



Power to the People

Nextdoor Nature's legacy for communities and wildlife

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RTS EAR

Language

The language we use	What we mean
Traditionally less likely to access nature and green spaces	People who are historically less likely to have access to nature, blue and green spaces such as people facing poverty, adults with a long-term illness or condition, minoritised ethnic groups, children from low-income families.
Established nature actors	Members of the local community who had an active involvement with improving outcomes for nature prior to the Nextdoor Nature programme. These may consist of professionals in their field, organisations or volunteers.
Community connectors	People/organisations that are well established within communities who are traditionally less likely to have access to nature and green spaces.
The Wildlife Trusts	A federation consisting of 46 individual Wildlife Trusts, which together with the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT), make up the 47 members of The Wildlife Trusts.
Trust or Trusts	Individual Wildlife Trusts all operate as its own legal entity, which has been formed by a group of people wanting to make a positive difference to nature and communities.
Active listening	The process of not only listening to what someone is saying but creating a two-way street of communication, so there is mutual understanding. It enables more attentive communication with groups and individuals, and ensures their needs and opinions are better heard and understood.
Community organising	Bringing people together to take action and overcome their common concerns. With the support of trained and employed Community Organisers, this approach helps build collective strength within communities. Please see the Community Organising Framework for more information ¹ .

Key Findings at a Glance

The Nextdoor Nature programme aimed to bring people and communities together to help nature flourish where they lived and worked. Utilising a community organising approach, the programme supported and enabled each Wildlife Trust to engage communities, providing encouragement while developing skills, creativity and confidence in taking ownership for nature connection.

What is [community organising](#)? ²

Community organising helps people to develop their collective power to act together for the common good of the whole community. It builds on what already exists if that is what the community needs and wants and supports them to cooperate with others.

To support The Wildlife Trusts in assessing the implementation and outcomes of the Nextdoor Nature 2022-2024 programme, M•E•L Research were commissioned to carry out an independent evaluation. Below presents the evaluation findings:

44 Wildlife Trusts across four nations collectively delivered the Nextdoor Nature programme.

Key changes identified	How the programme approach led to this change happening	Quantitative measure
The programme’s approach helped reach and involve communities in nature-based activities that were traditionally less likely to have access to nature and green spaces.	By actively listening to community needs through an approach that emphasised direct and creative engagement methods , this ensured diverse voices were heard.	88% of Wildlife Trusts said they found the listening exercises delivered with communities useful (n=42).
	Wildlife Trusts reaching and working directly with groups and communities that they hadn’t worked with before.	Since Nextdoor Nature (n=42): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 43% are now working with people facing poverty • 41% are now working with people with an impairment or long-term health need • 40% are now working with migrants including asylum seekers and refugees • 35% are now working with minoritised ethnic groups.
	Community organisers proved to be an invaluable element of the programme as they acted as a link between the Trusts and local communities ; this offered communities with a trusted	“Just getting out there and talking to people, visiting the community centre, visiting places, some of it was linked up through staff enabling me to book a room and advertise that we could have sessions, and others were just me hanging out.”

	touch point to enable them to engage with nature.	<i>Wildlife Trust</i>
	Using established nature actors that provided knowledge/upskilling helped reduce anxieties, increase learning and confidence within the community.	“The Nextdoor Nature project encouraged my confidence – I had a little bit of confidence from them saying 'OK, go through this' and 'look out for this', 'highlight the positives when you do it', 'find the positive things amongst the things that are worrying you are concerning you.” <i>Participant</i>
	Involving people in tangible activities in their immediate surroundings , the programme offered people easy access to get involved and take the first step.	“People got really into their projects that they were designing and delivering towards the end of the programme. And so people were all super keen to help each other get involved and support one another.” <i>Wildlife Trust</i>
The programme improved people's understanding of how they can act for nature, increasing confidence in addressing nature-based concerns independently and taking action themselves.	Upskilling communities helped address concerns about acting for nature. It helped overcome barriers to action, and in turn, increased people's motivation to do more things with nature.	
	The community-led nature of the programme offered various ways people could get involved . Alongside this, the levels of involvement could be dictated by individuals themselves. This gave people the freedom to act for nature in ways that worked for them.	
	Empowering people in the community that were already acting for nature to be local champions and advocates for change. The programme helped by enhancing their efforts by offering a network of support, building confidence and leadership skills.	“I was having all of these ideas, but I couldn't find anybody else to talk to. So immediately there was xxx to talk to, who understood and was excited.” <i>Participant</i>
The Nextdoor Nature programme has helped Trusts and local communities to	Community Organisers have been defined as connectors, catalysts for action and relationship builders . Their role was pivotal as they:	100% of Wildlife Trusts said that having a dedicated Community Organiser within the Trust was useful (n=42).

<p>emphasise a community-led approach to improving outcomes for nature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively listened to the needs and desires of the community • Took a bottom-up approach to drive change • Took time to build relationships and gaining trust • Leveraged on existing relationships and assisted in the community • Were a 'hub' of resources and knowledge helping community members achieve their goals. 	<p>52% of Trusts felt that community organised approaches have been embedded into their own ways of working (n=42).</p>
<p>The programme has enhanced how Trusts collaborate and share best practices with each other and the local community.</p>	<p>Listening rather than delivering formal consultations and using existing community connectors to act as enablers of movement helped to build stronger connections between Trusts and segments of the community.</p>	<p>"We've always worked well with communities and things, but it's just changing the emphasis a bit has been the important thing."</p> <p><i>Wildlife Trust</i></p> <p>56% of Trusts are now working with non-environmental community groups (n=42).</p>
	<p>The programme helped facilitate and empower communities by helping people to drive community actions and support by tailoring this to community needs from revitalised previously-stalled projects and conducted listening exercises to understand diverse aspirations.</p>	<p>95% of Trust said there is a great (24%) or somewhat (71%) of a drive to build on community assets.</p> <p>95% of Trusts felt that there was collaborative working across organisations and/or groups of people.</p>
<p>The programme has helped improve participants' sense of place and local pride by fostering community connections and enhancing local environments.</p>	<p>Being empowered through the community-led approach to design and/or to deliver improvements to local green nature spaces in their community.</p>	<p>"It's definitely contributed to a sense of purpose and empowerment towards the cause. You don't feel so hopeless."</p> <p><i>Participant</i></p>
	<p>By providing flexible opportunities for people to come to together to conceptualise and create what they wanted to see within their</p>	<p>"I think it makes us feel more included. Worthy, connected...the connections of the neighbourhood are a lot stronger. We feel proud of our achievements."</p>

	own community, over time it provided opportunities for people to connect with others in a way that was defined by them and therefore meaningful.	<i>Participant</i>
The programme has supported people in becoming more active in their community and, in turn, improving areas for nature and enhancing their well-being.	By providing activities that were easily accessible and hands-on , the programme has helped to establish and connect people to nature.	<p>"...when people chip in to help and support, which leads to a greater understanding on how they can improve nature."</p> <p><i>Wildlife Trust</i></p>
	<p>By targeting communities where there were people traditionally less likely to access nature and natural spaces, the programme has helped overcome barriers to access, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering safe spaces and/or group activities helped women and/or people of colour feel safer in their community. • Support and/or providing appropriate clothing, equipment through access to funding so that projects can take shape and people can get out in all weathers helped people sustain their behaviour. 	<p>21% of Trusts told us about occasions when they provided access to funds or grants.</p> <p>"It has given me something to do, to get out and about in green spaces on my doorstep."</p> <p><i>Participant</i></p>
	By connecting people together, the programme has helped reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.	<p>"Talking in front of people was something I struggled with but it really improved it for me."</p> <p><i>Participant</i></p>

About Nextdoor Nature

Background and purpose of the programme

The Wildlife Trusts (a federation consisting of 47 Wildlife Trusts) are corporate members of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts founded in 1912. The Wildlife Trusts is a grassroots movement supported by members, volunteers, staff and trustees. Each Wildlife Trust is its own legal entity, which has been formed by a group of people wanting to make a positive difference to nature and communities.

As part of the National Lottery's £22 million investment to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, The National Lottery Heritage Fund invested £7 million to create a lasting legacy for communities and nature across the UK. This funding's aim was to work alongside and empower excluded communities to take action for nature on their doorsteps and enable young people to undertake paid placements in the nature heritage sector. Nextdoor Nature is a huge part of delivering this.

The programme

Nextdoor Nature was about bringing communities together to help nature flourish where they live, learn and work. The Wildlife Trusts received £5 million from the [National Lottery Heritage Fund \(NLHF\)](#) to deliver the Nextdoor Nature programme, which provided people with the advice and support they needed to help nature on their doorstep and to leave a lasting natural legacy in honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

The programme aimed to tackle the interconnected nature and climate crises by encouraging people to make individual efforts to help nature, focusing on people from underserved areas who are less likely to have access to nature and who are also more likely to suffer the consequences of climate change. The programme was delivered across a network of 44 Wildlife Trusts, focusing on 190³ that are historically disconnected from nature, generally underrepresented and are more likely to be facing poverty. The work took place across four nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). The Nextdoor Nature programme was being delivered under two strands of work, the first of which is a mandatory outcome for NLHF, the second taken from [The Wildlife Trusts 2030 Strategy. Bringing Nature Back.](#)

STRAND 1: Has the programme enabled a wider range of people to act for nature, through a community organising approach?

- Whether the programme has involved a wider range of people than those ordinarily involved in nature-based programmes.
- How effective The Wildlife Trusts are at creating a ripple effect to reach a goal of 1 in 4 people taking action.

STRAND 2: Does community organising enable a sense of local pride and deliver improvements for nature?

- Improved the places where people live in relation to natural spaces, engendering a sense of local pride.

- Improved decisions made for nature at local and national levels, across all four countries.

Nextdoor Nature aimed to meet their objectives by:

- Engaging communities in undertaking transformational micro-projects to help nature thrive and make areas a better place to live work and visit. The programme looked to emphasise a community organising approach.
- Closing the “value-action gap” – so people’s values and actions coincide.
- Transforming communities by inspiring individuals and local communities to act for nature and become change-makers themselves.

Why the change?

The Wildlife Trusts made a commitment to improve how they connect, engage and inspire a wider range of people to take meaningful action for nature and to value the outcomes for people on an equal footing to outcomes for nature. More widely, there is a call for local communities to shape their environment and for people to place a value on nature. There is a need for society to reconnect with nature, but to do so with a well-thought-out strategy and approach that is evidence-based. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy⁴ is a system of spatial strategy for nature in England. Underpinned by the [Nature Recovery Network](#) (which is part of the UK Government’s [25 Year Environment Plan](#)), it aims to be locally led (residents, communities, voluntary groups, statutory bodies, private sectors) and collaborative to create shared plans to improve nature and biodiversity. Organisations are recognising that there is a need for change in how they work with individuals, communities and grassroot organisations, which requires a fundamentally different way of working – where communities set the agenda that works for them and maintain a level of ownership and independence. Collaboration, understanding and the utilisation of local resources helps to connect communities and decision-makers to meet a desired change.⁵ Evidence shows that there are many benefits to taking a community-led approach, such as:

- People are being listened to and can see how they have a ‘stake’ in their community.
- People who experience sustained engagement with nature have been shown to have increased social connections, happiness, health and pro-nature behaviours.

Alongside improvements to nature, there is a growing body of evidence around the positive impacts of natural spaces to health and wellbeing. More practice and research is needed to understand how nature-based programme delivery can best leverage the positive linkages between nature and health, and how local policy and strategies can support communities to benefit from green and blue assets. All the above highlights the rationale and need for the Nextdoor Nature programme.

Programme delivery

The Wildlife Trusts as a movement are shifting from a traditional engagement approach to a community organising approach. The community organising approach offers a support base which enables each Wildlife Trust to provide encouragement while developing skills, creativity and confidence in taking ownership for nature connection within communities. The projects being delivered through Nextdoor Nature were driven by the local community and therefore varied in their approach and design. The Nextdoor Nature programme was framed around this community driven approach. Below lists the key inputs (what input was

needed to deliver the programme) and the activities delivered (the tasks/activities that were needed to deliver the programme):

<p>INPUTS: <i>What was needed to deliver the programme.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) • The Wildlife Trusts and network of 44 Trusts across four nations • Appointed 50 Community Organisers to engage with communities • Volunteers and community champions • Local community organisations • Local Authorities/landowners • People/local residents
<p>ACTIVITIES: <i>What tasks/activities were needed to deliver the programme.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carried out listening exercises with communities to understand the barriers, challenges, needs and wants of communities • Reached towards and built relationships with community groups/associations/schools, etc. • Developed a suite of information resources both online (the Nextdoor Nature Hub) and offline • Developed and provided accredited training for Wildlife Trust staff and in-person learning sessions • Trusts attended and contributed to Share Learn Improve⁶ sessions • Supporting people to move local community projects forward to improve outcomes for nature. • Delivered the Pioneers Programme (Scotland only)

Variations to programme delivery

Nextdoor Nature operated across four nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). In Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust has taken a different approach with the delivery of their programme compared to other nations. The [Pioneers Programme](#) in Scotland offered a free six-month course (two hours per week through a mixture of self-led online learning, interactive webinars, practical face-to-face sessions and a community project) to provide the skills and confidence required for people to lead action for nature in their community by organising local activities. This targeted a minimum of 16 communities⁷ across three cohorts with up to 12 participants per cohort. SWT anticipated that engaging with a diverse range of community leaders through a leadership programme translated into more people from a more diverse range of communities engaging with and taking action for nature.

Evaluation Approach

Evaluation purpose and objectives

To support The Wildlife Trusts in assessing the implementation and outcomes of the Nextdoor Nature programme, M•E•L Research were commissioned to carry out an independent evaluation. The evaluation looked to explore the following:

STRAND 1: Has the programme enabled a wider range of people to act for nature, through a community organising approach?

How has the programme:

- **Motivated people to do more things with nature**, specifically those who were normally least likely to engage with nature-based activities?
- **Benefitted people** who were involved, both directly and indirectly, for example through changes in wellbeing, levels of eco-anxiety, feelings of improved control of one's own life, lifelong learning, accessing nature?
- **Helped bridge the value-action gap by changing thoughts to action** through overcoming the barriers people feel, and increasing their involvement?
- Helped more **people and groups work together**?

STRAND 2: Does community organising enable a sense of local pride and deliver improvements for nature?

How has the programme:

- Contributed to people **feeling healthier and how has it helped reduced health inequalities**?
- Created **meaningful involvement and positively impacted their actions in nature-based activities** through different levels of participation?
- Positively **changed people's views of their local area**?
- Created a **greater understanding of cultural and behavioural changes** as a result of people's participation in the programme?
- **Influenced local communities** to take real-life decisions to improve nature?

