network skills and networking days. Across the year we delivered six regional gatherings, hosted by GCHs across the North of England. In total, 64 people attended these events, bringing together volunteers, coordinators and staff from a diverse range of organisations. Each gathering combined practical workshops, facilitated discussions and peer learning, with topics including funding, accessibility, volunteer engagement, communications and storytelling. Time was also built in for guided tours of host sites, giving participants the opportunity to see successful projects in action and discuss practical approaches they could adapt within their own organisations.

Alongside developing practical skills, the gatherings strengthened relationships across the network. Members were able to make connections with organisations facing similar opportunities and challenges, share resources and discuss potential collaborations. By rotating the events between different regions and host organisations, we reduced barriers to participation while celebrating the breadth of work taking place across the Northern Network. The events have become an important part of the programme, helping members feel more connected, confident and equipped to support their communities.



"I found the networking opportunities to be really useful. Talking to other community gardens and finding solutions to problems together was inspiring."

- Northern Network event feedback

2.4 Community Engagement Budget

As with Year 1, we continued to support communities to gain skills in fundraising through writing mock funding bids and assessing others' bids via the Community Funding Panel. Feedback from Year 2 projects on attending the panel included:

"Interesting to see how much the applications reflected what we are doing at our hub - this is always nice to see. Nice to feel like we are on the right track."

"[I] learnt something new from each bid - interesting to learn about all the different processes and things that people think about when applying for funding. Eg things like whacker plate, soil testing."

Overall, all GCH's in the programme spent £100,298.71 of their funding on items to enhance their programmes of activity. The remaining funding was spent on vouchers for some hubs to continue their work after the year of support has finished or was carried over to be spent next year on the programme.

We analysed the individual items that GCH's bided for over the year and found that the most common item that GCH's bought were tools, followed by infrastructure improvements to their sites; raised beds, garden structures such as gazebos and pergolas, and toilets.

This year a number of GCH's spent some of their budget on training and development for volunteers and community members. Courses that were paid for by the Community Engagement Budget included: Forest School Level 3, Outdoor First Aid Training, Level 2 Horticulture, Introduction to Social & Therapeutic Horticulture.

Purchases grouped by theme



2.5 Match Funding

We continued to fundraise for the GCH projects alongside the year of support as in Year 1. We have now surpassed our fundraising target for progression onto Year 3 and have raised a total of £725,048.68 across Year 1 and 2 for the Northern Network programme.

The table below details the total match funding raised for each hub in Year 2. We have also included two case studies which describe the impact of the match funding on GCH's and how they have managed to enhance the programme of activity, or keep funded activity going after the first year of support through this programme has ended.

Successful Funds	Total
GCH - Aysgarth	£ 22,440.00
GCH - Botcherby	£ 8,790.00
GCH - Higher Folds	£ 121,951.00
GCH - Rochdale	£ 12,410.37
GCH - Salford City Roosters	£ 4,450.00
GCH - Forber	£ 9,999.00
GCH - Wensley	£ 4,500.00
GCH - WAFC	£ 13,896.50
GCH - Community Basket	£ 9,999.00
Total	£ 208,435.87

FORBER AVENUE COMMUNITY ALLOTMENTS MATCH FUNDING

With the help of The Northern Network and Riverside Housing Association, funding was secured to purchase a 10ft storage container for the Forber Avenue Community Allotment.

The community allotment identified a need for secure onsite storage for tools, equipment and supplies. Through partnership support and external funding, a 10ft storage container was purchased and installed onsite. The container provides a secure, weatherproof space that reduces the risk of theft and damage while improving organisation of shared resources. It has also created a communal storage hub that encourages collaboration and resource sharing among plot holders, helping to strengthen community involvement and improve the efficiency of day-to-day allotment activities.



"The storage container will make a significant difference to the allotment by keeping tools and equipment safe, organised and accessible for everyone involved."

- Forber Avenue Community Allotments Volunteer



ROSEHILL THEATRE EARTHWORKS PROJECT MATCH FUNDING

Whitehaven AFC GCH worked with a local theatre group, Rosehill Theatre, to design a programme of weekly creative and practical sessions as part of the match funding element of their project. Working alongside Rosehill Theatre facilitators, parent facilitators and Green Hub volunteers, the children contributed to the design and creation of an earthworks project while learning about sustainable land management and environmental stewardship.

Rosehill Theatre designed a programme to provide children with opportunities for hands-on, child-led learning in an outdoor environment. Throughout the sessions, participants worked collaboratively to:

- Built raised garden beds using reclaimed materials.
- Created wildlife dead-hedge pathways to support local biodiversity.
- Observed soil, plants, insects and water flow through direct interaction with the natural environment.

The project encouraged creativity, teamwork and problem-solving while developing practical environmental skills. Children were supported to share ideas, take ownership of elements of the project and see the tangible results of their efforts within the community garden.

As a result of their participation, the children developed greater environmental awareness, increased confidence and a stronger sense of connection to both nature and their local community. The visible and lasting impact of their work fostered a sense of achievement and belonging.

2.6 Integration with Groundwork Programmes and wider partnership working

We have found that the GCH that are the most successful are ones which form clear links with local partners and their wider community. We will discuss this in more detail in the next section. In Year 2 we also focused on linking GCH projects with other Groundwork programmes. This included our successful *Green Doctor* programme, which supports people to access energy advice and support. We linked up GCH's with *Wellies in the Woods*, a programme of Forest School style activity for children and their parents/carers. We also worked with our Landscape Architect colleagues to design green spaces for GCHs.

An example of wider partnership working linking up two Groundwork programmes with GCH activity and wider match funding, is demonstrated below at Higher Folds GCH:



2.6.1 Higher Folds GCH – partnership working with Groundwork

Higher Folds is an estate that experiences high levels of deprivation as well as climate vulnerability, in particular flood risk linked to land topography and surface water drainage. With funding from Electricity North West (now SP Energy Networks) a programme of resilience workshops was delivered within the community through the Communities Prepared programme.

This included workshops for community organisers on preparedness for floods, extreme heat, power outages and extreme cold. Running alongside this was a community-led programme aimed at reducing the risk to flooding for the estate. This included a SuDS Optioneering report (delivered by Jacobs in partnership with Wigan Council and the Environment Agency) as well as a pilot programme of rainwater SuDS planters. 40 planters were built by local residents as part of an employment pathway programme delivered by HF Works and installed in homes across the estate. Embedded within the wider programme was Groundwork's Green Doctor project, supporting households on a 1:1 basis to understand domestic energy use, improve efficiency and address fuel poverty.





3. Impacts on Individuals



As in Year 1, our research has demonstrated that there are two key ways in which the project has had an impact on individuals – on individuals who are able to use their skills to help others, and engage in peer-peer learning, and those who found the experiences gained at the GCH improved their own lives and opportunities.

3.1 Empower people to lead change and realise their potential

Joining the GCH in a leadership role, for example on the steering group, helped to give people a sense of purpose and utilise their skills in a productive way. It also provided a structured way to experience training and leadership opportunities.

An example below is a volunteer K, who volunteered at the Whitehaven Football Club GCH, to give back to their community and pass on their skills to the new generation:

WHITEHAVEN AFC GREEN HUB VOLUNTEER AND MENTOR

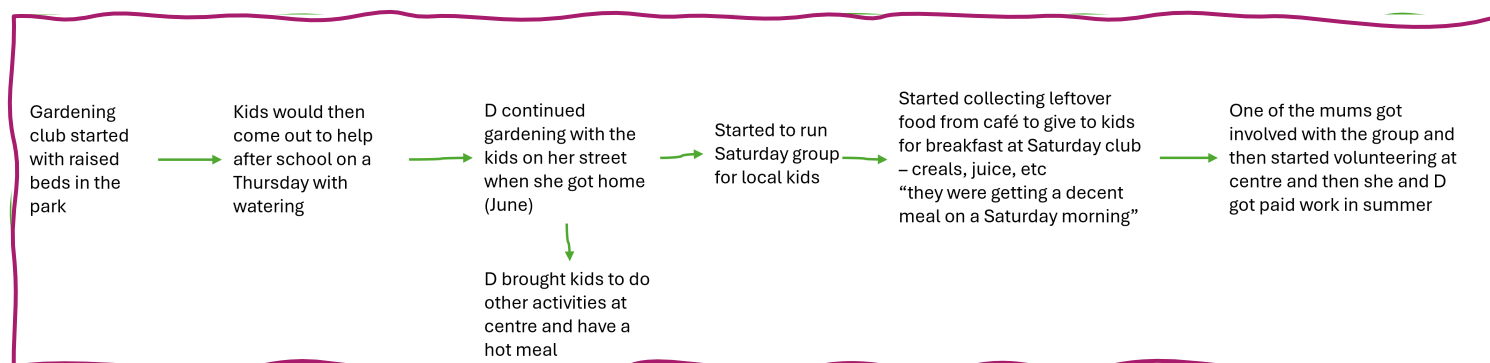
K joined the Groundwork NE & Cumbria Green Hubs Project after retiring from a long career as a self-employed Gardener and Horticultural Specialist. With a lifetime of practical gardening knowledge and hands-on craftsmanship, K was eager to use these skills to give back to the local community and help create welcoming, sustainable green spaces.