The Nextdoor Nature Programme is measured against the following set of outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** A greater range of people feel more connected to nature (S1)¹
- **Outcome 2:** There have been benefits to nature through people having a greater understanding on how they can improve outcomes for nature by acting for it (S1)
- **Outcome 3:** Communities and local people have an improved sense of pride in their local area (S2)
- **Outcome 4:** People have been encouraged to be more active and have benefitted from improved wellbeing (S2)
- **Outcome 5:** Trusts have emphasised a community-led approach (S1)
- **Outcome 6:** Trusts have improved partnership working with the local community (S1)

To address the outcomes, a set of research questions were developed for both the process and outcome evaluation. To understand how the programme is intended to work, the desired outcomes and longer-term impacts were developed into a programme theory. Both can be viewed in Appendices A and B.

Evaluation Activities

1. Data collection approaches:

The evaluation mainly used a qualitative data collection approach from primary and secondary sources. Below is a summary of how evidence was collected for the evaluation:

Qualitative data (providing depth of data):

- Project/site visits: MEL visited selected projects across the four nations. The projects selected varied based on their locations, types of activities/projects being delivered and the type of people they were engaging with.
- Storytelling using Most Significant Change (MSC): A set of core questions were developed (what changed as result of your involvement? Why was this change important to you? What led to this change?). Questions offered on a postcard were handed out to programme participants to feedback on, but Trusts could collect this data in other ways framing around the MSC questions such as: on a flip chart using sticky notes or drawings, having a conversation with participants and noting their feedback down, etc.
- Remote depth conversations with participants, local community organisations and Trusts: One-to-one in-depth conversations were delivered over the phone, using WhatsApp or online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom.
- Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) workshops: REM is a way to discover the impacts or effects of a community programme. The idea is to identify changes or effects in the community and how an intervention or your activities caused them. It combines evaluation methods – group interviewing, mind mapping, reflection, and qualitative data analysis. Five REM sessions (over three periods) were delivered across the evaluation period with Trusts, one of which took place online.
- Secondary data: Trusts were asked to submit quarterly monitoring reports for NLHF. These were provided alongside case studies, stories, etc, for the evaluation. The evaluation also delivered a rapid literature review to support the evaluation framework development and insights from the findings to date. The rapid review was related to community-led nature approaches. A total of 23 literature sources from 2010 onwards were reviewed as part of this work. A snowballing search methodology using the references in the reviewed literature was used to generate more sources of information. Findings from the review can be viewed in Appendix A.
- Observations: Researchers sat in a range of Share Learn Improve sessions and meetings across the programme period.

Quantitative data (providing breath of data):

- Online survey: The evaluation and survey was circulated with Trusts and other organisations involved in supporting the programme movement.

Challenges to collecting quantitative data: Primary quantitative data was collected, but this approach was not successful, with data being biased towards a certain demographic and people who were already acting for nature. It was therefore decided that the quantitative data would be omitted from the overall findings of the programme. The evaluation had greater success in collecting quantitative data from Trusts across two time periods (year 1 of delivery and then during year 2 of delivery).

Embedding the evaluation tools: All Wildlife Trusts attended an introduction presentation into the evaluation and the tools to be used. They were also posted printed copies of all the evaluation tools. A dedicated webpage was set up for Trusts to access information about the evaluation and to download any evaluation tools they could need. Historically Trusts have collected data and evidence quantitatively (outputs) on a range of funded projects. As this programme and evaluation was looking at primarily qualitative data (outcomes), understandably this identified a skills shift and the need for training and support. Therefore, initial data collection was limited. To look at this in more detail, it can be seen that this was due to a number of factors, such as:

- The time needed for Trusts' mindsets to change from an output (the numbers) to an outcome (the 'so what') style of data collection. It was identified that Trusts' understanding and skillset in collecting outcome-based data needed to be improved; alongside this, this was also a skillset that would take time. To support this process the following was delivered:
 - In September 2023, four online evaluation skills refresh sessions were offered to Trusts which revisited the evaluation aims, methods and tools. Best practice outcome data collection and examples of where this had been successful were discussed with Trusts.
 - In February 2024, The Wildlife Trust held an in-person session for all Trusts to attend with focused on supporting Trusts to capture stories, help amplifying community voices, and working with them to influence change.
- Centrally – A Test and Learn group was set up in response to our initial findings of issues around data collection to help dig down into the barriers more. By October 2023, this group fed back key issues around data collection. This supported both Trusts and MEL to reflect together and look at data collection going forward. From this, we learned crucial lessons around what was appropriate and non-extractive, alongside skill development.

Table 1: Summary of the evaluation activities and number of participants involved in the evaluation

Stakeholder type	Data collection method		Overall	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland
Participants	Depth chats		30	22	4	0	4
	Survey (omitted)		150	117	6	0	27
	MSC feedback		154	125	29	0	0
	Visits	No. of	10	7	1	1	1
		People spoken to	181	153	9	12	7
Organisations	Depth chats		17	15	2	0	NA
	Survey		18	18	0	0	NA
Trusts	Depth chats		27	23	4	0	0
	Survey Y1		58	46	6	1	5
	Survey Y2		37	32	1	2	2
	REM x 3 periods (not unique)		86	Y	Y	Y	Y

Analysis and Reporting

1. STATISTICAL RELIABILITY OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The Trust survey findings are based on results from the majority of Trusts, but not all. **Caution must therefore be exercised when interpreting the findings. The 'n=' figure referred to in the narrative and figures indicates the total number of Trusts responding to the question with a valid response. The reader should refer to this alongside the percentages presented or discussed in the report.**

Owing to the rounding of numbers, percentages displayed visually on charts within this report may not always add up to 100% and may differ slightly when compared with the text. The figures provided in the text should always be used. Where figures do not appear in a chart, these are 3% or less.

2. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

All qualitative discussions took place with consenting participants, and the data was then entered into an analysis grid for further exploration. All storytelling (MSC) responses were also entered into a separate analysis grid. Key themes and findings were then identified, drawing together the quantitative and qualitative data against each evaluation aim and research question.

Throughout the report quotes from participants have been used and where this information has been provided; socio-demographic information has been noted to give greater context.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

While we have undertaken research activities, the impact of the grant was measured only through self-reported behaviours. There were no independent validating observations, so the evidence is intrinsically limited.

The programme did not include a control group (gathering data from people that did not engage with the Nextdoor Nature programme) in order to provide counterfactual evidence with which to assess outcomes.

Evaluation Findings

This section presents the findings for each strand of the evaluation and key research question. A range of qualitative data has been analysed and triangulated to identify key themes which are supported by quotes and case studies. Where applicable, quantitative evidence and results from the rapid evidence review has been used to support the findings.

STRAND 1: Enabling a wider range of people to act for nature, through a community organising approach

How did the programme grow and diversify audiences who were connecting with nature?

The programme has grown and diversified its audience by connecting with a broad range of individuals through various channels and overcoming multiple barriers to participation. But this was not on a consistent basis – there was still a need for people already involved in the community, so-called ‘nature actors’, to be enablers for action. Motivations for people to do more things with nature, specifically those who were traditionally less likely to engage with nature-based activities, varied widely, encompassing a passion for nature, a desire to make a difference, professional and personal growth, community engagement, environmental and ethical concerns, personal development, and social connection. Participants were eager to share their knowledge, improve their mental health, drive environmental projects, and connect their communities with nature.

1. What worked well in growing and diversifying people engaging with nature

- **Actively listening to people’s needs:** The Nextdoor Nature programme actively listened to community needs through an approach that emphasised direct engagement and continuous feedback. The Wildlife Trusts, along with staff and volunteers, notably Community Organisers that were supported by the Trusts, conducted listening exercises in community hubs, attended local events, conducted door-knocking throughout communities, and participated in meetings to gather insights directly from community members. 88% of Trusts reported back in Year 2 of the programme that they found the listening exercises delivered with communities very useful. *“So actually what we found is, rather than putting on the sessions at the library or a community centre to get people to come to you, we’re doing more of the community work and going to where they are.”* [Wildlife Trust]. These efforts helped ensure that diverse voices were heard and that the programme’s initiatives were tailored to address specific local concerns. The programme also utilised creative engagement methods, such as spoken and visual arts, to reach a broader audience and foster inclusive participation. The evidence review found that when people feel like they are being listened to and that they have a ‘stake’ in their community⁸ – they feel more connected to that community. Studies have also shown that local residents value the opportunity to get more involved in designing and delivering improvements to local nature spaces, providing a sense that their voice really matters.⁹

- **By maintaining regular communication with community groups**, trusted local figures, and council officers, the programme built strong relationships and trust, enabling a responsive and adaptable approach to community organising. This commitment to listening and collaboration allowed the programme to support and empower communities effectively, ensuring that their needs and aspirations were at the forefront of environmental and social initiatives. An important element of how communities were listened to was the central team within RSWT support for paid Community Organisers, who in this role were given the formal training and means to support local-level nature-based activities and development. Community Organisers proved to be an invaluable element of the programme because they acted as a link between the Trusts and local communities (discussed in more detail later on in this report) enabling communities to feel like they had someone they can get to know and trust, and who listened to their concerns and needs. *“Just getting out there and talking to people, visiting the community centre, visiting places, some of it was linked up through staff enabling me to book a room and advertise that we could have sessions, and others were just me hanging out.”* [Wildlife Trust].
- **Using established nature actors and providing knowledge/upskilling:** Another aspect of the programme that enabled a wider range of people to act for nature were the information resources and support that the Community Organiser would signpost communities to. One element that stood out from participant conversations was that what traditionally prevented them from getting involved in nature was the feeling that they did not have the knowledge to ‘fit in’ or understand nature-based activities, causing anxiety that they would feel out of place. The programme attempted to address this by signposting to informational resources and support that would be accessible to those not typically involved in nature, or those that did not have any prior experience with nature-based activities. Having an expert, particularly at the beginning of engagement, that communities could learn from and ask questions proved to be a valuable element for reducing anxieties and increasing learning and confidence amongst community residents. As a result, residents felt more motivated to not only stay involved in nature-based activities but enhance their engagement as they grew more confident in themselves and their knowledge and abilities. Participants also noted, in particular, the approachable and respectful way that Community Organisers worked with them. They felt that Trusts treated them with respect and patience, making them feel that there were no wrong questions, therefore further building up their confidence in nature-based activities. This allowed participants who traditionally felt excluded from nature-based activities to think about how they could get involved, contribute, and crucially, improve the nature and outdoor spaces in their own communities. *“Probably the Nextdoor Nature project encouraged my confidence - I had a little bit of confidence from them saying ‘OK, go through this’ and ‘look out for this’, ‘highlight the positives when you do it’, ‘find the positive things amongst the things that are worrying you are concerning you.’”* [Participant].

CASE STUDY: Mark – Nextdoor Nature Pioneer

About the area where Mark lives:

Mark has lived in the area for about five years. The area used to have the largest open cast mine in Europe, and because of this, the environment was decimated. He felt that people stopped caring about nature. The area now consists of around 1,400 people and could be described as blue-collar workers.

Motivations for becoming a Pioneer:

Mark already runs a nature-focused group with around 400 members on his Facebook page. Mark was keen to improve his local area and the community. He'd struggled in the past as people don't have the time to get involved and wanted to learn how to get others involved too.

What projects have they been involved in:

Mark's journey as a Nextdoor Nature Pioneer began with two core projects. The first was the development of a nature walk and bird hide along an old mining railway. The second involved distributing seed and garden packs to local residents. *"The community are more likely to involve themselves in small actions they can do at or near home,"* Mark said.

How has the programme helped overcome barriers to involving people with nature:

The nature walk and bird hide became cherished spaces for the community. People valued the opportunity to connect with nature, even if it was just for a brief moment. Mark understood that these "one touch" moments were crucial. "A lot of people care about the environment, but time is a key barrier for people," he explained.

What changes have been experienced as a result:

Mark's efforts in leading improvements to the local area and nature have been impactful.

- The local primary school began using the bird hide as part of their curriculum, sparking an interest in nature among the younger generation. One notable case was Mason, a ten-year-old boy who received a seed and garden kit. Mason's enthusiasm for growing his own produce led him to ask for a greenhouse for his birthday. He now grows a variety of vegetables and has even entered a vegetable growing competition.
- The bird hide also provided a sanctuary for those seeking solace. Mark learned of a widowed woman who found peace and comfort in the hide, using it to cope with her loss. She told Mark that the hide was a calming space that greatly benefited her mental wellbeing.
- Moreover, the nature trail saw an increase in bird diversity, drawing more people to learn about and appreciate the local wildlife. "The Nextdoor Nature Pioneers programme has acted as a catalyst for the work I was already doing," Mark reflected.

Through Mark's commitment and the support of the programme, he has not only revitalised the local environment but also helped rekindle his community's love for nature.

QUOTE: *"The Nextdoor Nature Pioneers programme has acted as a catalyst for the work I was already doing."*

- **Connecting with trusted people/grassroots organisations:** The Nextdoor Nature programme connected with trusted people and grassroots organisations through strategic relationship-building and active community engagement. Initially, the programme reached out to pre-existing community groups and local figures, such as council officers and community connectors, who were already well-regarded within their communities. By establishing these connections, the programme gathered the trust and credibility of these individuals and organisations to foster broader community involvement. Trusts and programme staff attended local events, meetings, and conducted listening exercises to immerse themselves in the respective communities. This presence helped them identify key stakeholders and build rapport with influential community members. The programme also employed creative engagement methods, including spoken and visual arts, to connect with diverse groups and facilitate inclusive participation. Regular communication and collaboration with trusted people ensured that the programme's initiatives were aligned with local needs and aspirations.
- **Nature-based solutions at a micro level by involving people in tangible activities in their immediate surroundings:** Community-led work with a nature spin worked well. Framing the approach was important, but selling the idea as nature/environment didn't always work. Trusts had success in framing the activities/programme in a different way and then weaving in the environmental elements into the approach. Alongside this, engaging communities within the spaces they call home, especially ones within urban environments where fewer people have access to vehicles, worked well. This 'hyperlocal' engagement meant that more people could access what the Nextdoor Nature programme was offering without the traditionally associated stress or inconvenience of travelling long distances to reach outdoor activities. When speaking with participants through in-depth conversations, the most frequent barriers to accessing nature were often not a willingness to take part but rather financial and logistical barriers, such as transportation issues and geographical barriers, lack of time and other responsibilities e.g. childcare, and anxiety around travelling long distances. The programme recognised this and made conscious decisions therefore to engage a diverse range of communities in the most practical ways possible for them, such as in their neighbourhood communal spaces that were easily accessible. This involved an approach of 'going to them' to engage and involve a range of communities on the project, and crucially, this also meant not expecting communities to come to a fixed location far away from their homes. *"One of the main things that came up in the conversation with the school was that people don't take their children to things unless they're literally on their doorstep. So we knew we had to do something, which was on the estate."* [Wildlife Trust]. One example from Norfolk and Waveney that illustrates this approach involved the programme reaching out to community members to identify where it was most convenient for them to get involved and where they wanted to see nature-based changes in their community. They found that planting raised beds in the direct vicinity of their homes was what members of the community wanted the most, and the programme was able to help facilitate that change alongside community members. *"So actually what we found is, rather than putting on the sessions at the library or a community centre to get people to come to you, we're doing more of the community work and going to where they are. People have come to Nextdoor Nature and identified green spaces that are obviously really just lacking in any diversity or are just grass and we've then worked with the community to build raised beds."* [Wildlife Trust].

ORGANISATIONAL CASE STUDY:

Owen (pseudonym) – Nature Connect Support Worker at the local Mind in Norfolk

About the area Owen works in/the community:

Owen runs a local Mind project that specifically aims to connect people with nature and empower them to learn skills they can use such as gardening and identifying birds. The project is very seasonal in nature e.g. growing over winter, walks/flower identification throughout spring. They place an emphasis on people doing all they can, given the regularity/severity of mental health issues. *"The aim of our project is to support people to connect with nature, so empowering adults to learn skills in order to use them every day,"* Owen said.

About the projects Owen has been involved in:

The Community Organiser helped Owen set up a local walk that had both a nature and mental health focus. The walk activities included upskilling local people in bird and plant identification, which was led by the Community Organiser, whilst Owen from Mind focused on the activities such as breathing techniques and mindfulness. This collaboration and upskilling worked well for Owen and the local community. *"The Community Organiser was able to identify what we were seeing and then I'd be there to encourage some mindfulness or stopping to connect with our breath and grounding. So it kind of goes hand in hand in that way,"* Owen said.

What worked well for Owen:

The simplicity of their activities was key to their success. Owen believed in the power of low-key 'pop-up' events that were easy to join and not too demanding. Whether it was a spontaneous bird-watching session or a small gardening workshop, these activities were designed to be accessible and enjoyable. *"Really low-key activities, where you can take part if you want to and just showing them what it's about,"* Owen said. He knew that connecting with nature didn't have to be a grand gesture. Even small actions, like growing herbs on a windowsill, could have a profound impact. One of the most popular activities was growing food. People were fascinated by the process of nurturing plants and harvesting their own produce. *"I think people are really into seeing what they can nurture and harvest...yes, to save money, but also to take on goodness as well,"* he said.

Have you noticed any changes/differences in how people/your community are engaging with this project:

Owen noticed a change in the community. People began to see the potential in their surroundings. They no longer viewed communal areas as neglected spaces managed by the council. Instead, they saw opportunities to plant trees and bulbs, to bring life and colour to their environment. *"The communal areas seem like they're just managed by the Council, but they're not managed, they're maintained. When people start to see 'well actually we can plant a tree here, we can plant bulbs...I think what the Nextdoor Nature project in particular is showing people is that they can make those changes and they have the agency to do so,"* he said.

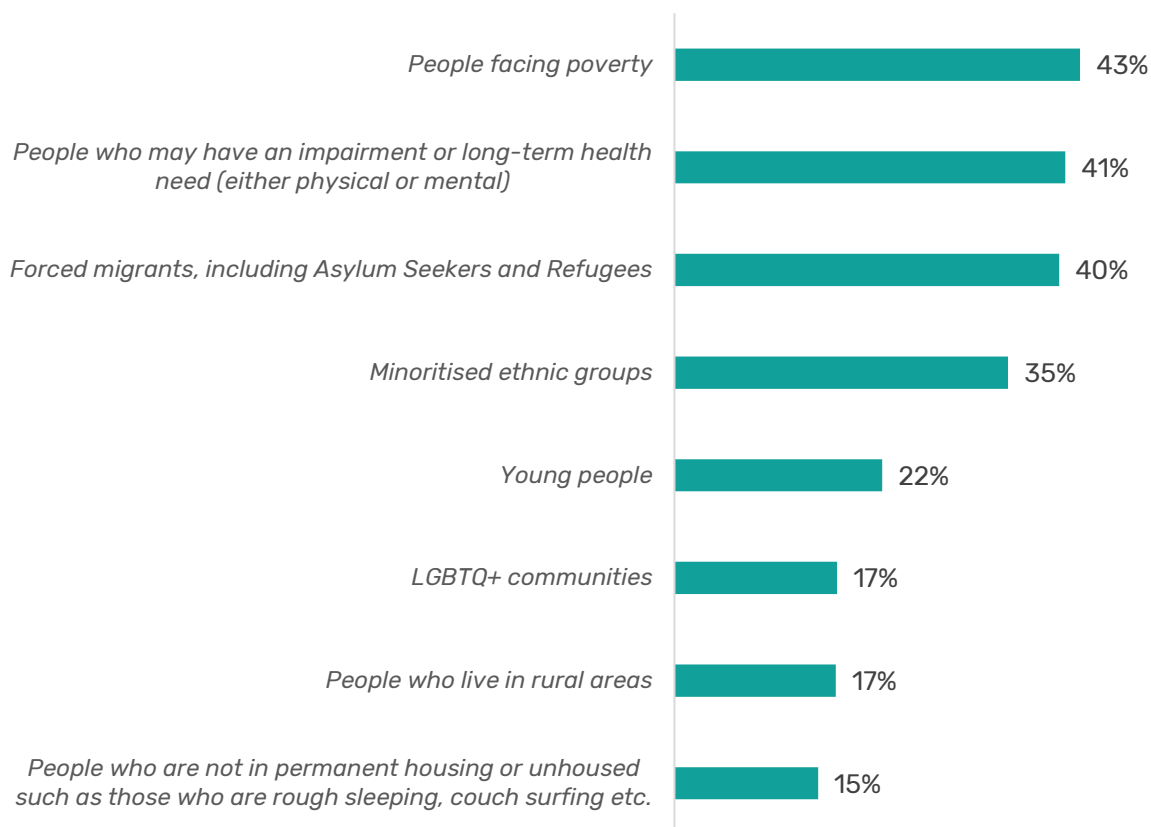
Through his work, Owen inspired a sense of ownership and pride in the community. He showed them that even small actions could lead to meaningful change. And in doing so, he helped them reconnect with nature and with themselves, one step at a time.

2. The changes experienced

- More engagement groups that Trusts hadn't worked with before: Although this had challenges, there were many positive stories told by people who were traditionally less likely to access nature. This included children and young people, migrants/refugees, minoritised ethnic groups, people facing poverty, faith groups and community associations. Results from the Trust survey from 2023 and 2024 (Chart 1) suggest that positive steps have been made to engage people facing poverty with an average of 44% of Trusts stating that they have started working with these groups since Nextdoor Nature. This was following by increases in Trusts working with those who may have an impairment or long-term health need, (41%) and forced migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees (40%) and children and young people (22%). In addition to this, 14 individual Trusts mentioned engagement with young people in the REM sessions. While these survey numbers are by no means definitive, they do suggest the programme has initiated involvement with diverse groups of people, many of which have been traditionally excluded from nature. *"Nextdoor Nature helped us to achieve that and helped us to kind of reach and some of the communities and some of the areas where we've never kind of been before."* [Wildlife Trust].

Chart 1: Results from the Trust survey from 2023 and 2024

Average % over Year 1 & Year 2 of Trusts stating they started to work with groups since NDN



- Created better relationships with local people:** The consistent community presence of the programme helped support better relationships with local people and their communities. Staff and volunteers maintained a consistent presence in local communities by attending events, holding regular meetings, and being available for ongoing support, which helped build trust and familiarity with those representing the programme. Organising and participating in local events had a similar effect, allowing for frequent, informal interactions with community members, which helped establish stronger, more personal connections.
- Encouraged local people to engage more with nature:** The programme encouraged people to get involved in nature by organising community events, educational workshops, and awareness campaigns, making participation accessible and appealing. Providing resources, funding, and tools removed barriers for some, while empowering local leaders and fostering community-led projects built a sense of ownership and responsibility. Several participants expressed that they usually did not see themselves as the type to get involved with nature, whether that was because of the setting they lived in or a feeling they didn't have the correct skills or knowledge, but the programme encouraged them to get involved through these activities and showed how accessible and rewarding getting involved in nature could be. This encouragement also spread amongst groups and communities, leading to wider involvement with nature. *"People got really into their projects that they were designing and delivering towards the end of the programme. And so people were all super keen to help each other get involved and support one another."* [Participant].

COMMUNITY ORGANISER CASE STUDY:

Ben (pseudonym)

About Ben:

Ben is a Community Organiser and chose to work in two of the most challenging communities in North Wales, areas impacted by historic issues and a deep-seated mistrust of local authorities. *"When the call came out to get involved and the criteria for selecting communities was shared with us, we took it quite literally and selected potentially the most difficult communities to engage with,"* he said.

About the projects Owen has been involved in:

When listening to the local residents, Ben heard stories of broken promises, a lack of facilities, and antisocial behaviour. *"Broken promises...nothing for the young people to do...rubbish along the river...no prospects for young people...very high level of illiteracy,"* he explained.

About the projects Ben has been involved in:

Ben focused his efforts on the children. He organised after-school clubs and Saturday morning activities, hoping to instil a love for nature in the younger generation. *"We came to the conclusion quite quickly that we weren't going to change the behaviour of adults. Really, the hope is to invest your time and energy in the next generation and connect the children with the local landscape"*

	<p><i>and with nature in the area so they grow up to respect it and appreciate it and fight for it in the future,” he said.</i></p> <p>The projects delivered helped children discover nature and wildlife around them. <i>“It is difficult to find solutions for nature, but when you see a child discovering something about wildlife for the first time in their life and their eyes light up because you see that there’s a glimmer of hope there...”</i> Ben said.</p>
<p>What worked well for Ben:</p> <p>The Nextdoor Nature programme played a crucial role in bridging the gap between the local authority and the residents. The council wanted to make things happen but were constrained by limited time and budgets. Residents, on the other hand, often lacked the skills or confidence to advocate for themselves. <i>“I think there’s a real outcome for Nextdoor Nature where we’ve kind of plugged the gap between the local authority and people on the ground...there’s just a severe lack of potential leaders within that community to hold the local authority to account, to kind of make things happen in their community,”</i> he said.</p>	
<p>What and how are relationships being developed in the community:</p> <p>Ben was also aware of the challenges of the areas he was working within in North Wales. He aimed to improve this by connecting the estate and the town centre in a way that hadn’t been done before. <i>“There was an anonymity between the town and the estate, which was really embedded...whoever you spoke to, you mentioned the estate and their eyes would roll,”</i> he said. To bridge this divide, Ben organised a celebration event, offering food to bring people together. <i>“We thought if we could try and create connections between the estate and the town and try to create a more positive light on the estate, then people from the town would get involved in some of the activities that we were going on there and vice versa.”</i></p> <p>Though the journey was still a work in progress, Ben remained hopeful.</p>	

3. Challenges faced

- Cost of living and other financial/time barriers:** The cost of living and other financial barriers presented challenges for communities. Many individuals and families faced economic pressures that limited their ability to participate in community activities. *“For many people addressing the cost-of-living crisis is a much higher priority than engaging in activities related to nature or conservation.”* [Wildlife Trust]. These financial barriers included the high cost of transportation, lack of access to affordable childcare, and the need to prioritise work over voluntary or leisure activities. Additionally, the economic variations within communities often exacerbated feelings of exclusion and reluctance to participate, particularly among traditionally marginalised groups. This situation was further complicated by bureaucratic hurdles and the need for financial assistance to

support community-led initiatives. *“People that are living in more economically deprived areas are unheard and are disconnected because they’re often not near green spaces and they’re often time poor as well as financially poor.”* [Wildlife Trust].

- **The need for established nature actors in traditionally disconnected communities:** The need for established nature actors posed another challenge in the Nextdoor Nature programme, specifically in gaining project momentum and the sustainability of activities. Community actors –individuals who can mobilise and inspire local people to take part in environmental activities—are crucial for the success of such programmes. One of the primary challenges was the initial reluctance of community members who are traditionally disconnected to nature to take on leadership roles. This hesitation stemmed from various factors, including impacts from the cost of living, confidence, previous negative experiences, or simply not recognising their potential as community leaders. If someone is already interested in helping nature and have the free time/motivation then they may only need a little push (money, advice, etc.) to become a community leader. Where someone is minoritised, has limited English, has a low income/insecure housing, etc., then it would require massive support and patience, far beyond what Trusts can achieve in two years.

How did the programme improve people’s understanding of how they can act for nature?

The programme improved people's understanding of how they can act for nature by fostering community engagement, empowerment, and real-life application of nature-based skills. Participants have noticed positive changes in their communities, leading to a stronger sense of local empowerment. People and communities have expressed increased confidence in addressing nature-based concerns independently and taking action themselves. Real-life examples of these improvements include the rejuvenation of local green spaces, such as the renovation of gardens for elderly residents and those with learning disabilities, and the transformation of neglected areas into community gardens. These projects have not only enhanced the physical environment but also boosted community morale, as evidenced by the increased use of gardens and the formation of new gardening/outdoor community groups.

1. What worked well in improving people's understanding of how they can act for nature?

- **Upskilling, learning and knowledge:** Hearing from ‘nature experts’ helped to address residents' questions and concerns about interacting with nature, increasing their confidence and motivation to participate in nature-based activities. It helped to overcome this barrier to act and increased their knowledge, in turn increasing their motivation to do more things with nature, as they became more confident in what they’re doing. *“It was so lovely to attend the garden experience. The team, Sean and Tom were funny and helpful. I’ve learnt so much about gardens.”* [Participant]. *“It’s great knowing the names of plants, insects, knowing these things made me want to know even more and care for them.”* [Participant] *“Getting an interest in gardening and upcycling and learning to grow your own.”* [Participant].
- **The variation is how people could act for nature:** Due to the community-led nature of the programme, the activities and approaches varied and therefore levels of involvement

were dictated by individuals themselves, meeting their own needs and wants. As such, projects varied across the four nations ranging from nature walks, creating bottle gardens, bird feeders, and gardening. Through this people have built up knowledge about nature and skills for how they can improve the natural environment around them. Participants that fed back through the evaluation highlighted the value of learning new skills related to gardening, nature activities, and environmental sustainability. People, including children and young people, learned about various plants, insects, and local environmental projects, which they applied to their own personal and community nature projects. Gaining these practical skills grew participants' confidence and motivated participants to act positively for nature even further. What is more, specific organised events for knowledge sharing and learning were valued by participants; this included events like the Nextdoor Nature Community Celebrations and activities organised by GROW and Grow Cymru. *"A series of events, starting with knowing Jenny was starting this project, attending some Trust events, doing some wellbeing walks with Recovery & Wellbeing College, it all began to link in!"* [Participant].