From the start, K became known for dedication, reliability, and willingness to share experience with others. These qualities made K a cornerstone of the Green Hubs volunteer team at the WAFC community garden.

K's expertise in construction and design has been vital to developing the infrastructure of two Green Hubs across West Cumbria. Through informal training sessions and day-to-day teamwork, K has inspired confidence and built a sense of camaraderie among volunteers of all ages and abilities.

"I thoroughly enjoy being outdoors and working with my hands. It keeps me active and gives me a sense of purpose. It's not just about the gardening; it's about seeing people come together, learning from each other, and making something that benefits everyone."

Volunteering at GCHs also gave individuals the opportunity to take the lead in Aysgarth, Leeds. The Impact Pathway shows the story of one volunteer who took the lead supporting other children and families in her area to engage with the GCH. This eventually led to paid employment for the volunteer:



1 Impact Pathway, Aysgarth Greenspace Community

In Sheffield, the steering group worked together to overcome issues of low attendance at community activities. The steering group was heavily influenced by young people in the local community. By empowering the steering group to take the lead to try to attract more attendees, young people were supported into training and development to help them lead groups and help develop the climbing club.

LEVEL UP CLIMBING CLUB AT WENSLEY GREEN COMMUNITY HUB

After a fall off in numbers coming to the Foundry from Climbing Club toward Christmas 2025, the Wensley Steering group decided to rebrand the club and spread the message more widely. The Steering Group are passionate about increasing representation of minority groups in sport. Steering group members and young adults AB and AN have been instrumental in the re-development of the project. With a new poster, a new name – the Level-Up Climbing Club – and online consent forms, participant numbers quickly increased.

The first session of 2026 exceeded expectations, with 18 young people, all new participants, attending and experiencing climbing, many for the first time. An introductory climbing session was delivered for the boys from Wensley. The Foundry was exceptionally supportive and offered an excellent rate for the group. Strong links have also been developed with Pitsmoor Youth Climbing, whose members attend on Thursdays and include highly skilled instructors trained in-house.

A significant success was the increased participation of young women. Previous sessions had no female representation, but the relaunch attracted six young women. All participants came from marginalised backgrounds and it was encouraging to see new faces enjoying climbing and building confidence through the activity. AN is an Arabic woman with a passion for climbing and is working towards a Climbing Wall Instructor (CWI) qualification. AN plays an important role in demonstrating to young women who join the group that they belong and can participate confidently in climbing and outdoor activities.

At Clifton Hospital GCH, steering group members were supported to develop their own projects and activities for patients, supported by clinical staff. One steering group member decided to respond to an issue around inclement weather stopping patients attending sessions in the winter months. The subsequent art sessions also helped to encourage some patients and staff to come out to the polytunnel and engage with other elements of the project once the weather improved, driving engagement with the project and exposing patients and staff to the opportunity who had not engaged with the project before.

ART THERAPY AT CLIFTON HOSPITAL GREEN HUB

One of the Volunteers at Clifton has begun to develop regular therapeutic Art sessions at Clifton hospital. The aim is to develop accessible art for people with a range of disabilities and for patients in recovery on the wards through the winter months. This will be delivered to patients and their families.

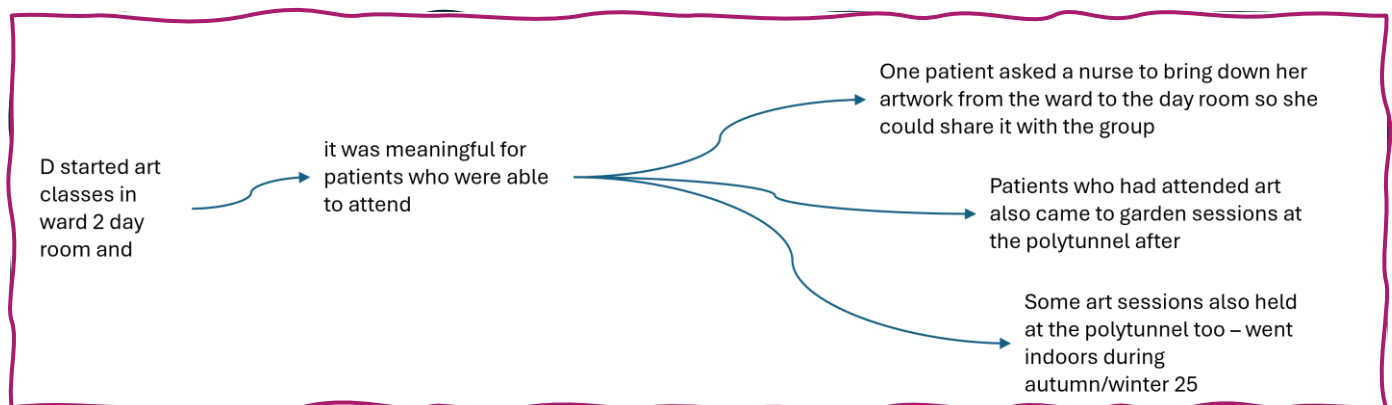
"I am happy to deliver art to patients. It will be great to complement what we do at the Green Hub in the hospital. I hope it will help patients and staff to visualise what we do outside and help patients to relax and enjoy themselves."

A consultation with the clinical staff and patients on the range of recovery issues and barriers for patients took place. The consultation with the clinical occupational therapists revealed that it would be better to deliver in the day room. The consultation also revealed that some patients struggled with fine motor skills and issues with eyesight.

The art sessions were developed to complement the work carried out in the Green Therapy project, with themes around nature, growing and biodiversity. The volunteer researched accessible art projects for recovering patients. Adapted art equipment such as larger brushes and brighter paint colours were added to the resources. The volunteer used their extensive knowledge and talent to create accessible art sessions.

The volunteer took responsibility for sourcing the appropriate materials for the sessions.

The first session was delivered on 27/10/25 and was a great success. It was developed using leaf stencils to make marks with stencil brushes.

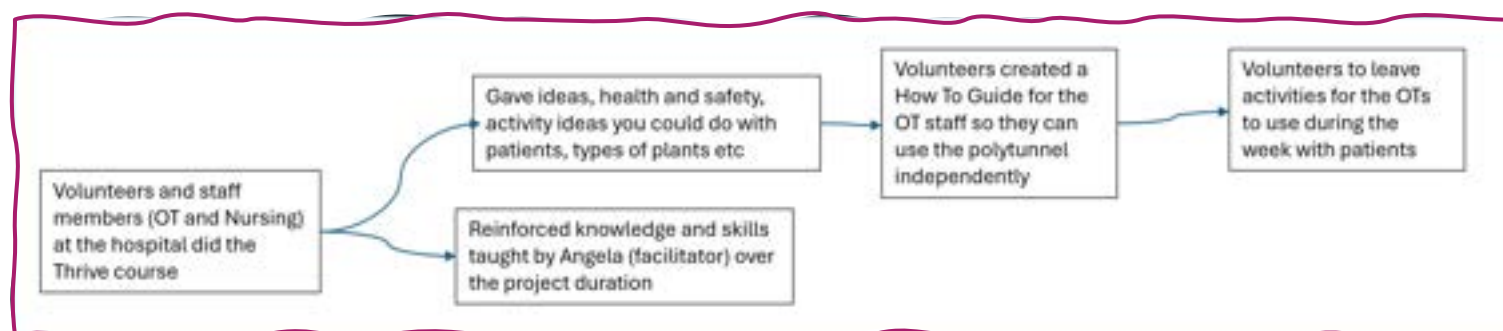


2 Impact Pathway, Clifton Hospital Art sessions

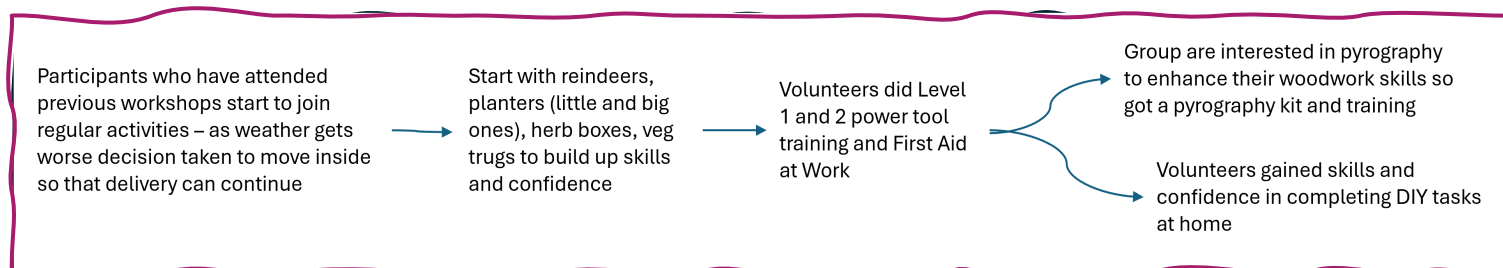
Across the hubs, regular volunteers and the steering group members were also supported to access courses and grow their own skills. This has varied from specific skills aimed to improve activities at the GCH, to skills that participants and volunteers have gained which can then be used outside of the GCH setting.