- **Empower local champions:** the programme supported those already acting for nature by providing tools, motivation, advocacy, and guidance. This helped them overcome barriers and enhance their efforts, building confidence and leadership skills. This involved, for example, providing people with the support and knowledge for how to approach councils and other decision-makers, to improve the outdoor spaces in their respective communities. A key element of this was the support provided by the Community Organisers to overcome logistical barriers that often challenged localised community efforts to improve spaces. One participant that fed back was supported by a Community Organiser who helped build up their confidence by standing alongside them and offering advice on how to approach and talk to their local authority. They were also supported by being signposted to funding and helped with applications - providing opportunities and contacts who wouldn't otherwise be there. *"What they [Trust] were trying to do was find out what was happening already or what was attempting to happen, they were trying to catch hold of people's dreams and visions and amplify them and connect them. For example - I was having all of these ideas, but I couldn't find anybody else to talk to. So immediately there was XXX to talk to, who understood and was excited. XXX was a friend from the wildlife perspective, so if I had to talk to the Council, I had somebody who saw things the same way as me, standing alongside me, rather than having to persuade somebody in the council to even want to think about it...If you hit an obstacle, they can say 'try this' or 'talk to this person', or they will actually talk to that person on your behalf. So, for example, they've been a fantastic support in getting us together with some people to look at fundraising. We basically have no funds except the initial startup of the council [...] we've started it, we've planted seeds, but to do it properly, we've got to have the money at the right time of the year. And so, they have been helping us work towards funding bids."* [Participant]. Similar feelings of empowerment around acting for nature and gratitude towards Community Organisers can be seen in the quote below from another participant conversation. In this case, the participant worked at a secondary school and led on a community outdoor space for their students. The involvement and support from the programme helped them learn and gain confidence for how they could not only act for nature themselves but also how to support their own students to act for nature. *"[They have] been really helpful [...] they sent through grants that we can apply to, they come along to some of our sessions, got to meet the kids, got to offer advice and chat to them about what they do and generally just be really helpful because I've never done anything like this before. It's been really great to have an expert like her in the situation."* [Participant].

- **Handing over direction and responsibility:** The Nextdoor Nature programme handed over direction and responsibility to communities to a degree, through several strategic approaches, ensuring local ownership and sustainable engagement. Here's how the programme facilitated this transition:
 - a. **Community-led decision-making:** From the outset, the programme encouraged community involvement in decision-making processes. This was achieved through regular meetings, listening exercises, and feedback sessions where community members could voice their opinions, share ideas, and contribute to planning.
 - b. **Support:** Initially, the programme staff played a supportive role, guiding communities through the initial stages of project development and implementation. As community members gained confidence and expertise, the programme gradually reduced its direct involvement, allowing locals to take the lead.
 - c. **Resources:** To ensure communities had the tools necessary to succeed, the programme provided signposting to resources such as funding, materials, and access to networks. This support was crucial in the early phases and was tapered off as communities became more self-reliant.
 - d. **Facilitation of networks and partnerships:** The programme connected communities with local councils, organisations, and other stakeholders, creating a valuable support network. These connections ensured that communities had access to ongoing support and could collaborate with more partners.
 - e. **Gradual transition:** The handover process was gradual, with programme staff remaining available for support as needed. This approach ensured that communities did not feel abandoned and could seek guidance when necessary. It should be noted that this gradual transition varied across the different communities who were involved in the programme and had to be tailored each time to the communities' confidence and needs.

2. The changes experienced

- **Community empowerment and shared responsibility:** The focus on community activities and collaboration in the Nextdoor Nature programme fostered a sense of community empowerment and shared responsibility for nature. This community-led focus encouraged individuals to make real-life contributions to the collective improvement of their local area. As a result, participants felt empowered to act for nature on both a personal level and a collective level. Staff working on the programme noticed significant changes in how participants and communities were engaging with the programme once it had gained momentum. Our in-depth interviews and REM sessions with Wildlife Trusts revealed that participants gained greater confidence in approaching nature-related activities and community organising. Notably, groups which previously would just 'accept' support began looking to advocate for themselves and have their voices heard. The examples below indicate how the programme not only improved the confidence for individuals themselves to act for nature but also communities to act for nature. *"They feel comfortable now calling us and saying 'look, we've got this issue, how do we resolve this?' and so we'll talk through it a bit and they come up with their own solutions. We'll give them two or three different ideas, but they're getting more of the local people involved."* [Wildlife Trust]. *"They want to be able*

to support a community voice group and have actual members of that community advocating for their needs and their concerns...Rarely does the community have a Council of its own that's articulating and looking towards the long term." [The Wildlife Trusts]. The Nextdoor Nature programme has also encouraged communities to believe in themselves and speak up for what they think they deserve when it comes to improvements in their outdoor spaces. Participants expressed that before the programme that they may have not known where to start to improve the outdoor spaces in their communities, and if they did know, they felt that they did not have the means or confidence to act. The Nextdoor Nature programme, however, has enabled this confidence and agency amongst participants, helping them realise what is possible and what they can do for nature in their neighbourhoods.

"I think what the NDN project in particular is showing people is that they can make those changes, and they have the agency to do so...NDN has enabled people to connect with nature but not give up on it." [Wildlife Trust].

"I think people have become more confident to do initiate work themselves. They are contacting stakeholders and relevant people." [Wildlife Trust].

"I think the communities have a greater understanding that they can do a lot more than they thought they could themselves. So just by coming together, you know you're listened to, you know local councillors will listen to groups that come together." [Wildlife Trust].

- **Helped address questions and concerns about acting for nature:** The focus on community activities, skills-building, and learning also allowed participants to ask questions and address any concerns they may have had about nature and their involvement in it. For one, participants had access to knowledgeable staff and environmental experts who could answer specific questions and provide tailored support and advice. This guidance helped clarify doubts for participants, many of whom may have not been involved in nature to this extent before, and it provided actionable steps for addressing environmental concerns. The programme also introduced participants to hands-on demonstrations and practical projects. By organising these, such as creating community gardens or restoring local habitats, the programme showed participants how to implement conservation practices in real-life settings, which helped remove doubts and build confidence and competence. The programme also fostered community-led discussions and forums where participants could share their experiences, ask questions, and discuss challenges. These forums created a supportive environment where people could learn from each other and collectively find solutions.
- **Improvements to knowledge created motivations to act:** By gaining a deeper understanding of environmental issues and the importance of biodiversity, participants became more aware of the impact of their actions on nature. This awareness fostered a sense of responsibility and urgency to take positive steps, while the knowledge and skills they gained from the programme equipped participants with the tools and information they needed to make informed decisions about nature. This empowerment made them feel more capable of taking effective action, whether it was creating wildlife habitats, engaging in conservation projects, or advocating for sustainable practices in their communities. The improved knowledge that participants gained also resonated with their personal values and interests, such as a love for gardening, wildlife, or

outdoor activities. This connection made their actions more meaningful and enjoyable, reinforcing their commitment to nature.

3. The challenges

- **Barriers to acting for nature:** Lack of time was a significant challenge for people's ability to act for nature within the Nextdoor Nature programme, impacting their involvement in several ways. Many participants, for example, had to juggle multiple responsibilities, such as work, family, and other personal commitments, leaving little time for additional activities like participating in nature conservation. This was particularly true for lower income participants, who often had less spare time because of these life commitments and often lacked the same means to travel. This made it difficult for people to consistently engage in the programme.

How did the programme help Wildlife Trusts, staff and participants emphasise a community-led approach to improving outcomes for nature?

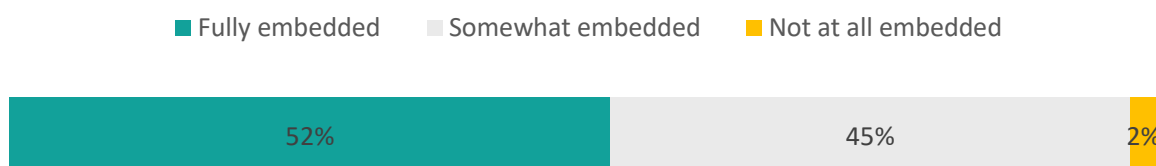
The Nextdoor Nature programme has emphasised a community-led approach to improving outcomes for nature, as evidenced by Wildlife Trusts, staff, and participants' efforts to engage with local communities. Through various methods such as hosting local events, attending meetings, and conducting listening exercises in community hubs, the Wildlife Trusts ensured that community voices were heard. Challenges included reluctance from community members to take the lead and barriers faced by traditionally excluded groups, exacerbated by economic pressures. Despite these hurdles, the programme facilitated networking and collaboration among diverse groups, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment within the community. Wildlife Trusts reported improvements in community relationships, increased engagement with nature, and a shift towards a more inclusive approach in their practices. The programme's success is evident in the enhanced community networks, the emergence of new community-led initiatives, and a stronger collective vision for nature conservation.

1. What worked well in emphasising a community-led approach?

- **The role of the Community Organisers was crucial in the success of the Nextdoor Nature programme:** Community Organisers have been defined as connectors, catalysts for action and relationship builders. Alongside this, they have also empowered people, which has resulted in increased community pride. All (100%, n=42) of Wildlife Trusts that fed back in the Year 2 survey said that having a dedicated Community Organiser within the Trust was useful. During Year 2, just over half (52%) of Wildlife Trusts felt that community organised approaches have been embedded into their own ways of working, with the majority of the remaining sample stating it had been 'somewhat' embedded. This is still a positive result and highlights the amount of time needed to embed and shift perceptions to a community-led approach. We identified eight key aspects of their role that was crucial in delivering a community-led approach:
 1. Listening to people: Actively listening to the needs and desires of the community and engaging with them in meaningful conversations.
 2. Taking a ground-up approach: Adopting a ground-up approach by starting with peoples' needs and desires, rather than imposing top-down solutions.

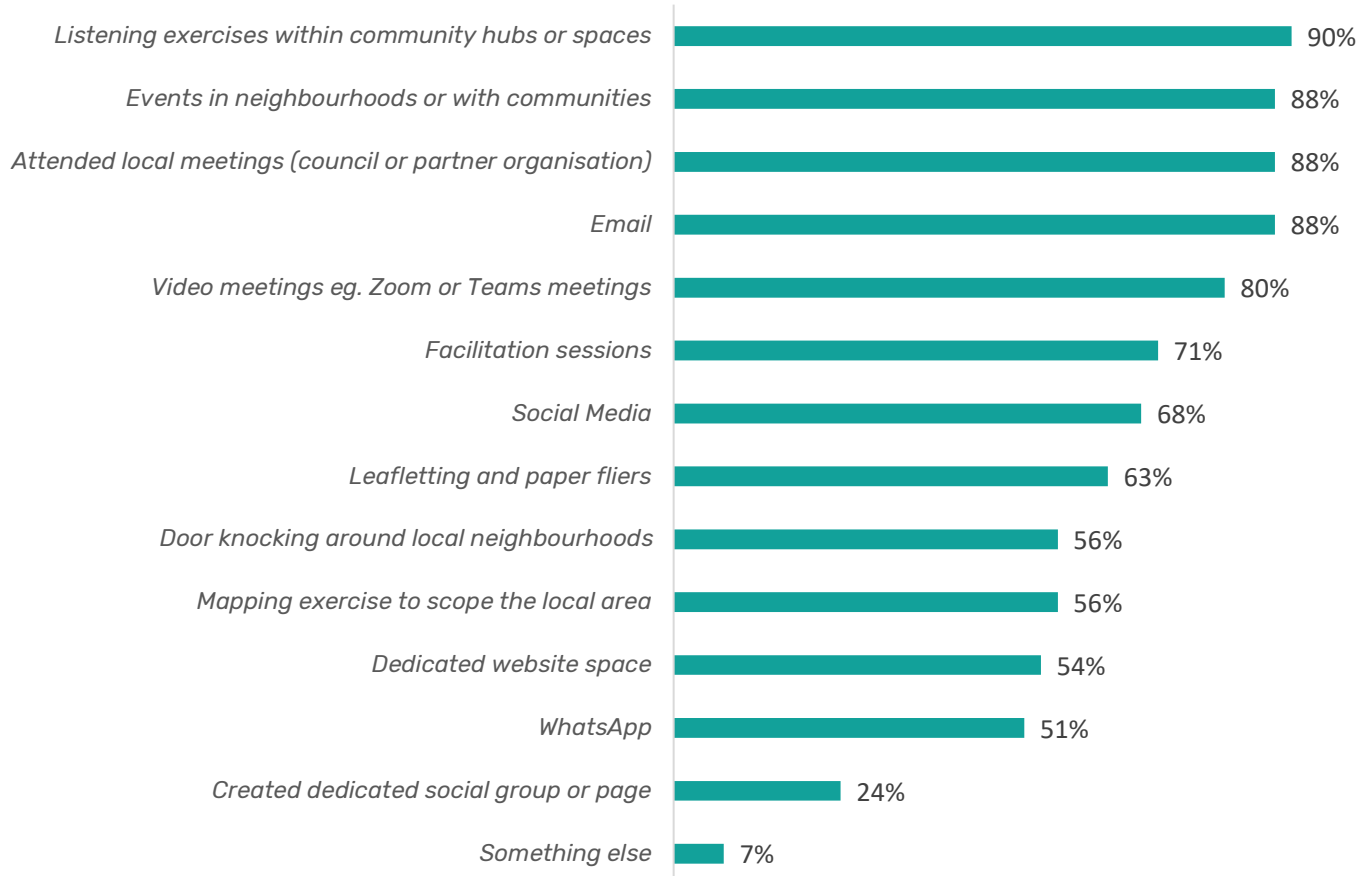
3. Building relationships and gaining trust: Slowly building trust and relationships with the community members over time.
4. Personal engagement and friendliness: Being present, approachable, and friendly, which helped in building rapport and fostering a sense of shared community.
5. Utilising existing relationships and networks: Leveraging existing relationships, such as those with local organisations, councils, councillors, and community groups, to facilitate connections and gain support for community initiatives.
6. Accessibility and outreach: Ensuring accessibility by using various venues, social media, posters, and word-of-mouth to reach a wider audience and engage more community members.
7. Providing resources and knowledge: Offering advice, funding, habitat management support, and knowledge about local organisations and resources to help community members achieve their goals.
8. Continued support and follow-up: Providing ongoing support, follow-up, and encouragement to community members as they worked towards their goals.

Chart 2: To what extent has a community organised approach been embedded into your own ways of working? (Year 2, n=42)



- **Utilising a range of approaches and community assets:** Community Organisers were given freedom to use a variety of approaches to engage and actively listen to communities. Chart 3 below shows the range of approaches which were taken to connect to communities. The top three approaches were delivering listening exercises in community hubs/spaces, hosting or attending events and attending local meetings held by other organisations. By speaking to people on the ground/where they were, a greater sense of trust developed. *“We have something that we now call xxx, which is a marquee, and rather than having tables at the front of it, we have chairs [...] if the weather’s OK we have bean bags, we have small tables and we usually put on cake and coffee drinks with their kids and then we just start conversations with people about nature, about wildlife and what their favourite wildlife is in their park. We talk about how they want to have help, and how we can support them to help that wildlife in that park. So that completely changed the way we’ve done things.”* [Wildlife Trust]. *“I created a resource called ‘Nature Space in a Box’ and we held an event in January of this year where we had three tables of people. We had three of these games, which are basically a PVC tablecloth which you can draw on. I’d drawn on their space in scale, I’d made over the Christmas holidays lots of dead hedges, hedges, trees, apple trees, bushes, all of that sort of thing, and got some little wooden butterflies, birds, ducks, bees, all sorts of things, so they could move those around a bit, like fuzzy felt they used to play as kids.”* [Wildlife Trust].

Chart 3: What approaches using community organising principles have you used as part of your work on the Nextdoor Nature programme? (n=41) (Year 2 Trust survey)



What engagement strategies worked well?

1. Hosting local events:

Neighbourhood events: Organising events within local areas was one of the most common approaches. These events aimed to bring the community together, fostering engagement and interest in local nature spaces.

Specific focus on underrepresented groups: Events were tailored to include who were traditionally less likely to access or be able to access nature spaces, ensuring improved inclusivity.

2. Attending existing meetings:

Local meetings: Wildlife Trusts attended pre-existing local meetings, such as council or partner organisations. This allowed Wildlife Trusts to collaborate within established community groups and gain insights from local people.

3. Listening exercises:

Community hubs and spaces: Delivering listening exercises in community hubs helped Wildlife Trusts understand community needs and build trust. Speaking directly to people in their familiar environments facilitated rapport.

4. Face-to-face work and door knocking:

- Engaging directly with people through door-to-door visits and in-person conversations provided firsthand insights into community desires and challenges.

5. Collaborating with key organisations and professionals:

Social/Green Prescribers: Partnering with professionals who could signpost individuals likely to benefit from the programme was crucial. These partnerships helped reach people who might not otherwise have engaged with nature-related activities or might have lacked trust in large organisations.

Working with diverse organisations: Engaging with a variety of community groups, including those not traditionally associated with wildlife, broadened the reach and impact of the programme.

6. Facilitation and mapping sessions:

- Facilitation sessions: These sessions aimed to guide community discussions and planning, enabling people to express their ideas and take ownership of local initiatives.
- Mapping exercises: Scoping the local area to identify potential sites, opportunities and assets for nature projects helped in strategizing and aligning community efforts with environmental goals.

7. Digital and traditional communication:

Social media and email: Utilizing digital platforms allowed for broad and efficient communication with community members, keeping them informed and engaged.

Leafletting and dedicated websites: Traditional methods like leafletting and maintaining dedicated website spaces ensured that information reached those who might not be active online.

8. Innovative engagement tools:

Nature Space in a Box (Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust): An interactive resource used in events to help communities visualise and plan their nature spaces creatively. This hands-on approach facilitated deeper engagement and idea generation.

- **Not going into communities with an agenda:** The programme worked with communities without a predefined agenda by adopting a flexible and responsive approach that prioritised listening to and understanding local needs and perspectives. The programme started by actively listening to community members through meetings and informal conversations. This approach helped identify the community's genuine needs, interests, and concerns without imposing external priorities, and helped build vital rapport that would extend throughout the duration of the project. The project also emphasised community leadership, as we have already mentioned, which allowed local residents to take the lead in identifying and prioritising projects. This empowerment ensured that the initiatives aligned with the community's vision and values rather than predetermined goals set by external organisations. The programme also remained adaptable, offering a range of activities and support options that could be adjusted based on ongoing feedback and evolving community needs. This flexibility meant that the programme could respond to emerging interests and concerns as they arose rather than staying rigid with its own agenda and goals. Long-term, this will hopefully allow communities to adapt and evolve based on what is best for them, ultimately resulting in more community-led outcomes.

2. The changes experienced

- **Attitudinal shifts which enabled community ambitions to unfold:** There were noticeable changes in positive attitudes towards wildlife, with communities feeling more empowered and motivated to enact change themselves and as part of their community.
- **Encouraging independence:** Wildlife Trusts were encouraged not to dictate actions or to solve all problems, but to give communities time and space to figure things out independently and let leaders emerge naturally. It is important to note that the programme was not purely about getting people to lead but about recognising where people wanted to be in the programme from leaders to participators, delivery, etc., identifying people's needs and wants.
- **Building new relationships and growing networks:** The programme has allowed new relationships between organisations and participants, and participants themselves, to be formed and grow. Leading to continued engagement and action for nature. *"I think for us the main celebration is that we've got a lot more connections now."* [Wildlife Trust].
- **Community ambitions:** The programme emphasised listening to the community and helped realise their ambitions, rather than imposing their own ideas. Trust staff recognised that listening is crucial for a community-led approach.
- **Improved collaboration:** The programme fostered better collaboration between Wildlife Trusts and communities, helping them work together more effectively.

COMMUNITY ORGANISER CASE STUDY:

Harry (pseudonym)

About Harry (pseudonym)

Harry is a Community Organiser. While working with a local organisation they met a resident who shared a dream of transforming a neglected garden area into a vibrant community space. Inspired by this vision, Harry rallied the community and helped them kickstart the project.

About the projects Harry has been involved in:

The community garden project is now being led by the community with around 15-20 members attending regularly to help out. The gardens are also producing vegetables, and this has gone to the Mind café to help raise funds. There are also lots of hedgerows, meadows produced which will hopefully support wildlife in the future. *“That group was led by one of the service users there - I met with her and listened to her and she had a couple of small little raised beds made, and that was all that was on the site [...] now there's up to 15 to 20 members that come regularly on Tuesday. All these people learn how to grow for themselves, and that produce has gone to the mind building and cafe, which is served to the community who come in daily or weekly for their mental wellbeing sessions or whatever,”* Harry explained.

What worked well for Harry:

Harry’s success was not just in the garden’s transformation but in the relationships built through the Nextdoor Nature programme. He said, *“There’s definite success to it. I’ve got really good stories through community organising where I’ve partnered with trusted organisations already within a community.”*

The community’s involvement extended beyond the garden. They built a pollinating corridor and an insect hotel on the main high street, sparking conversations among locals, saying, *“We’ve done some work in places like the high street where maybe autonomously people wouldn’t have that direct correlation with nature. Yesterday, a local asked, ‘How else do I get involved with this?’ So if you go and be in the space that generates those conversations, even if it’s ‘I’ve not even heard of the Wildlife Trust or what you’re doing.”*

What and how are relationships being developed in Harry’s community:

The social aspect of these projects proved invaluable. Harry said, *“Through the socialising aspect, there’s been a lot of positive work, especially with Washington Mind, about how it gets people who are isolated into routines. It gets them focused on something they can do and look forward to. They’ve made a lot more new friends than they would have without that, and they’ve seen what work they’ve achieved across the year and how that’s transformed the space. People’s wellbeing and social aspects of that project have been really beneficial.”*

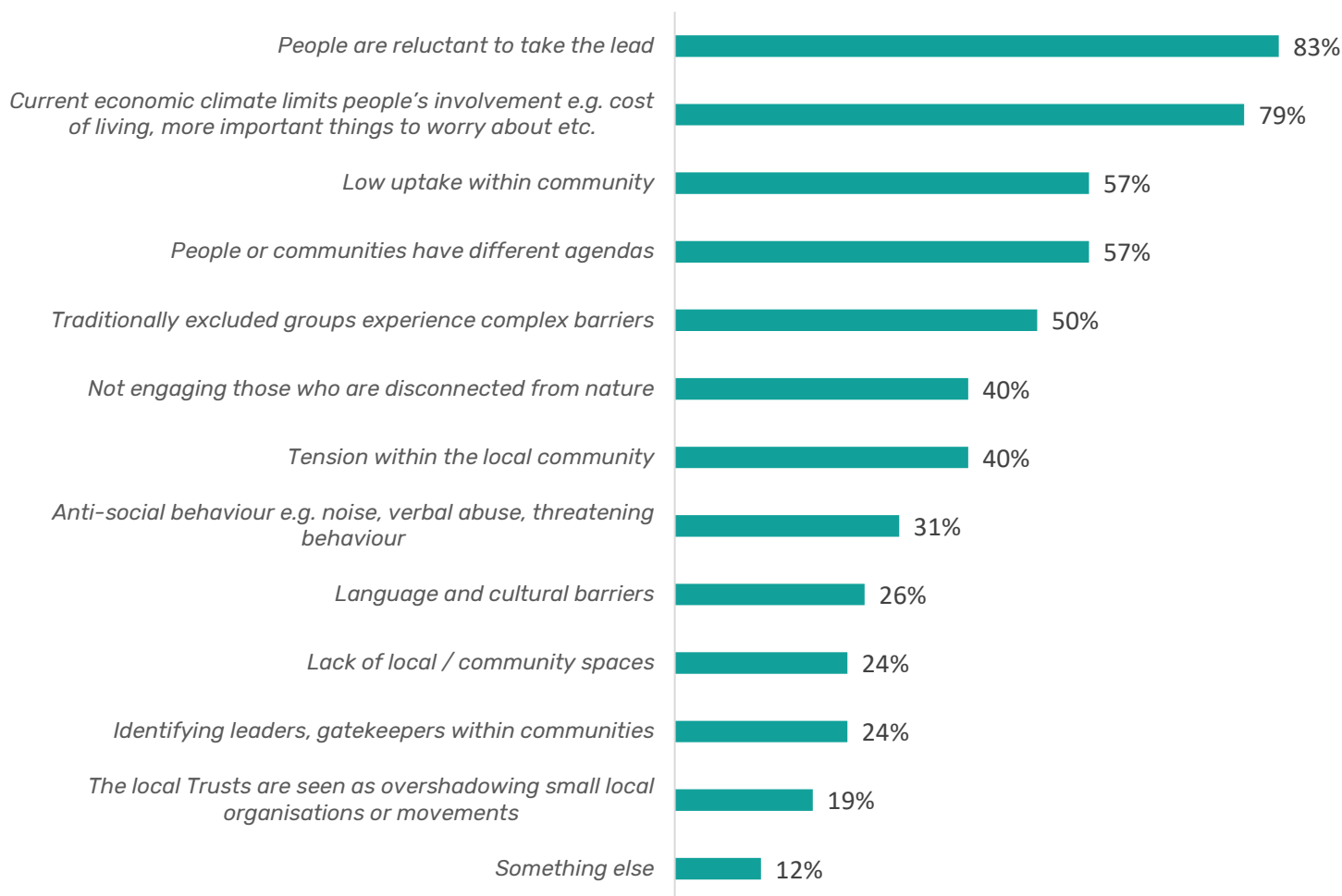
How did Harry support this community-led process:

Harry’s approach was always community-led, saying, *“There’s been a lot more community consultation about ‘what does the space become.’ Through organising and listening to people, we’ve heard them say, ‘We want to create a space to come in and maybe relax,’ so the kids can come and use the space and learn how to grow. It’s no longer just an allotment site; it’s an urban garden for people to come and access who don’t have that access in their own space.”*

3. The challenges

- **Reluctance to lead:** People were hesitant to take leadership roles and at times had a tendency to wait for organisational direction. This is further echoed in Trust year 2 survey, with 83% of respondents stating this as a challenge (Chart 4). Some Wildlife Trusts explained that a challenge that stunted leadership was that some interpreted Nextdoor Nature's involvement at the start of the programme as an indication of their leadership role going forward, causing them to rely on Nextdoor Nature staff to support them and bring ideas from then on. *"I know lots of projects where we've led from the beginning and then tried to hand over ownership of a project or to a group or individuals...it just doesn't work. The minute you've taken that leadership role, it is really difficult to vanquish it, you know?"* [Wildlife Trust].
- **Time pressures:** Current economic limitations were also a key challenge highlighted by Trusts in getting people to lead and act independently. This was also highlighted in the rapid evidence review, citing a lack of time to get out and visit nature and natural spaces which led to a lack of familiarity with natural environments impacting perceptions of place.¹⁰ *"A lot of people care about the environment, but time is a key barrier for people."* [Participant].
- **Resistance to change:** Transitioning from Trust/volunteer-led to a community-led approach faced some resistance at various levels, requiring time to gain buy-in and shift mindsets within communities and teams. *"Somehow, we need to be able to engage our local community, to encourage discussion and involvement in projects that could benefit them. Our own local community has a history of reluctance to engage."* [Wildlife Trust].
- **Resource limitations:** Some Wildlife Trusts struggled with the amount of resource they had and felt that they needed to offer more time to effectively embed a community-led approach (specifically with new communities). *"Knowing that you only had two years [...] it's that that anxiety about 'will the work we've done be lost if there aren't people championing the cause for community organising?'"* [Wildlife Trust].
- **Bureaucracy:** people grew frustrated with the amount of 'red tape' involved in the community-led approach, which they felt caused slow progress, especially in the beginning of a project.

Chart 4: What challenges have you experienced when emphasising a community organised approach in your local area? (n=42, Year 2 Trust survey)



How did the programme help improve the way Wildlife Trusts work and share best practice with each other and the local community?