The inclusion of formal qualifications enhances the skills that the Groundwork Project Facilitators have helped to nurture. It also ensures that skills learnt over the year are consolidated and can be recognised outside of the GCH programme.

The two impact pathways and quote below demonstrate how GCH programmes have integrated formal skills training alongside mentoring and coaching to support individuals to grow their skills. It is too early to understand completely how the skills gained will benefit individuals in the long term, however it is clear that attending the GCH has helped to increase individual confidence, and provided people with the opportunity to learn skills that they otherwise would have not done.



3 Impact Pathway, Courses at Clifton Hospital



4 Impact Pathway, Aysgarth Greenspace Community

"N, who comes [to the gardening group] went to an RHS careers day off the back of coming to the garden group. I took her to Harlow Carr [RHS garden], and she spent the day with the gardeners there doing a careers event"

- Groundwork Project Facilitator, Aysgarth Greenspace Community

3.2 Deliver activity that promotes healthy lifestyles through integrating services to increase physical activity and nature connectedness whilst reducing social isolation

A number of volunteers and participants reported that attending their GCH sessions had positive impacts on their mental health, especially reducing social isolation and feelings of loneliness. Attending the project also helped to reinvigorate people's knowledge and love of gardening, and stimulate interest in the environment and the natural world – learning either from each other, or from their Project Facilitator:

"I just used to walk past it all the time and then I got the courage up to message S [project lead]. And yeah, I've not regretted it. For me personally, it's like it's my first step into my future, sort of like getting back into life again, meeting loads of people. I've got a bit of a background of land management and stuff, so it's getting me back on track to that, hopefully"

- Volunteer, Community Basket CIC

"I just live locally. I live round there, and the park was a bit of a mess. I just wanted to be involved in making a difference, I suppose... I wanted to form a social group as well and get people out, for their mental health. Just try to bring people together. I don't know a right lot about gardening... We have a couple of people who are really experienced and everyone brings their own expertise, don't they."

"I definitely look forward to Thursdays now, hanging out with the group and learning new things, and just being around green stuff and outside does wonders for my mental health."

- Volunteers, Aysgarth Greenspace Community

At the GCH at Forber Avenue Community Allotments, the Project Facilitator has supported local residents, volunteers and plot holders to develop gardening skills, improve wellbeing and strengthen community connections. The site has evolved from underused land into a thriving community allotment with plots, volunteers and plans for future community facilities. The two stories below demonstrate how attending the GCH project has been transformative to their health and wellbeing. In the stories below we see how taking on their allotment plots has built confidence, helped them to develop new skills, and make long lasting friendships.

"At 18 years old, I am the youngest person at Forber Avenue Community Allotments to hold a plot. Originally, I took it on to be able to assist my grandad who also has a plot. I thought it would be a perfect opportunity to spend some quality time with him. It took me some time to clear the land and to get it level but I have managed to do it. I have also purchased a polytunnel and cannot wait to grow weird and wonderful vegetables. I want to grow things that are different to the stuff you would normally grow in an allotment. It is all going to be about learning as I go, and learning from the other plot holders and volunteers. Starting the allotment was something I thought I was only going to do to help my grandad but has turned into an actual hobby for me and it's great when I finish work, it's somewhere to go and unwind. I have made new friends and gardening really helps my mental health."

"In 2016 I had an allotment at [x] and my son and I used to race pigeons. In May 2016 my son lost his life. I was unable to return to my garden due to my grief. For eight years I never left my house and became a shell of the person I once was. I found out that there was a plot available at Forber Avenue Community Allotment. It was in the perfect location as it is only 50 steps away from my home. Since starting the plot at Forber Avenue Community Allotments I leave the house daily to potter in my little plot. Most importantly I have gained new friends and we all help out with tips and ideas to make our allotment better... I am looking forward to growing and cooking fresh organic produce and I cannot wait to see the growth in our community over the coming years."

GCH's have also provided a safe space for physical activity, which helps to reduce social isolation, improves community cohesion, and improves individual and community health outcomes. The projects in Stoneyfield Park and Wensley both demonstrate this outcome in different ways: in Stoneyfield Park by creating a physical path, which encourages people to use the park for exercise, whilst at Wensley GCH, providing a carousel of activity options increased young people's confidence in exercising outside, and introduced them to new ways of socialising with each other and engaging in the outdoors.

Figure-eight path works are completed, creating a continuous loop around the park

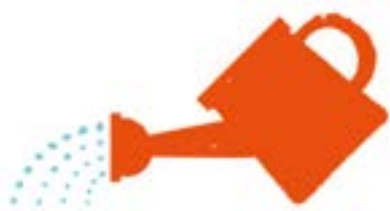


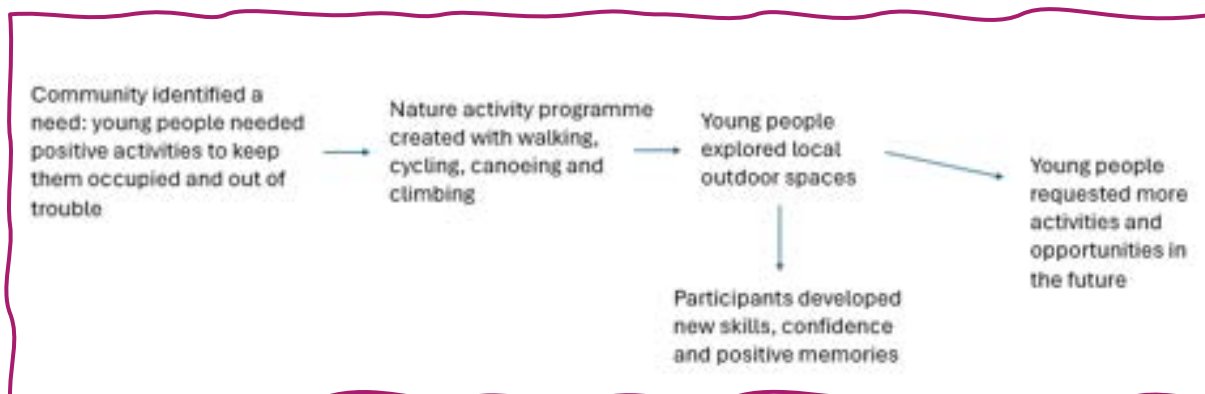
The surfaced path marks the park accessible year round



Local community use of the space increases, including older people and families

5 Impact Pathway Stoneyfield Park path





6 Impact Pathway Wensley GCH

So far, what has been your favourite part of the Green Hub activity?
ALL HUBS ANSWERS – Meeting people and reducing social isolation theme
I have had a lot of different activities here but this is really great teaching.
learning new skills and knowledge and getting to do work that you can see.
Learning new things, being outside in the nice weather
Making people happy 😊 involved
Socialising and trying new things
Meeting some great people and helping the local environment
the social aspect
Being with other people - comraderie
Gardening and meeting new people
Meeting people
Meeting people in the community
Seeing all the kids playing and socialising.
Socialising across ages
People being together
People weather, best not in Feb to cold
Playing in the park with my cousins

Improving mental and physical health, by “getting outside” is also reflected in the responses to our one off survey, answered by participants attending GCH activity across the programme. When analysing the responses to the question “So far, what has been your favourite part of the Green Hub activity?” the most common thematic response referenced meeting and learning from other people as a key highlight of their experience at the GCH. Whilst fundamentally this is an outcome that improves individual quality of life, strengthening relationships between people living in close proximity to each other, and providing opportunities for them to learn together, also improves community cohesion and resilience. Learning together in shared community spaces appears to be a good way for individuals to bond and to build shared community knowledge.



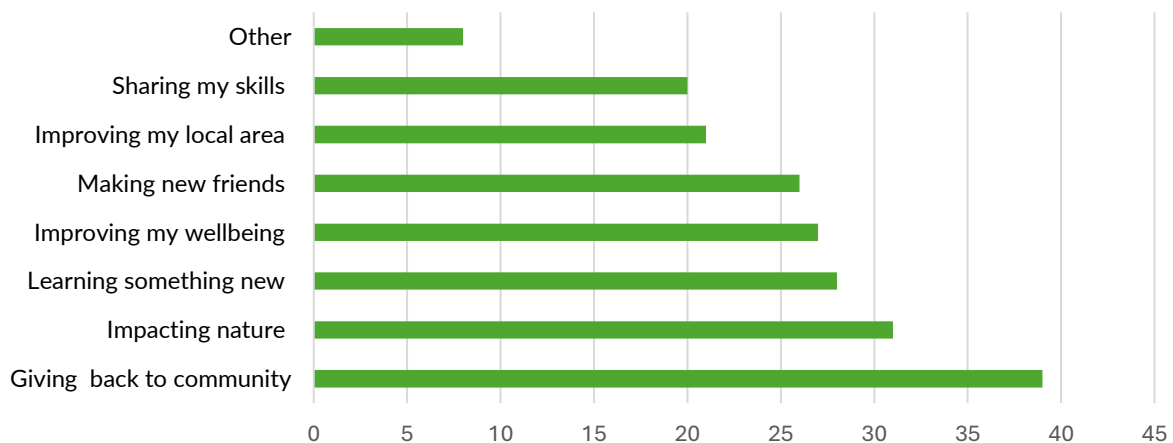
4. Impacts on Communities



4.1 Develop stronger and more resilient communities

As in Year 1, the programme is appearing to most impactful in the different ways that GCHs strengthen communities, through increasing pride in the area, building networks, and providing third spaces for people to meet. When we asked steering group members why they chose to volunteer for their GCH, the most common theme picked was to “Give back to community”.

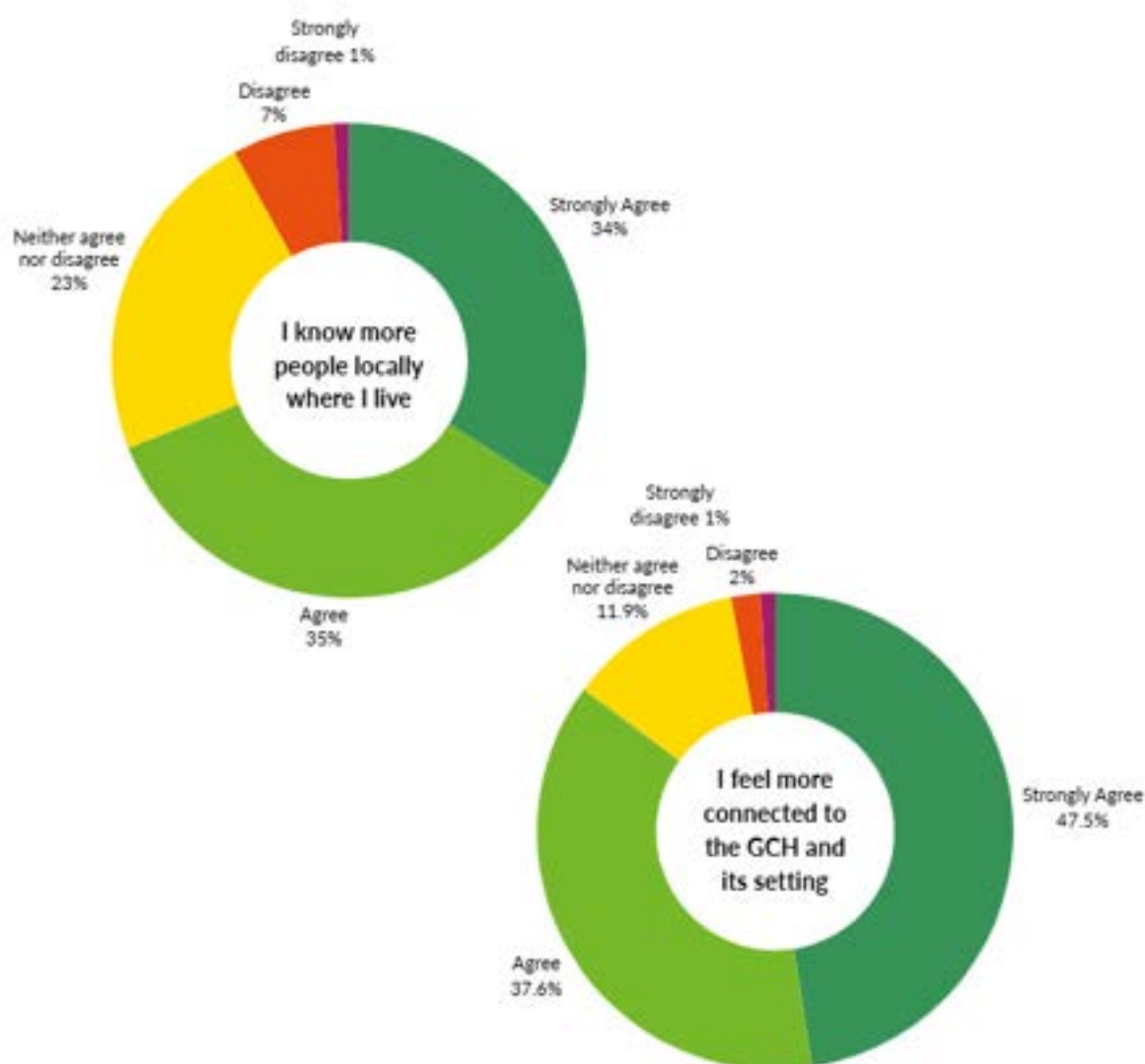
Why did you choose to volunteer for your GCH?



We also asked steering group members what they hoped to get out of the volunteering experience. When we analysed the responses to both questions, developing stronger and more resilient communities was the biggest motivating factor for joining the project (38% of responses). Across Year 2 GCHs, 81% of steering group members had not volunteered for anything similar to the project before. This is encouraging as it demonstrates that we are reaching new demographics of people who have not had the opportunity to be part of something like this before and are motivated to make a difference for their community.

In the one off survey asked to participants attending a GCH activity, we asked respondents to answer how attending the event had made them feel, and then asked them to follow up their response with a reason. When we analysed the responses, 47% of answers relating to why people enjoyed attending the GCH activities implied stronger community links and increased availability activities to take part in locally. People also enjoyed making new friends and learning new skills at GCH activities; all demonstrating the role of the GCH in their community.

We also asked participants at Year 2 GCH's whether attending a GCH activity had changed their opinion on their area, with the following results:



These are promising indications that GCH activities are helping people to build strong relationships and develop pride in their local area. GCHs are one part of a bigger picture of supporting communities to become resilient and varied places that cater for many people.



4.1.1 Impact on children and young people

It is becoming clear that the GCH are starting to act as third spaces and focal points in communities; becoming places people can socialise, make friends and try something new, alongside being a positive space for nature. GCH are especially important spaces for children and young people. An example of this is an activity that took place with a local school in Stoneyfield Park, Rochdale. The GCH not only provided a safe and inviting space to learn about nature and provided a space in the community for the children to get involved with and feel proud of:



STONEYFIELD PARK SCHOOL TRIP

As part of the continual community engagement with this Green Hubs site, Deeplish School Eco Council visited Stoneyfield Park to take part in nature engagement activities.

The children had the opportunity to learn from the steering group how to plant plants correctly in a raised bed so that their roots could grow and expand and learn about the different conditions that different plants enjoy depending on the species. They also had a nature spotting sheet to encourage them to engage with their senses and surroundings and re-potted a small Lavandula plant each to take home and were given instructions on how best to care for it.

It was notable that some of them didn't have much experience working outside with the natural world and at first were hesitant to get involved with the soil but after a while they became more comfortable. Developing their interest and intuition around plants is a really important step in their development into adults who will care for the environment and champion it. They were encouraged to bring their families and friends to the park and show them their good work, and asked people not to vandalise the plants as they had been planted by the community. They all really enjoyed their trip to the park, with one child describing it as 'the best trip ever'!

Similarly, in Liverpool, participants at Community Basket CIC noted that the project had become an example of good practice and become a focal point for their community. Co-locating the greenspace alongside the community shop also meant that customers who would usually just come for the food service also were exposed to volunteering opportunities at the GCH and stayed for longer to enjoy the flowers and the greenspace. The participants specifically noted the impact that the project had as providing a safe space for local children to play and enjoy themselves:

"If you could pick this up and put it in every street for people again, children would grow healthy minds like you can never imagine. Our communities would be like this, wouldn't it?"