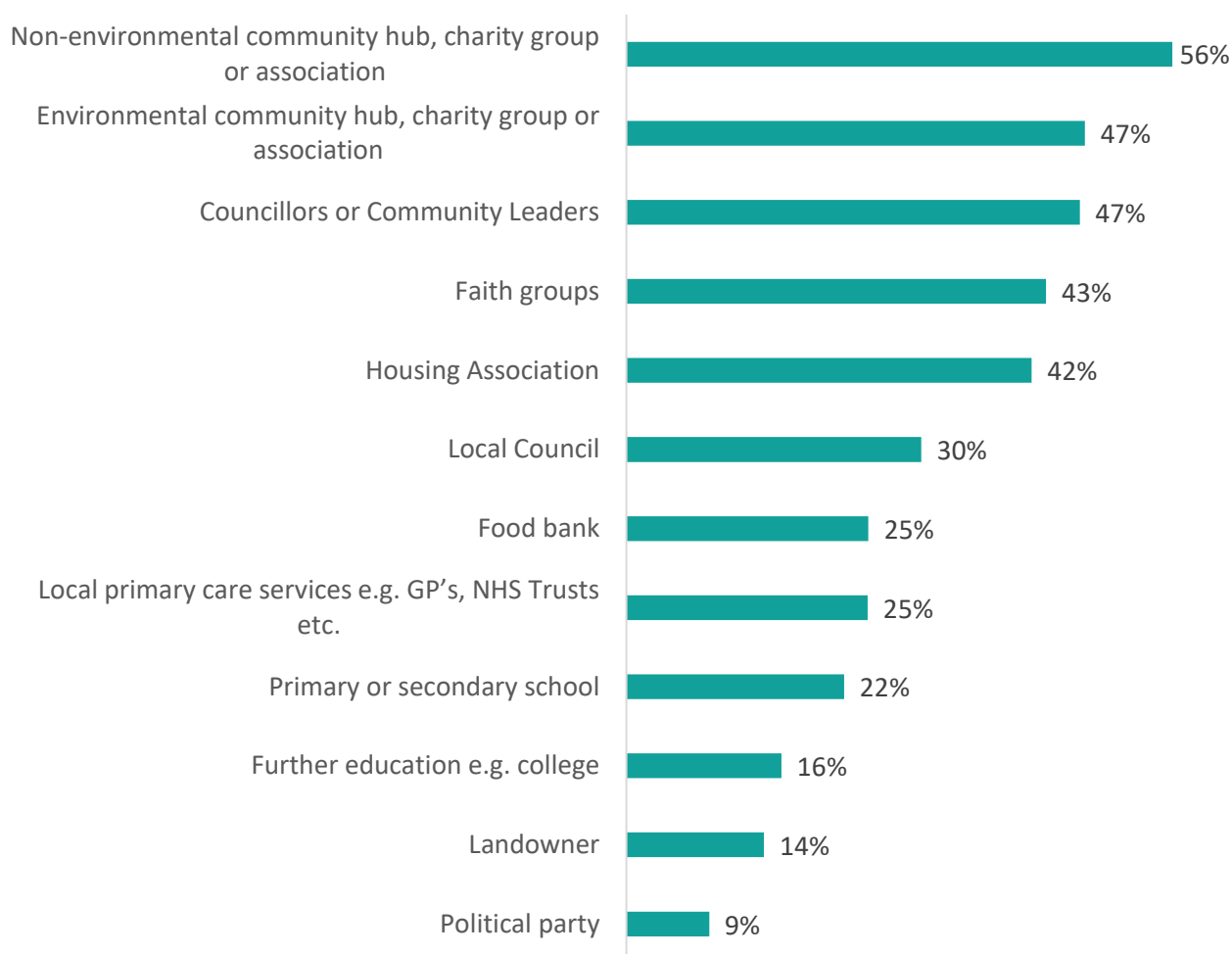
The programme has enhanced how Trusts collaborate and share best practices with each other and the local community. By starting with simple approaches and gradually increasing engagement, Trusts were able to establish strong relationships with pre-existing community groups and community connectors. This strategy helped engage communities wary of outsiders, ensuring the trust of the Trusts and helping to change perceptions. The programme also employed creative engagement methods like spoken and visual arts to connect with diverse community members.

Despite challenges such as the slow progress of working with schools and the resource-intensive nature of door-to-door engagement, the programme utilised existing networks and regular communication to maintain momentum. The listening exercises and community-led sessions fostered a sense of ownership among community members, ensuring genuine and sustained involvement. The shift towards a community-led model has improved the Trusts' understanding of local issues and highlighted the importance of partnership working, which has been crucial in achieving their goals.

1. What worked well in improving the way Trusts work and share best practice?

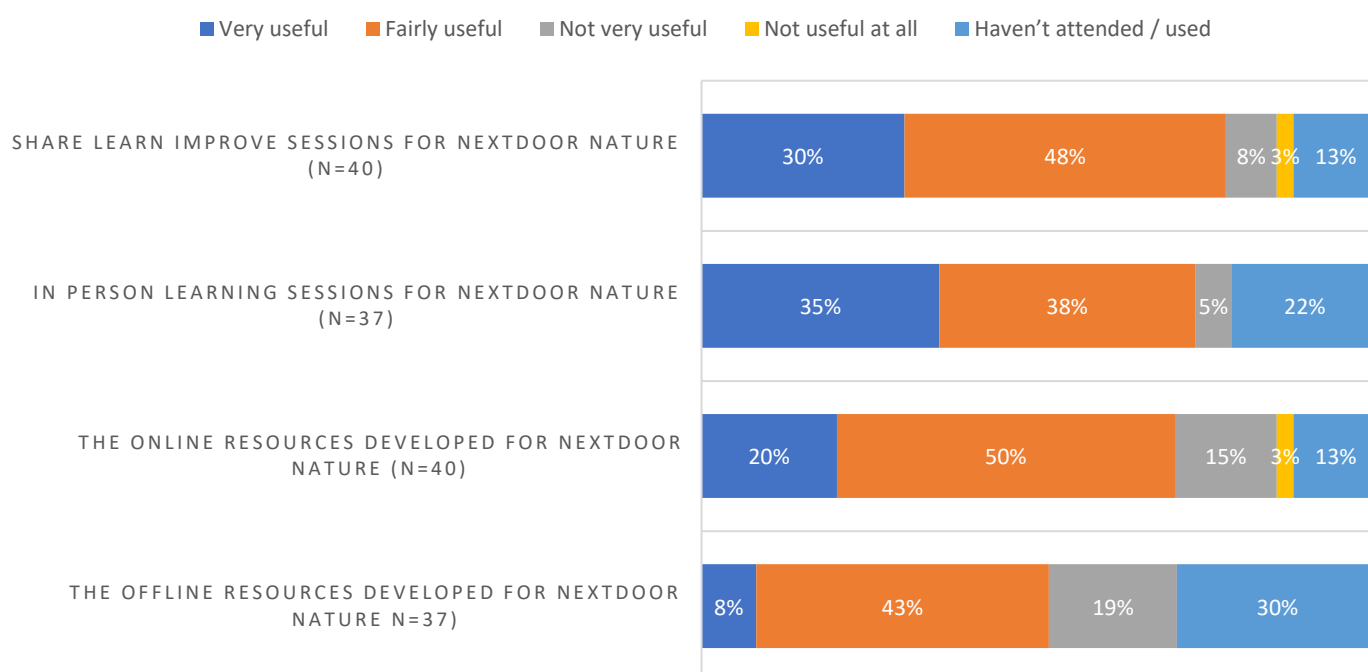
- The programme built stronger connections between Trusts and various segments of the local community** that may not have interacted with The Wildlife Trusts before. This was achieved by listening rather than delivering formal consultations and using existing community connectors to act as enablers of movement. In years 1 and 2 of programme delivery, we asked Trusts if they had started to work with various groups which they hadn't before this programme. We have taken an average between the two years. Since the programme has started, the top five changes have been with Trusts starting to work and collaborate with both third sector environmental and non-environmental organisations, community leaders, faith groups and housing associations (Chart 5). *"A wellbeing project and that was working with care homes and a cancer charity and delivering green activities."* [Wildlife Trust]. *"We've always worked well with communities and things, but it's just changing the emphasis a bit has been the important thing."* [Wildlife Trust].

Chart 5: Average % over year 1 & year 2 of Trusts stating they have started to work with groups since NDN (n=42)



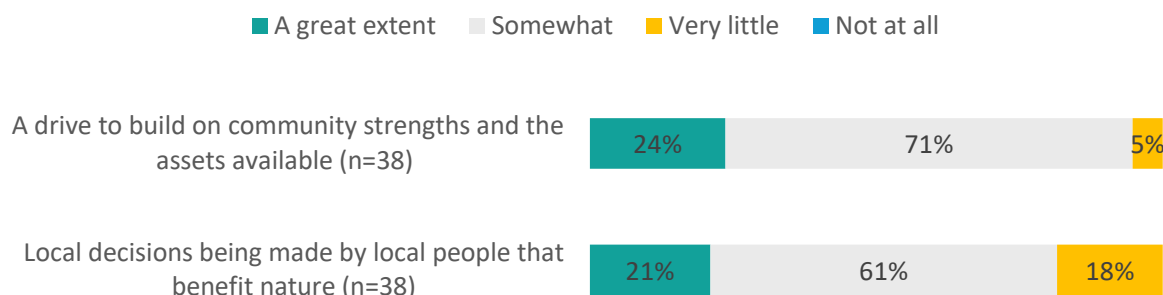
- Sharing learning and coming together:** The programme offered Trusts a regular platform to hear from the network, for example: Share Learn Improve; buddying up so that learning can be shared at a local level; what is working well. In the Year 2 survey (Chart 6), 78% of Trust staff who completed the survey said they found the Share Learn Improve session useful, 73% said they found the in-person learning session useful and 70% said they found the online resources developed for the programme useful. *"I think we're always reflecting on what we're doing and discussing it and trying to improve it and build a better strategy. So yeah, I think it has affected the way we work."* [Wildlife Trust].

Chart 6: How useful have you found the following...



- The programme helped facilitate and empower communities:** The programme achieved this by helping people to drive community actions and support by tailoring this to community needs from revitalised previously stalled projects and conducted listening exercises to understand diverse aspirations. *"I think there's probably imaginary barriers in life. Like 'other people will just go and pick it up' or 'it's the Council's problem', you know? I see lots of problems and I was trying to highlight them, but there were things that I could personally do and get involved in. So why would I not do it? That was probably the reality check I needed."* [Participant]. This was backed up by the Trusts, with 95% stating they 'greatly' (24%) or 'somewhat' (71%) felt a drive for building upon community strengths and the assets available (Chart 7).

Chart 7: As a result of the Nextdoor Nature programme, to what extent do you feel there is the following in your local community... (Year 2 Trust survey)



2. The Challenges Experienced

- Legitimising community voices:** The programme’s approach recognised and addressed local issues, supported existing groups that were already trusted, and encouraged broader community involvement by valuing the importance of local ownership and community voices in nature-related programmes of work. *“I was able to share our dreams and visions for the whole area and they [the Trust] just kind of restored my hope that this is exciting, that this can happen, and all of a sudden here’s somebody who’s offering to do anything she can to help it to work. So I couldn’t believe it – it was fantastic. I bounced all the way home.”* [Participant].
- Encouraged broader community involvement:** The way the programme was delivered and worked together resulted in improved community involvement that was broader than Trusts has seen before: *“...the young people involved who wouldn’t normally spend time doing this [activity].”* [Wildlife Trust]. To further support the qualitative findings, 95% of Trusts who fed back felt that there was either a ‘great extent’ (46%) or ‘some extent’ (49%) of collaborative working across organisations and/or groups of people (Chart 8). *“The people that were coming into the gardening group were people that wouldn’t necessarily come along to anything else at the centre, but they felt comfortable to be in that space. They had a space that was for them and works for them and they could have an impact. That was a really big thing.”* [Wildlife Trust].

Chart 8: As a result of the Nextdoor Nature programme, to what extent do you feel there is the following in your local community - collaborative working across organisations/groups of people?



3. The Challenges

- **More time needed to work with and develop relationships:** A strong emphasis from many of the Trusts that fed back through the study was the need for additional Community Organisers' time and longer-term engagement to enhance project impact and sustainability. Working in certain communities and schools, for example, can be a slow process, which needs to be taken into consideration. *"Particularly for the first year things have moved quite slowly because there's not the resources already there to start doing planting or start growing things. That's definitely been something that's helping now."* [Wildlife Trust]. *"The project is helping people to be sustainable, but people in the area I work in warm up to things slowly. We have had the first people, but there are still many people who are dragging their feet. The numbers are growing, but I'm just worried that if this project ends, we won't be able to reach as many people or if there's a way of continuing with this project. Just within one year, the improvements that have been made are huge, so if it was to go on again for another year it would just make a lot of difference."* [Wildlife Trust]. While these challenges were less evident from the participants perspective, some still vocalised frustrations with the slow progress at the beginning of the programme, particularly with 'red tape' bureaucracy.
- **A need to manage expectations of the Community Organisers' role: Trusts** and organisations emphasised the importance of managing expectations for the role of the Community Organiser and what community-led means and can do. *"Sometimes because of cost of living crisis, organisations are interested in working with you if they think that you're bringing additional funding and when we come to say actually we haven't got any money, but we can offer relationships, they can go a bit cooler and you know, everybody's got an agenda that they're working to, we just need to be really, really open about ours."* [Wildlife Trust].

STRAND 2: Does community organising enable a sense of local pride and deliver improvements for nature?

How did the programme improve people's sense of place and local pride?

The Nextdoor Nature programme improved participants' sense of place and local pride by fostering community connections and enhancing local environments. Participants felt their local area became a better place to live and reported reduced social isolation, with activities offering opportunities to meet new people, connect with neighbours, and engage with local organisations. Participants also valued being part of a community and contributing to local initiatives. Practical outcomes included the development of community gardens, promotion of nature in local spaces, and increased biodiversity through habitat creation.

Decisions to improve nature were often led by the community and supported by local councils and organisations, leading to environmental benefits and increased awareness of sustainable practices. Overall, the programme provided participants with a sense of purpose, improved mental and physical health, and strengthened community ties, contributing to a heightened sense of local pride.