- Participant, Community Basket CIC

At Clifton Hospital GCH, the polytunnel not only became a space for activities to take place, but a space for NHS staff to unwind at lunch time, and also hold meetings:

"Everyone who comes in here benefits in some shape or form..."

In summer it's busy. You have a lot of people out in the gardens, and they come in here [the polytunnel] and sit. The staff have meetings here and in the courtyard... Sometimes you'll come in and there will be 5 doctors in here. [Staff say] We have just had our lunch in here and enjoyed the space".

- Volunteer, Clifton GCH

4.1.2 Training and Development at GCHs

As noted in the previous chapter, GCH activities also provided a training and learning opportunities for volunteers, which in turn builds community capacity and resilience across a whole area. Across the GCH Year, we recorded **156 events or activities** that we classified as "capacity building", for either the whole community around the GCH or for the GCH. These included: partnership meetings, steering group meetings, funding and project planning, trips to other hubs, evaluation sessions with the wider community, and community consultation and open activities. We also recorded that 67 individuals were supported with 1:1 mentoring.

At Clifton Hospital GCH, the steering group volunteers noted the importance of their Project Facilitator Angela and her role in teaching and mentoring them, and providing a clear point of contact with staff and NHS systems. This was especially important in a place with clear hierarchical structures where volunteers can sometimes find it hard to advocate for themselves:

"Angela has been a stalwart while we have been here...without her, we wouldn't have been able to do what we have done.... [it has been] good to have someone leading us. We need somebody who is a leader. [We] can talk to patients... [and] we need someone who is in control, while everybody [else] gets on with the gardening. It's about everyone slotting into their comfort zone".

- Volunteer, Clifton Hospital GCH



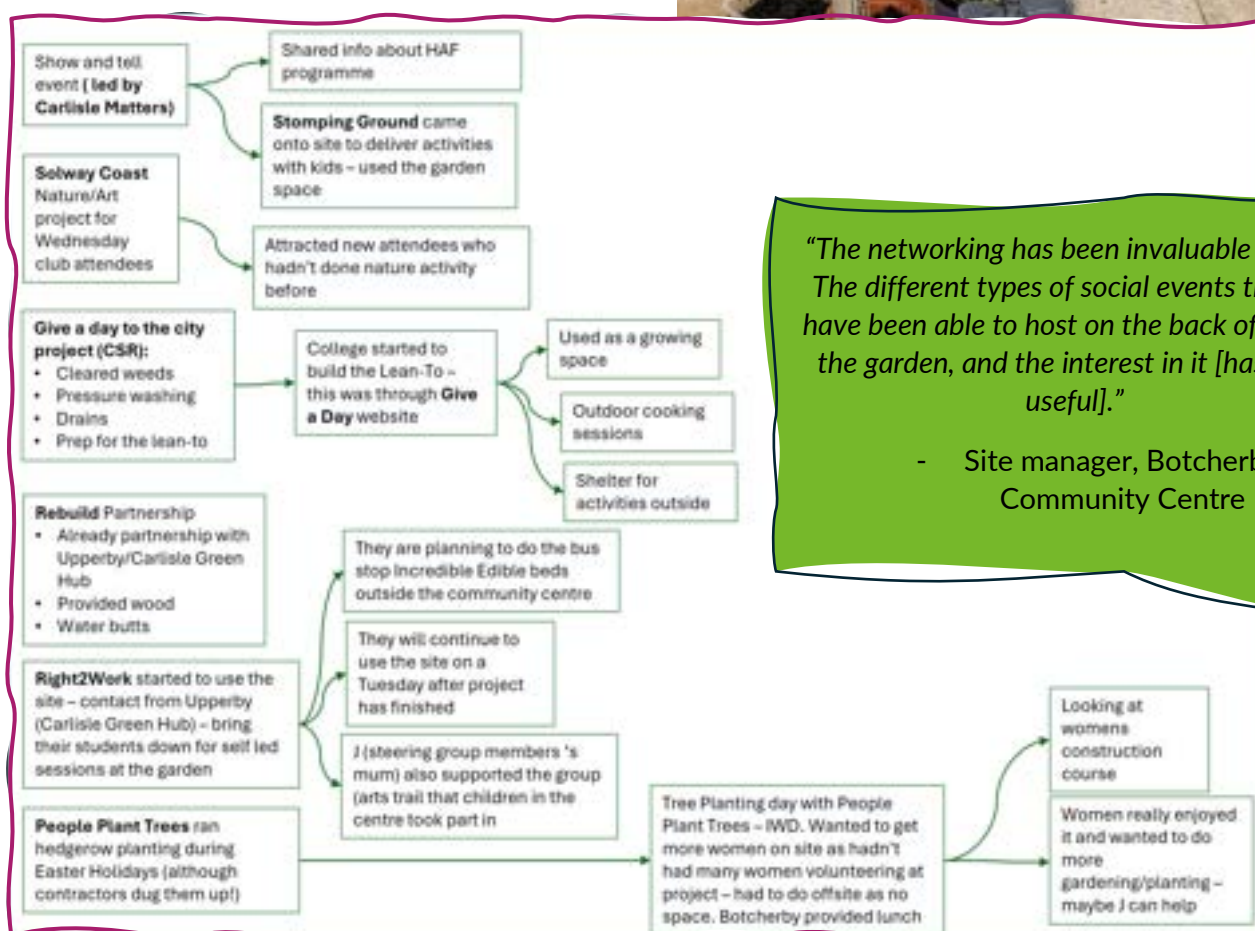
4.2 Establish local networks of organisations working collaboratively to support individuals

Partnership working is crucial to the success of GCHs. GCH's may not always be the centre of each community, but when they act as another cog in the wheel to support communities then they are able to function to the best of their abilities. Across all hubs in Year 2, we have worked with 58 partners, who range from local authority colleagues, local schools and VCFSE partners. We have included three examples below from Year 2 GCHs which demonstrate successful examples of partnership working.



4.2.1 Botcherby Community Centre

At Botcherby Community Centre in Carlisle, the Project Facilitator worked closely with the Community Centre manager to introduce as many partners to the project as possible, to help get the greenspace created by the project known as a “venue”. The impact pathways demonstrate the varied ways in which partnerships have enabled a vast amount of activity to take place. Some of the partners that were involved in the work at Botcherby were introduced to the project in Year 1, which demonstrates the success of GCH’s working together.



“The networking has been invaluable for me. The different types of social events that we have been able to host on the back of having the garden, and the interest in it [has been useful].”

- Site manager, Botcherby Community Centre

4.2.2 Salford City Roosters – Community Payback and Tindall Street Allotments

Partnership working has been critical for Salford City Roosters to grow their connections in the community and to promote their GCH.

The two examples below demonstrate how developing relationships with local contacts and neighbours has benefited the project. The partnership with Community Payback to help develop their community garden, providing a space for Community Payback to use and also helping to build a better community space for everyone to enjoy. The steering group volunteers noted:

“The project has provided a permanent work place for Community Payback through probationary services. They have supported and continue to support the maintenance of the garden [and] some of the wider green spaces on our site. The planters that are on site have all been built by Community Payback, either on site or out with their workshop. The materials that we purchased, Community Payback built them and then planted them.

So that's having a positive impact restoratively, I would say, in that that they're doing some payback in the community...the people who are involved in the community payback as well, they're learning transferable life skills, not doing meaningless tasks - building things, learning about nature, conservation. It's been really positive for them.”

- Salford Roosters steering group member





PARTNERSHIP WORKING AT SALFORD ROOSTERS GCH

Just down the road from Roosters Community Garden site is Tindall Street Community Allotment. The range of Groundwork GM activities activated interest from a local elected member during a steering group meeting. The elected member had been working with the allotment, particularly the veterans group, to secure the site from ongoing vandalism through improved fencing.

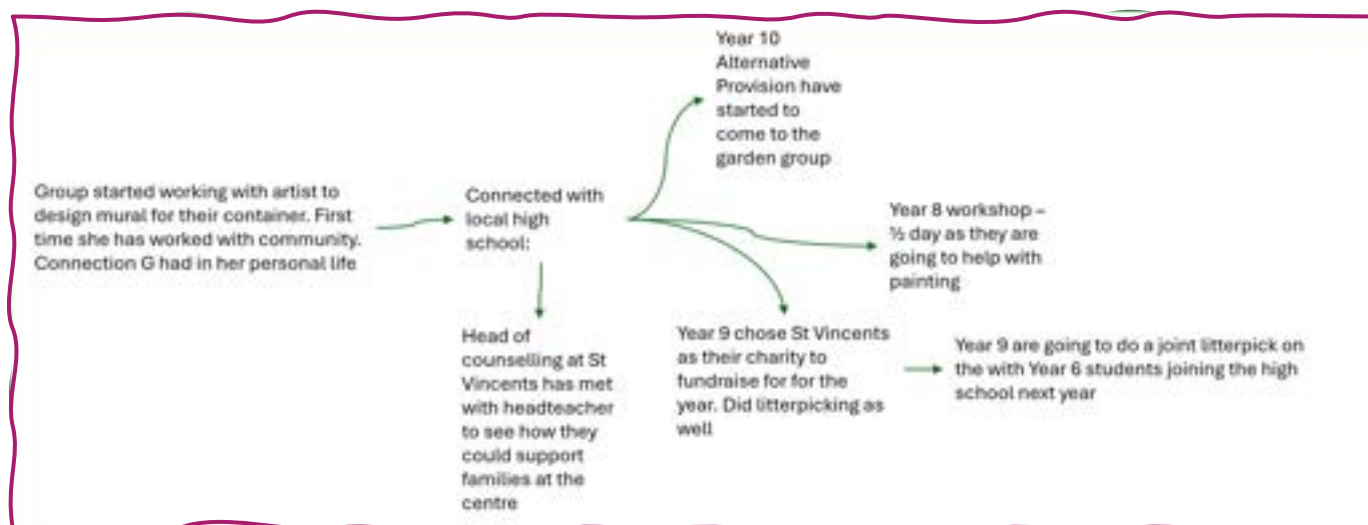
Adam from the Groundwork GM Fencing and Landscaping Team visited the allotment to meet the allotment chair and members of the veterans group and to provide a quotation for new fencing. The visit helped the veterans feel valued and listened to. Although the visit was primarily to provide a quote, it represented an important step forward in progressing improvements to the site.

Following these discussions, it emerged that the Local Authority had allocated £150,000 to expand allotment provision in the area. During conversations with local partners, it became clear that the community garden and a second phase of community growing space aligned well with the objectives of this funding.

Roosters Community Garden is located nearby and there is outline agreement to increase community growing space, both on land at the end of the Roosters car park and on adjacent public land. The project demonstrates how Green Hub activity can act as a catalyst for wider investment, partnership working and the expansion of community-led growing opportunities.

4.2.3 Aysgarth Greenspace Community

In Leeds, Aysgarth Greenspace Community has a long standing relationship with their local primary school. Discussions about how to involve the community in a mural design for their storage container has led to a long term partnership with their local high school:



8 Impact Pathways, Aysgarth Greenspace Community

The Groundwork Project Facilitator also took the opportunity to host a networking meeting at St Vincents (the local community centre attached to Aysgarth Greenspace Community) to promote all of the work that had taken place over the year, and to help build further connections for the future.

"On Thursday 5th March I presented to the LGAP group (Leeds Green Activity Providers Network) which includes TCV, Hyde Park Source, Space2, Canal and River Trust, MAFWA, Season Well and Yorkshire Dales National Park among others about the work that has happened with Aysgarth Green Space Community with photos of the wildflower meadow in full bloom; woodwork sessions; mushroom growing; incredible edible seed swap library; bulbs donated by a local nursery for Spring blooms; pumpkin carving, seed collecting and recipe books over the kids school holidays; apple juicing; mosaic making and the artists work that will be displayed on the side of the shipping container.

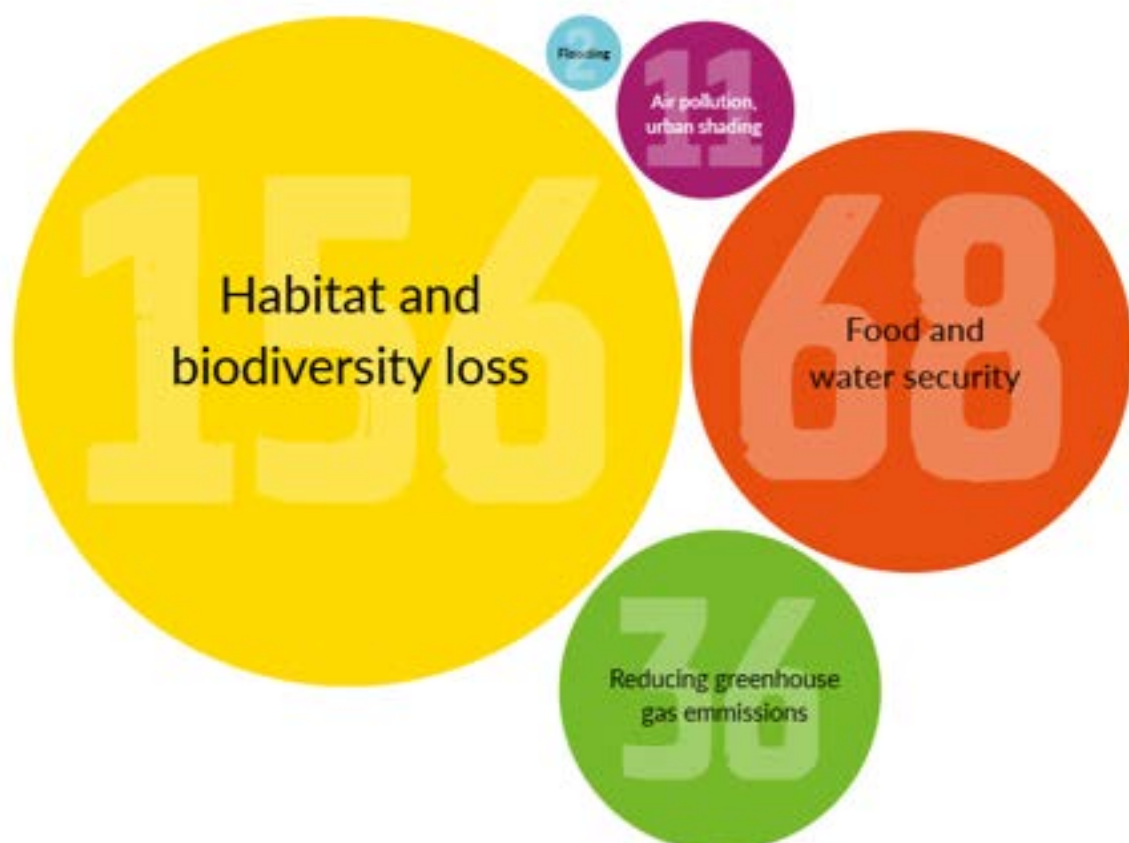
It was well received and we walked the short distance from St Vincents to the green space to admire the raised beds and where all the wildflower seeds are sleeping."

- Groundwork Project Facilitator, Groundwork Yorkshire

5. Impacts on the Environment



Environmental activities grouped by theme



5.1 Regenerate land for nature within neighbourhoods

Key to this project is improving the biodiversity of urban spaces and connecting people to nature on their doorstep. As with Year 1, we are finding that whilst nature is not always the first reason why people engage with the project, by the end of the year of support, participants are more connected to nature and have a better understanding of its value in their neighbourhood. Encouragingly, across Year 2, when asked why steering group members had decided to volunteer for the project, the second most popular answer was “Impacting Nature”. We are interested to see if this change is reflected in the steering groups in Year 3, and whether the changing climate has had any impact on people’s motivations for joining the project.

Across Year 2 GCHs, we recorded a total of 273 environmental activities, ranging from weekly gardening sessions and volunteer days through to larger seasonal events, activities with local schools and community celebration days. While one-off events often introduced people to their local green hubs for the first time, it was the regular programme of volunteering and gardening that helped build lasting relationships within projects. Looking at the demographics of participants across Year 2, GCHs also engaged a large number of people who had not taken part in any climate or community action before (69% of participants recorded).

All the GCHs across Year 2 worked in some way to regenerate land for nature within urban neighbourhoods. This work always included local residents and volunteers in some way. When asked in our one-off survey, 85% of participants at GCHs said that they “strongly agree/agree” that they felt closer to nature have taken part in GCH activity.

On the following pages we have included case studies from GCHs which demonstrate how activities and actions taken have regenerated and improved land for nature within urban settings, and encouraged community members to take the lead in safekeeping nature for future generations:

FORBER AVENUE RAISED BEDS

With funding secured from Riverside Housing Association, Forber Avenue Community Allotments carried out a project to build new raised beds across the site in January 2026. Existing ground-level plots had limited how much food some members could grow, and several plot holders experience medical conditions that make bending or kneeling difficult, restricting their ability to take part fully.

Using high-quality decking boards, the group constructed durable, long-term raised beds for every plot. As part of an inclusive design approach, two plots were built with double-height beds specifically for plot holders with reduced mobility, ensuring the improved growing conditions benefited the whole allotment community rather than a select few.