1. What worked well in improving people's sense of place and local pride?

- **Local people valued the opportunity to get involved in a way that met the needs of individuals:** Participants fed back that they felt empowered being able to design and/or deliver improvements to local nature spaces in their community. In addition, due to the programme's approach, people could choose how they wanted to be involved and to what degree. This meant that in some cases there were people leading, and in others, people just supported efforts. *"You can contribute in whatever capacity you have. I think that is brilliant because it takes away the isolation. It's very inclusive. Because it doesn't matter what your capacity is - everyone is welcome to the party, basically."* [Wildlife Trust]. Equally, participants expressed satisfaction and joy in how the programme empowered them to improve their local nature spaces and add to their communities in a positive way. *"It's definitely contributed to a sense of purpose and empowerment towards the cause. You don't feel so hopeless."* [Participant].
- **Providing meaningful opportunities for people to come together:** By offering people the flexibility to conceptualise and create what they wanted to see within their own community, over time it provided opportunities for people to connect with others in a way that was defined by them and therefore meaningful. *"If you've got somewhere nice outside as well as in, then it makes you want to look after it and take care and take pride in where you are and make you feel valued that you're working somewhere."* [Wildlife Trust]. *"I think it makes us feel more included. Worthy, connected...the connections of the neighbourhood are a lot stronger. We feel proud of our achievements."* [Participant].
- **Working with and supporting local organisations:** The programme forged partnerships with local organisations, such as community groups, charities, schools, and grassroots initiatives. These partnerships facilitated the sharing of resources, knowledge, and networks, thereby enhancing the reach and impact of the programme. Local organisations were also instrumental in facilitating community-led projects. They provided support and guidance to community members, helping them navigate challenges and explore their ideas. The programme's involvement with Able2Achieve, a learning disability support organisation in the Somerset and Devon region, is a prime example of how the programme worked with local organisations to enhance its reach and effectiveness.

CASE STUDY: Martin – Organisation Case Study

Martin (pseudonym):

Martin had always been passionate about nature. Working with Able2Acheive, he dedicated his time to helping adults with disabilities engage with the community. For a while, he tried to get involved with The Wildlife Trust, but each attempt ended with a polite suggestion to become a member. Martin didn't want to just donate money; he wanted to make a tangible difference.

How long Martin has been in the position/involved in NDN:

The Nextdoor Nature programme provided the opportunity for Martin to actively work with The Wildlife Trust, which helped him finally break through the public-facing barriers, *"We don't want to give The Wildlife Trusts money...We want to get in and help, to make a difference through physical time and labour."*

About the projects Martin has been involved in:

One of Martin's achievements through the Nextdoor Nature programme was the transformation of the Westfield Community Garden. This was once a neglected brownfield site; it had been an eyesore for a while. With the support of the Community Organiser at the Trust, Martin and his team received invaluable advice and shared knowledge. Slowly but surely, the community's interest in the environment was reignited: *"Westfield Community Garden was a brownfield site...it'd been this way for as long as people could remember. The community started to turn it into this wonderful place where anyone can go,"* he said.

What worked well for Martin:

The project had a significant impact on the people Martin worked with. It allowed disabled individuals to come out into the community independently and engage with nature, often without the need of a carer. He explained, *"So if you think most adults with learning disabilities, unless they've got a carer who's passionate about nature, they're not getting involved in nature [...] They're going to be sat in their home... So already our service users, our learners are much more engaged in the wildlife when they're on site."*

Have you noticed any changes or differences in how people/your community are engaging with this project:

There was a noticeable decrease in anti-social behaviour. The green space seems to have become a cherished part of the neighbourhood, a place where people felt a sense of ownership and pride, *"They're [people] actually hanging out in the park at night...they've accepted that it's something nice for them as well",* he said.

The programme had also shifted perceptions of The Wildlife Trust. It was no longer seen as an imposing entity but as a genuine partner in the community. *"I was just going to say, from meeting her on that project, the Community Organiser will come to other projects to involve them...she's not there beating the drum, but she's just genuinely helpful. Like she brings resources,"* Martin said.

Through his work, Martin not only helped create a beautiful garden but had also fostered a sense of community and belonging.

2. The changes experienced

- **Enhanced perception of local area and stewardship:** Many participants expressed that the project gave them a purpose and increased their sense of community. Engaging in collective efforts to improve local nature made them feel like they were part of something bigger, contributing to a common goal and enhancing their pride in their local area. *“It gives me purpose and a ‘joyous boost’, it has increased my sense of community.”* [Participant]. *“It has contributed to a sense of purpose and belonging.”* [Participant].
- **Building and strengthening new and existing relationships:** The programme has provided new opportunities for people to meet and interact with each other, community connectors and organisations through events, workshops, and activities. This regular engagement helped people form new friendships and deepen existing connections. During our REM sessions, Trusts noted that the programme fostered a greater sense of community, particularly among a diverse group of people from different ages and cultural backgrounds. Participants noted feeling more connected to their neighbours and enjoyed meeting new people who share their interests in nature. *“I think because it was the same group of people coming together at each event over the course of the however many months, we started to build stronger relationships with one another. And as we as a group became more comfortable with each other, I’d say that relationship building facilitated.”* [NDN participant]. *“I think the fact that we’re all coming together; the same group every time. Each time being able to build those relationships a little bit more. I think over time that ended up having quite a significant impact and we became excited to see people again. And that’s always a nice thing, isn’t it, when we live such isolated lives these days.”* [NDN participant]. Furthermore, participants used these relationships to build on the projects they were working on, thus further contributing to their sense of pride *“And people got really into their projects that they were they were designing and delivering towards the end of the programme. And so people were all they were like, super keen to help each other and like, get involved and support one another.”* [NDN participant].

How did the programme support people to be more active in nature and improve their wellbeing?

The Nextdoor Nature programme has supported people in becoming more active in their community and in turn, improving areas for nature and enhancing their wellbeing. By offering people the opportunity to be involved in activities and projects in local nature led by them, the programme gave people a purpose to engage with their environment and their community. Feedback from participants indicated an improvement in happiness, mental wellbeing, and physical health.

These findings align with broader research suggesting that access to high-quality green spaces, coupled with opportunities for social interaction, can substantially enhance overall life satisfaction. Thus, the programme not only promoted physical activity and engagement with nature but also fostered a sense of community, reducing isolation and contributing to the overall wellbeing of its participants.

1. **What worked well in getting people to be more active in nature and improve their wellbeing?**
 - **Hands-on activities that connected people to their environment and encouraged regular physical activity:** The evidence showed that providing activities that were easily accessible and hands on helped to establish and connect people to nature: *“Good when people chip in to help and support, which leads to a greater understanding on how they can improve nature and learning more about gardening, being able to go out and walk, and just being outside.”* [Organisation]. To showcase the individual impact of this, please see the case study from a community group that supports older women:

CASE STUDY: Jennifer – Participant Case Study

About Jennifer (pseudonym)

Jennifer, an older woman from an urban area in Leicestershire and Rutland, always had a deep connection with nature. As a child, she cherished moments spent with her mum, learning to name birds, recognise insects, and appreciate the beauty of flowers.

What motivated Jennifer to take part:

During the pandemic, Jennifer rediscovered her love for nature. The chaos of the world made her seek solace in nature, allowing her to breathe and feel grounded. This rekindled her passion and motivated her to get involved with the Nextdoor Nature programme. *“It’s probably a story for a lot of people, but during lockdown I had the breathing space to actually sit back and notice [nature],”* she explained.

About the projects Jennifer has been involved in:

Working alongside the Community Organiser, Jennifer worked to help others connect with nature. She initiated projects to create wildflower areas and gardens, bringing local green spaces to life. Her efforts were warmly received by the community. *“I got a hug from a non-native speaker who said, ‘we’re family’ as a result of the project.”*

Her work gained significant attention, even making it to ITV News. This exposure brought more people to the garden, eager to see the transformation they had seen on TV. *“We’ve been on ITV News because of Nextdoor Nature. People are coming over to the garden and saying ‘we came because we saw you on the news’. So there’s all sorts of stuff going on and all sorts of doors opening up in different directions.”*

Through her involvement, Jennifer not only reconnected with her childhood love for nature but also inspired her community to appreciate and protect their local environment.

<p>Impact NDN had on Jennifer personally:</p> <p>The Community Organiser helped to reassure Jennifer that their plans for the area were exciting and possible and that she was there to support her, saying, <i>"I was just thinking I don't know how I'm going to get this to work."</i> As a result, Jennifer had a renewed sense of hope for their plans and the future of the area. Jennifer's efforts have taken shape as a result of the support from the Nextdoor Nature programme.</p>	<p>Any changes/differences in how people engage in Jennifer's project:</p> <p>About local people now growing vegetables in their own house and excitedly showing this to her, she said, <i>"We're connecting with people who have no access to garden space but are managing to grow chillies in their houses."</i></p>
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- **Offering access to nature and overcoming barriers to access:** The programme targeted communities where there were people traditionally less likely to access nature and natural spaces, who had limited practical access to such spaces, or who had been excluded from those spaces. Targeting these areas (people facing poverty for example) was key to successful engagement and helping to overcome barriers to access, which in turn improved people's wellbeing (discussed in the next section below). Research shows that people in a lower socioeconomic group were less likely to feel connected to nature and less likely to have easy access to nature spaces.¹¹ The programme helped overcome various barriers such as:
 - **Offering safe spaces and/or group activities** helped people; for example women and/or people of colour feel safer in their community and natural spaces. This is validated by external evidence; for example, Natural England reported that 'group activities are a way to ensure safety and quality, and to build individual confidence and skills especially where communities have historically experienced high levels of exclusion.'¹² *"The whole project was about turning the space back into a green space and having the grass cut so it was much more manageable because there's a football field not far away, so if it's really busy (which it is on a regular basis) people don't have somewhere to walk because the grass is too long. So having a safe space, getting access to clean out the years of dumping that was in there. Cars, tyres, fridges, freezers...everything you can possibly imagine. Planting other plants and flowers and trees to attract different types of nature or clearing the space so you could actually see nature and join it."* [Participant].
 - **Support and/or providing appropriate clothing, equipment through access to funding** so that projects can take shape and people can get out in all weathers helped people sustain their behaviour and act on their visions for nature. *"We now have the grant and funds to realise the vision we had for the garden and properly renovate and rebuild."* [Participant]. *"We were able to specify what we thought they might need and the companies to buy it from and then sent back through to them and then they were able to put their own order in and order what they felt that they needed."* [Wildlife Trust].

2. The Changes Experienced

- **Increased physical activity:** Participants felt that their involvement with Nextdoor Nature activities improved levels of activity. For many, this was simply due to the improved outdoor spaces in their neighbourhood, which made accessing outdoor areas and doing physical activity easier. While for others, the act of learning about nature and improving their outdoor spaces, through activities like gardening for example, provided valuable physical activity and improved their wellbeing in the process. Participants also noted improvements in overall energy as a result of the increased physical activity from outdoor activities. *"We've had a guy come along, they explained that they are bipolar and so they were enjoying getting the physical exercise and having a chance to talk to people. You can tell it makes a difference."* [Wildlife Trust].
- **Improvements to mental wellbeing:** Poor mental health has increased drastically in the UK, especially since the pandemic and is a leading cause of disability in the UK.¹³ Participants reported feeling happier and more at peace after taking part in nature-based activities. The opportunity to spend time outdoors and connect with nature had a therapeutic effect, reducing stress and anxiety. Participants also showed more optimism for nature since taking part in the programme, which is of particular importance amidst increasing levels of environmental anxiety. *"It has given me something to do, to get out and about in green spaces on my doorstep."* [Participant]. *"This made me feel nice about myself and happy because I love doing art and writing."* [NDN participant]. *"In terms of my mental health, it's helped a lot".* [Participant].
- **Reduction in social isolation:** By connecting people together, the programme has helped reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Participants reported feeling more relaxed and connected to both nature and their community, which fostered a sense of belonging. For many, they had not taken part in anything like this before, so being included in group activities to learn about nature and contribute to their neighbourhoods brought them a lot of happiness. The activities not only created a sense of belonging, but it gave some participants a feeling of purpose in the sense that they were contributing something valuable to their community. These feelings were reflected in our in-depth conversations and REM sessions: *"I think it makes me feel more included."* [Participant]. Participants also explained how their social confidence grew as a result of getting involved in the activities. Some lacked the confidence to get involved in the past, but the community togetherness of Nextdoor Nature acted as a real motivator for some individuals to go out of their comfort zone, which they expressed, saying they are glad they did: *"Talking in front of people was something I struggled with but it really improved it for me."* [Participant].

The above findings are validated by the increasing body of evidence showing the positive impact of exposure to social, green and blue spaces with improved sense of mental wellbeing, people feeling less isolated¹⁴ and improved social connections. In addition, evidence suggests that there are positive relationships between natural environments and physical health, versus exercising in other spaces, such as on the immune system, perinatal health, and overall physical health. There is moderate evidence showing that having accessible, good quality natural environments leads to higher likelihood of physical activity within these spaces.¹⁵

3. The Challenges

- Seasonal variations/fair weather engagement: the only key challenge highlighted was people's change in motivations to act for nature in the colder, wetter months. The impact of this was that the responsibility of acting, maintaining and improving was then placed on the established nature actors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The programme engaged a diverse range of people and communities across the four nations, spanning various geographies, ages, and socio-economic backgrounds. A key success of the programme was having dedicated Community Organisers within each Trust that acted as catalysts for change, connecting people to people and building relationships.

Another success of the programme was the upskilling of people through the community-led approach. This was supported by the Community Organisers, who were able to offer advice, funding, habitat management support, and knowledge about local organisations and resources to help community members achieve their goals. This helped equip them with the knowledge and confidence to engage in nature-based activities. By using a community-led approach, participants were able to tailor their involvement to their interests, resulting in a degree of sustained engagement through projects from nature walks to creating local green spaces. The programme also empowered local champions by providing tools and guidance to enhance their leadership and advocacy for nature in their local area. The programme's approach also was successful in helping to tackle loneliness, reducing social isolation by connecting people together, and creating safer spaces for vulnerable people within the community. It helped inspire creativity, collaboration, and a sense of community spirit.

Below presents the key highlights under each strand of the programme:

Strand 1: Enabling a wider range of people to act for nature, through a community organising approach

- The programme was successful in engaging with a range of people and communities across the four nations from different geographies, ages, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.
- A key success factor was having a dedicated Community Organiser within each of the Trusts. Their role in embedding a community-led approach from the ground up allowed participants to tailor their involvement according to their interests, leading to sustained engagement through a variety of projects, from nature walks to creating local nature spaces.
- The programme upskilled participants and provided them with the knowledge necessary to engage confidently in nature-based activities, leading to increased commitment to improving nature around them.
- The programme empowered local champions by providing tools, guidance, and motivation, enhancing their leadership abilities and enabling them to advocate for nature effectively within their communities.
- The emphasis on community collaboration cultivated a sense of shared responsibility for nature, with participants increasingly taking on leadership roles and engaging proactively with local stakeholders.

- Despite these successes, there were challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis. This hindered some participants and communities from fully dedicating time to nature-related activities, thus limiting their involvement. Some communities had a greater dependence on Community Organisers for guidance and leadership, making it challenging to transition to fully community-led initiatives.