The increased growing capacity is also expected to have benefits beyond individual households: the group plans to sell surplus fruit and vegetables from the allotment and reinvest the proceeds into future improvements, activities and maintenance, building a more sustainable model for the site going forward.

Growing food has also been a large part of activities across the Green Community Hubs. Food grown at hubs has been shared within local communities, used in community meals and incorporated into practical learning sessions, helping people build confidence in growing while improving access to fresh produce.

Community Basket CIC's allotment site opened as a disused plot of ground on the corner of a park with the aim of growing fresh food that could feed directly into the group's affordable community shop, giving local residents access to good produce on their doorstep.

Regular volunteers have been key to the site's progress, supported by green hub facilitator Ian. From April 2026, the group also began hosting a free weekly horticulture course run by Myerscough College, giving volunteers the chance to build formal growing qualifications alongside their practical experience on the allotment.

The site's first full growing season is now producing regular harvests, including lettuce, kale, onions and herbs, with garlic, carrots, rocket, tomatoes and potatoes to follow. Produce grown on site is offered through the community shop, which is open three days a week and provides cheap food and household essentials to local residents without means-testing helping ensure fresh, healthy food grown just yards away reaches the families who need it most.

"Well basically it was just rubble wasn't it? It was just waste land...the progress they've made is unbelievable. And it's just made a massive difference to people coming in, the community, bringing people together, the children, watching the children enjoy everything really."

- Community Basket CIC, local resident



Stoneyfield Park activities

The Friends of Stoneyfield Park group ran a series of sessions to improve the park's green spaces and build a more regular presence to encourage participation and community ownership of the space, beginning with a planter maintenance day tackled beds that had become overgrown. A new volunteer from a Rochdale environmental group was on hand when the steering group arrived, opening up a new partnership, and several passers-by stopped to help.

Children and young people who took part spent much of their half term outdoors, spotting minibeasts such as ladybirds and millipedes and learning about their habitats. Before leaving, they told the group they'd speak up if they saw anyone damaging the planters in future, since they belonged to the whole community. Two follow-up sessions saw the group and Deeplish Community Centre barrow in two tonnes of compost, during which a new volunteer - recently arrived in the UK and keen to reconnect with outdoor work she'd done in her home country - joined with her son, who has since started watering the planters with her on the school run.

The group also ran a bird box building session with Orchard House, the community centre opposite the park, to improve biodiversity and create nesting sites for birds. The session engaged a group of young men who had not previously used the community centre. Participants learned how birds use nest boxes and built their own using drills and hammers, problem-solving the assembly through trial and error. Two participants who hadn't met before discovered a shared interest in poetry and are now planning to return for a poetry reading exploring mental health and nature.



9 Impact Pathways, Friends Of Stoneyfield Park

"It's so great to see the park being looked after. I'm really proud of the work we've done today"

- Stoneyfield Park event attendee

5.2 Deliver activity that promote pro-environmental change including enhancing biodiversity, building climate mitigation and supporting nature to thrive

The diversity of activities across hubs reflects the different priorities of each community.

Some focused on transforming neglected spaces into welcoming places for wildlife and local residents, while others concentrated on growing fruit and veg, creating opportunities for therapeutic gardening, or working with schools and local organisations to help children and families experience nature close to home. Across the year, hub volunteers planted trees, created wildlife ponds, carried out litter picks and biodiversity surveys, built bird boxes and managed wildflower meadows. Across the hubs, volunteers and community members carried out 168 biodiversity improvement actions and improved more than 26,000m² of land, creating greener, more welcoming spaces for both people and wildlife.

Alongside practical action, the programme continued to build environmental knowledge within communities. GCHs have provided opportunities for people to learn through doing, whether by growing food, caring for wildlife habitat or taking part in hands-on conservation activities. Across the year, more than 1,300 people were supported to make greener choices, while local organisations also received advice and practical support to help embed environmental sustainability into their own work.



NATURE CONNECTION AT WENSLEY GCH

At Wensley, the steering group found that traditional gardening activities weren't drawing much local interest, and took the decision to broaden their offer, focusing instead on other ways to help people connect with nature and the outdoors. An autumn cycle day proved a popular alternative: a group of sixteen young people and volunteers travelled into the Peak District to cycle a five-mile route around the eastern shore of the Derwent reservoirs, taking in forested paths and reservoir dams along the way, with a stop for lunch and tea at Slippery Stones.

The day ended back in Sheffield with a bonfire to mark the change of season, bringing together volunteers and community members of different ages before winding down with games indoors. The approach reflects a wider lesson from Wensley's first year: that nature connection doesn't have to mean gardening, and that meeting communities where their interests already lie can be just as effective a route into engaging with green space.



At Botcherby Community Centre, a key milestone of the GCH project was finishing the community garden. Not only did it create a space for local partners to use for gardening, but it became a thriving space for nature next to the community centre, which sits just next to a main artery road running out of the centre of Carlisle.

Volunteers commented that spotting nature had become a key part of garden volunteering days and they completed several nature surveys to record the increase in biodiversity in the garden:

"I've never seen so many butterflies in that garden"

"There's quite a few birds in the trees in the corner. It's our little running joke on a Tuesday, whenever we are digging stuff up, the birds are always out and about... they know we are digging and they are getting their worms"

- Volunteers, Botcherby Community Centre



The case study below demonstrates how the Project Facilitator and Community Centre staff worked together to use the garden as a focal point for teaching children and young people about how to grow food and ecosystems, and how many insects and plants work together in harmony.

TOGETHER WE COOK AT BOTCHERBY

At Botcherby, the Together We Cook day used food growing as a way to build young people's understanding of where their food comes from and how looking after the land benefits them directly. The day began in the garden, where young people sowed seeds and harvested vegetables, many for the first time, learning what was ready to pick and how it had grown.

With support from facilitators, the group then prepared and cooked a meal using the vegetables they had grown themselves, before sitting down together to eat it. By connecting growing, harvesting and eating in a single day, the session helped young people see the direct link between caring for green space and the food it can produce - building both practical growing skills and a lasting appreciation for sustainable, local food production.



6. The Northern Network



The Northern Network continues to connect and support GCHs across the North of England. While Year 1 focused on building the foundations of the network, Year 2 has been about developing stronger relationships between members and providing practical support that responds to the challenges they face.

The network has increased by 100 members over the past year. Alongside supporting communities involved in the GCHs programme, the Northern Network continues to attract interest from organisations, volunteers and community groups developing their own green spaces and looking to connect with others doing similar work.

6.1 Website and Resources

Over the last year, we have continued to develop the Northern Network website as a practical resource for community groups across the region. Following a review of the website, we introduced a range of accessibility improvements to make it easier to navigate and use, alongside clearer layouts, improved signposting and updated content. We have also refreshed the website with photography from projects across the network, helping showcase the variety of green community activity taking place across the North.

Our resource hub now includes 65 practical resources, with new content added each month, including new Hub Spotlight articles highlighting inspiring projects from across the network. Increasingly, resources have been developed collaboratively with the



green hub facilitators, who have contributed to practical guides on topics including organising cultural celebrations, building herb planters and using woodchip in growing spaces.

Green Funding Alerts has continued to be one of the most popular elements of the Northern Network offer and has highlighted the importance of providing simple, practical support to members. The WhatsApp group was created to make it easier for community groups to find relevant funding opportunities without needing to spend significant amounts of volunteer time searching multiple sources and now has 84 members.

Feedback from members shows that the service is helping groups identify opportunities they may otherwise have missed. Several organisations have told us they successfully applied for funding after seeing opportunities shared through the group, while others have valued the time saved by receiving relevant updates directly.



Northern Network members' map

6.2 Growing the Network

The Northern Network has continued to build its profile through digital communications, with our social media audience now reaching 573 Instagram followers and 338 Facebook followers. Both platforms have seen steady growth over the past year.

However, Year 2 has also highlighted the challenges of relying on social media alone to build engagement. With increasing competition for attention online, it has become harder for community-focused organisations to reach people organically. In response, we have focused more on activities that create direct value for members, including our resource hub, Green Funding Alerts, newsletters and in-person events.

During summer 2026, we worked with seven Northern Network members to co-deliver a series of locally led summer celebration events across the North. Groups received a package of support including promotional help and Northern Network resources. This approach

allowed communities to shape events around their own priorities while providing practical assistance to help make their ideas happen.

Celebrations have taken place across locations including Wigan, Burnley, Liverpool, Sale, Leeds and Huddersfield, with more than 300 people attending events so far. A number of celebrations were postponed due to periods of exceptionally hot weather and will take place later in the summer.

At Lincoln Greeners, celebrations took place alongside Refugee Week, bringing together music, food and gardening activities that reflected the different cultures represented within the community while encouraging residents to become more involved in Roxby Community Garden. Other events marked the reopening of restored community spaces, celebrated volunteer achievements and created welcoming opportunities for neighbours to spend time outdoors together.

"We opened the Springwood Community Garden and had asked the Mayor Karen Allison to open the garden. Karen has been involved with the garden for many years and was sad to see it decline and become unused. We are proud that over the last 10 months we have regenerated the garden and it is being used by the local community once again."

- Volunteer, Springwood Community Garden

6.3 Looking ahead

While the network continues to grow across the North, we recognise that many of our strongest connections remain within the North West, where Groundwork CLM's existing relationships and partnerships are most established. A key priority for the final phase of the programme will be continuing to develop relationships beyond this region, ensuring the network better represents the range of green community activity taking place across the whole of the North of England.

During Autumn 2026 we will launch a new training and development offer, giving members access to specialist learning opportunities based on their own needs and priorities. Rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach, this will allow communities to identify the knowledge and skills that would be most valuable for their own projects.

Alongside this, we will deliver a programme of winter wellbeing events during January. These events recognise that maintaining connection is particularly important during the colder and quieter months of the gardening year and will provide space for members to explore the role GCHs have in supporting mental and physical wellbeing.

As the Northern Network programme approaches its conclusion, we will also bring members together for celebration opportunities, recognising the achievements of communities across the region and reflecting on the collective impact created through the network.



7. Project Challenges

We have faced some challenges this year as the project has developed. We will take these learnings as lessons going forwards after the project has ended.

7.1 Project timeline – 1 year too short/very intense

The project was conceived to be a one year training and support programme, to support communities to enhance or develop their GCH offer. Having some sort of existing project or land is a key part of the rationale for choosing sites. However, we have come to learn that one year is too short a time frame and the work and role of the facilitator becomes very intense. The key milestones that we have set for the project can become difficult to achieve in a short space of time if there are any factors which delay progress.

In Year 3 we will relax some of the milestones around skill shares and training which gives slightly more space for the projects to develop in their own time. As a lesson for the future, we would recommend that there is a longer development lead time (up to 6 months) before the support starts, which ensures that all logistical issues, such as gathering together a project steering group, ensuring land permissions are in place, and generally doing high quality consultation and engagement can be done.

7.2 Facilitator role becoming blurred

Linked to the above issue, we are finding that the role of the Project Facilitator is becoming quite blurred and GCHs sometimes rely on Project Facilitators to run activities for them, rather than support/mentor and advise steering groups to do this themselves. This also means it is hard to scale down support after 1 year. We remind GCHs of the distinction and the role of the facilitator through the Green Hub Charter and at steering group meetings, however sometimes it is easy for power structures and hierarchies to develop.



In Year 3 we will continue to remind team members and GCHs of the appropriate role of the Project Facilitator, and build in conversations about project sustainability and next steps from an earlier point in the year. As a lesson for the future, the project needs to be clearer about the training and development role over supporting groups to just run activities. This could be reflected in adjustments to targets and outcomes, focusing more on development outcomes for individuals rather than group outcomes.

7.3 Interpersonal issues between volunteers and community members

As in Year 1, there has been occasions where interpersonal issues between volunteers has led to breakdown in relationships and trust, and in some cases, individuals choosing to leave projects, sometimes after having given a large amount of time/dedication to the project. Unfortunately this is somewhat unavoidable and it is not in the Project Facilitators role to mediate long standing or challenging disputes – although Project Facilitators have taken a role in trying to resolve small issues. Using the Green Community Hub Charter as a values based document has been helpful for reminding people about respectful conduct.

In Year 3 we will continue to use the Green Community Hub Charter as a way to set the standard for correct conduct at a project. As a lesson for the future, it is important to have clear policies and procedures in place to deal with interpersonal conflicts, as well as being aware that sometimes it is a normal part of working in communities and should not be taken personally or as a sign of failure.

8. Project Sustainability and next steps

8.1 GCH Sustainability Plans

The Northern Network project was designed to support communities to develop their GCHs for a short amount of time. Sustainability and next steps are very important parts of demonstrating success of the projects. A key role of the Project Facilitator is to support GCHs over the first year, and plan for a transition to carry on without the Groundwork support after the first year. For many hubs, this involves raising money to continue projects, potentially looking at other ways for Groundwork to continue working with the project, through integration into other programmes, and project planning.

The table below demonstrates how Year 2 GCHs are planning to continue their projects after their year of funded support comes to an end:

Hub	Sustainability Plan
Clifton Hospital GCH	- Gardening group being transferred to being supported by Atlas (grounds maintenance) - Booklet being created for OTs to use independently with patients - Volunteers will continue to maintain green space and support patients when available - Polytunnel will be used to grow plants for gardens and green space
Community Basket CIC	- Myerscough College have started Level 1 Horticulture course on a Thursday which will continue, currently have 12 regular learners each week. - Groundwork CLM supporting the group ad hoc until August 2026
Higher Folds Green Community Hub	- Community centre plan to use the community garden for their HAF programme which will bring in a summer income for the group - SuDS programme continues, with more community voice involved in the project and engagement on steering group.
Stoneyfield Park	- The group are feeding into an application for the Green Spaces Fund that Orchard House are applying for with the support of Groundwork. If successful, a portion of the £40,000 will be budgeted for Groundwork to deliver community engagement activities alongside the Friends of Group. - The group have been signposted to an external infrastructure organization, Action Together, who can support them with legal matters of getting their bank sorted and holding an AGM- the goal is to have a functional and active Friends of Stoneyfield park in order to continue the legacy of the work done in the Green Hubs project.
Salford City Roosters RLFC	- Elected members engaged, who have access to significant funding to develop more community growing space and will continue to work with engaged stakeholders and community partners. - Recently secured £1,000 for planting activity with the community from Salford City Centenary fund and looking to submit an Awards for All bid. - There is a clear phase 2 planned consultation (complete community garden to fullest potential, including further community growing spaces, in partnership with key organisations) and develop further green and blue community wellbeing activities.
Botcherby Community Centre	- Partner groups will continue to use the site: Probation service and Right2Work will bring groups on separate days for their own projects - HAF programmes will use the garden during school holidays - Volunteers will continue to garden and come in their own time to maintain site
Whitehaven AFC GCH	- Local charity will continue work for 3 months after project ends to help continue momentum with volunteers - Plans to continue with community café and growing space, building on wider community plans for the stadium and football club.

Forber Avenue Allotments	• Group are fully functional now and have clear roles and responsibilities on the allotment committee. • Planned summer event series • Have started generating their own income through plant sales, event tickets and fundraised from council and local funds
Aysgarth Greenspace Community	• St Vincent's received funding for 1 steering group member to be paid for a year to continue to develop the project. Planning a big funding bid with support from Groundwork Yorkshire architect teams to build a new community garden in the park. • Woodwork - 3 of the team are trained up on using tools safely and woodwork so that they can continue delivering the sessions next year • Gardening - Incredible Edible group will continue with this during the spring/summer months until weather gets too bad like last year • Groundwork Yorkshire have received cooking funding to deliver sessions to adults and kids so we will be back to deliver this with the group. Also planning to book Groundwork to deliver individual events like healthy holidays
Wensley GCH	• Hill and Moorland Leader training will be followed by funded assessments for the five participants later this year, enabling them to lead local walks, encourage more people outdoors, and strengthen future funding applications. • The 12 participants who completed Outdoor First Aid training will use their new skills to support people in their local neighbourhoods. • The Climbing Wall Instructor qualification will enable the funded participant to encourage more local people to take up climbing, while helping improve diversity by supporting a woman from an ethnic minority. • Volunteers are continuing to support young people into a local climbing club, helping them maintain regular participation.

8.2 Next steps

We will continue to deliver Year 3 of the project from July 2026 – July 2027. We have identified our Year 3 hubs and work has already started with them to get them prepared for their year of support.

After some staffing issues in the first half of the year, we are planning to start the Green Leadership Academy project in September 2026, running until January 2028. This project will work with up to 60 Green Leaders from across England, supporting them on a structured training and mentoring programme, with in person workshops at Groundwork-led GCHs, and support from a Groundwork member of staff as a mentor.



After Year 3 has finished, we will evaluate the project to understand the successes and lessons to be learnt from the past five years (Northern Network Pilot and Phase 2 projects). Working in partnership in this way has been a new way of working for the Groundwork Trusts and has led to other collaborative projects – the Northern Network will not be the last. We will look for ways to combine the Northern Network with other Groundwork initiatives and programmes, and capitalise on the strength of the Green Leadership Academy and all of our learning to date to build a Northern Network Phase 3.