Strand 2: Community organising enabling a sense of local pride and delivering improvements for nature

Key findings

- The programme helped improve people's and communities' sense of place and local pride by empowering them to actively contribute to their local area, fostering a deeper connection and ownership.
- The programme strengthened communities by providing meaningful opportunities for individuals to connect, collaborate, and build relationships through shared environmental projects.
- People and communities experienced increased physical activity and improved mental wellbeing through accessible, hands-on activities that encouraged regular engagement with nature, specifically with regards to reducing social isolation.

Recommendations

- **Programmes need longer funding periods**, specifically to embed sustained ownership in areas that are traditionally less likely to have access to nature spaces. The resources provided to Wildlife Trusts should be adjusted to give more time to effectively embed community-led approach, especially in communities where this may take longer.
- **Being more transparent in the realities of dealing with certain communities;** those in crisis, facing poverty and similar situations mean that programmes such as this may take time to deliver and to establish local champions to sustain nature-based activities. Some of these communities may not be able to prioritise and lead on initiatives to improve nature too and may need consistent leadership and support.
- **Community Organisers being clearer on their role** with organisations and communities at the onset. Showcasing how they've worked with similar areas before, and their role may help to overcome this.
- **The need for local skills development** within Wildlife Trusts should be addressed at the start of the programme, with adequate resources and time allocated to embed learning throughout its duration.
- **Offering detailed training to engaged members** within communities (similar to the Pioneers Programme approach) could help improve the sustainability of the programme and nature spaces, allowing Wildlife Trusts to step back in communities where they have found it challenging to do so.
- **To improve levels of independence** in some communities after The Wildlife Trusts' initial involvement it may be beneficial to offer peer-to-peer networks where more experienced participants can mentor newcomers, fostering a community of practice that reinforces skills and leadership development.

References

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Research questions
- Appendix B: Programme theory
- Appendix C: Rapid evidence review

Appendix A: Research Questions

STRAND 1: Enabling a wider range of people to act for nature, through a community organising approach

1. How did the programme grow and diversify audiences who were connecting with nature? (O1)

- a. How has the programme motivated people to do more things with nature, specifically those who were normally least likely to engage with nature-based activities?
- b. How did the programme overcome the barriers people face?
- c. Which type of people have benefited the most, both directly and indirectly?

2. How did the programme improve people's understanding of how they can act for nature? (O2)

- a. How has it influenced local communities to take real life decisions to improve nature?
 - i. What aspects of the programme helped empower people to create spaces for nature?
 - ii. How did this help people make better decisions for people, communities – and has this had a wider knock-on effect?
 - iii. How meaningful was this to them?
- b. How did the programme change the way people feel about nature?
- c. How did the programme change people's behaviours and actions towards nature?
 - i. As a result of the above, how have people, communities and nature benefitted?
- d. How has it helped bridge the value-action gap by changing thoughts to action through overcoming the barriers people feel and increase their involvement?

3. How did the programme help local Wildlife Trusts, staff and volunteers emphasise a community-led approach to improving outcomes for nature? (O5)

- a. How have communities been listened to?
- b. How effective have Wildlife Trusts been in embedding a community-led approach into the current ways of working?
 - i. What aspects of the programme enabled Wildlife Trusts to emphasise a community-led approach?
- c. What challenges did Wildlife Trusts face in emphasising a community-led approach, if any?

4. How did the programme help improve the way Trusts work and share best practice with each other and the local community? (O6)

- a. How has it helped Wildlife Trusts and communities work together?
- b. How has it created a greater understanding of the cultural and behavioural changes as a result of people's participation in the programme?
- c. How has a community organising approach meant more mobility and visibility within communities who are disconnected to nature?

STRAND 2: Does community organising enable a sense of local pride and deliver improvements for nature?

1. How did the programme improve people's sense of place and local pride? (03)

- a. To what extent have people's perceptions of their local area changed?
 - i. What changes have people seen, experienced in their local area?
- b. How connected do people feel to their local area as a result of the programme?
 - i. What connections have people formed?

2. How did the programme support people to be more active in nature and improve their wellbeing? (04)

- a. How has the programme led to better decisions being made for nature at a local level?
- b. How did the programme support people in getting out into nature more?
 - i. Did it lead to people feeling physically healthier, if so, how?
 - ii. Did it lead to people reporting improved mental health and wellbeing, if so, how?

Appendix B: Programme theory

A Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It includes what needs to go into a programme of work and what needs to be done to experience the desired changes.

What was put into the Nextdoor Nature programme:

Inputs: What you need to put into it?

- *Funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)*
- *The central team withing RSWT and network of 44 Trusts across four nations*
- *Appointed 50 Community Organisers posts to engage with communities.*
- *Volunteers and community champions*
- *Local community organisations*
- *Local Authorities/landowners*
- *People/local residents*

Activities: What tasks/activities are needed to reach your outcome?

- *Carried out listening exercises with communities to understand the barriers, challenges, needs and wants of communities*
- *Reached out and built relationships with community groups/associations/schools, etc.*
- *Developed a suite of information resources both online ([the Nextdoor Nature Hub](#)) and offline*
- *Accredited training for Wildlife Trust staff and attending in-person learning sessions led by the central team*
- *Trusts attended and contributed to Share Learn Improve sessions*
- *Supporting people to move local community projects forward to improve outcomes for nature*
- *Delivering the Pioneers Programme (Scotland only)*

What changes happened as a result Nextdoor Nature programme:

Outcomes: The changes we want to see as a result.

- *O1: A greater range of people feel more connected to nature (S1)*
- *O2: There have been benefits to nature through people having a greater understanding on how they can improve the outcomes for nature by acting for it (S1)*
- *O3: Communities and local people have an improved sense of pride in their local area (S2)*
- *O4: People have been encouraged to be more active and have benefitted from improved wellbeing (S2)*
- *O5: Trusts have emphasised a community-led approach (S1)*
- *O6: Trusts have improved partnership working with the local community (S1)*

Impacts: The longer-term changes.

- *There has been a sustainable change within communities and local people taking the lead in acting for nature and their local area.*
- *There is a diverse range of people and communities actively engaging with nature and their local area.*
- *There is an improvement in nature and biodiversity.*

Appendix C: Rapid evidence review

To support the Nextdoor Nature evaluation framework, a rapid review of literature related to community led nature approaches was carried out.

Topic	Community-led nature approaches
Programme purpose:	To empower people from 190 that are historically disconnected from nature, generally underrepresented and are more likely to be facing poverty to act in bringing nature to communities. Turning disused spaces on their doorstep into pocket parks. Work with communities to build a sense of civic pride and sense of space.
Any specific target groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economically deprived communities (defined as communities of place OR communities of interest) • Groups less likely to engaged with nature: ethnicities and social backgrounds, disabled people • Rural and urban areas • UK
Search terms:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value action gap • Environmental values • Environmental attitudes and behaviours • Community organising approach • Community-led nature activities • People acting for nature • Local pride and nature-based programmes • Local pride and improvements to nature
Date sourced from:	> 2010
Search management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Evidence, Natural England http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/ • Google • Web blogs • SAGE journals • PubMed • BMC Public Health • Snowballing search methodology using the references in reviewed literature.

Summary of the review:

The literature review highlighted a disconnection between people, communities and nature, which was exacerbated by urban living, sedentary lifestyles, and unequal access to nature spaces. Despite this, the Covid-19 pandemic has had some positive influence how people engage with natural environments, leading to increased use of green and blue spaces and more pro-environmental behaviours. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy aims to reconnect society with nature through collaborative and locally led efforts to improve biodiversity. The review found that factors such as health status, accessibility, mental state, and demographics influence how connected individuals feel to nature, with women, affluent urban areas, and higher socioeconomic groups generally feeling more connected. The benefits of being connected to nature are extensive, including improved mental and physical health, enhanced life satisfaction, and better social connections. Children, in particular, benefit from spending time in natural environments. However, there are still gaps in understanding the impact of eco-anxiety, the effectiveness of community-led approaches, and the inequalities in access to natural spaces for certain groups.

Key points identify in the review:

People are disconnected from nature - Being connected to nature is linked to pro-environmental behaviours [2, 12]. Evidence shows that being connected to nature encourages people to be more active and responsible for nature and the environment around them [13]. Research also suggests that being provided with information about nature, experiencing nature, and having sustained exposure to nature can lead to commitments towards CWN (Connected with Nature) [12, 12]. Although just because people get exposed to nature does not necessarily mean they will be connected to nature in the longer term. The likes of Holland (2021), Seers, Mughal, and Chaterjee (2022), DeVille et al (2021) have explored the reasons for this [1,2,12] such as:

- The increase in development and urbanisation of areas
- People seem to show less empathy and humility to nature and the environment
- An increase in the indoor sedentary lifestyle and entertainment easily available
- The inequalities in access to blue and green spaces

The current climate crisis, with local government bodies declaring climate emergencies, shows that our relationship with nature is breaking and there are new ambitions to change how people work with nature and structured bodies [19]. Although there is still a disconnect from nature, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been beneficial in terms of how people use natural spaces. There have been changes in the way people are engaging with green and blue spaces and the natural environment around them since the pandemic [1]. There is evidence to suggest that there has been a degree of positive change in environmental behaviours such as driving less, reducing food waste - with the environment being ranked as the 3rd most important issue, behind health and the economy [6,7]. There is a call for local communities to shape their environment and for people to place a value on nature. There is also a need for society to reconnect with nature but with a well thought out strategy and approach that is evidence based. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy was a new system of spatial strategy for nature under the Conservative-led UK Government [18]. It aims to be locally led (resident, communities, voluntary groups, statutory bodies, private sectors) and be collaborative to create shared plans to improve nature and biodiversity; it is underpinned by the Nature Recovery Network which is part of the government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

The review found that there were key factors that affected how connected people feel to nature. The health status and accessibility arrangements of individuals was a key factor in how connected people were with nature. The review identified that 47% of adults with a long-term illness or condition had made a visit in the last 14 days, compared to 62% without [2, 6]. This connection to nature was also impacted by the time needed to get out and visit nature and natural spaces which led to a lack of familiarity with natural environments impacting perceptions of place [8]. Alongside this, people in urban areas were more likely to cite their green areas as dirty or unkempt which reduced the likelihood of them visiting [1]. People's mental state and perceptions of social spaces was a key barrier identified. The review found that people felt fearful in open/social spaces e.g. fear of attack, or racism especially those from an ethnic minority background [8]. The above was further exacerbated by an individual's demographics and background. For example, the review found that people living in rural areas are less likely to report pro-environmental behaviours versus people living in urban areas. Although people who live in urban areas were likely to have contact with nature for their wellbeing – this was regardless of ethnic background [1]. People in a lower socioeconomic group were less likely to feel connected to nature and less likely to have easy access to green spaces [1]. Those from a minority ethnic background, specifically those from a Black or Asian background, are less likely to live near green areas (almost 40% of ethnicity minorities live in England's most green deprived neighbourhoods versus 14% of white people) [1,3,8,15]. Linked to this the level of engagement from parents, guardians, and other family members affected how connected children and young people in the family unit were to nature. For example, children living in homes with lower incomes and minority groups are less likely to spend time outdoors compared to children living in more affluent areas [1,4,8]. For example:

- 61% of children in the most deprived areas spent time outside every week compared to 81% in the most affluent areas [17].
- 56% of children from minority ethnic backgrounds spent time outdoors once a week, compared to 70% of white children [17].

The review found that there were a wide range of benefits to being more connected with nature, such as emotional and mental wellbeing improvements. Poor mental health has increased drastically in the UK, especially since the pandemic, and is a leading cause of disability in the UK [15]. There is an increasing body of evidence showing the positive impact of exposure to social, green and blue spaces with improved sense of mental wellbeing, people feeling less isolated and improved social connections [1,11a,15] Being exposed to natural environments improves people's resilience and being able to deal with stresses and recover from psychological events [15]. There are improvements to physical health; insufficient activity is responsible for 1 in 6 deaths (the same as smoking). Evidence suggests that there are positive relationships with natural environments and physical health versus exercising in other spaces. For example, benefits to the immune system, perinatal health, and overall physical health. There is moderate evidence showing that having accessible, good quality natural environments leads to higher likelihood of physical activity within these spaces [16]. Overall improvements in general life satisfaction; alongside improved mental and physical wellbeing, overall life satisfaction is improved when people can access good quality green spaces which offer opportunities for meaningful social interaction [20]. Again, there are positive relationships with children playing in natural environments and their physical and mental wellbeing. Although their experiences naturally change over time i.e. as they get older [17].

Nationally, there is a rationale for cultural change moving towards community organising approaches. Organisations are recognising that there is a need for change in how they work with individuals, communities and grassroots organisations, which requires a fundamentally different practice. There is an increased understanding that they need to get communities to set the agenda that works for them and maintain a level of power. Collaboration, understanding and the utilisation of local resources, helps to connect communities and decision makers to meet a desired change [14]. Community organising as a practice is rooted in building the power of communities marginalised because of who they are or where they are from. “The first question you must ask is: whose power are you building?” [14].

The review identified that there are benefits to taking a community-led approach. In a social care context, people feel more able access support services and are therefore more resilient [11a]. People feel like they are being listened to and that they have a ‘stake’ in their community – connected to place. Studies have shown that residents value the opportunity to get more involved in designing and delivering improvements to local green spaces [20]. People who have taken part in sustained engagement with the natural environment, for example The Wildlife Trusts’ 30 Days Wild public engagement campaign, showed increases in connection to nature, happiness, health, and pro-nature behaviours [19].

At the time of the review, there were gaps in evidence that were identified, such as:

- Understanding the impact of ‘eco-anxiety’ on connectedness to nature [3].
- Community-led approach is an important to improve policy and practice and although these approaches are often described, their impact is seldom evaluated [10].
- There is little evidence of the impact of specific programmes/interventions delivered and how these impact society [20].
- More evidence is required on the inequalities of accessing natural spaces for women and those with disabilities (a larger proportion of evidence focuses on incomes and ethnicity) [20].

The review identified the following key recommendations from other community-led interventions/research:

- Have a well-defined referral/enrolment approach [5].
- To know your community assets and to understand the local context – link in with social, green and blue prescribing programmes [5,9,11a]
- Instil networking, collaboration and partnership working to share knowledge [5,11a].
- Involve communities and local bodies; they are vital to bring about change [11b].
- Access to resilient funding and local partnerships was vital for sustained success [8,9].
- Make sure the offer reflects the communities they serve and the use of appropriate role models to encourage trust and engagement [8].
- Inclusion of the whole family structure – not just the children [8].
- Make sure organisations take a coproduction approach when developing interventions and programmes – ‘with not to’ [11b].
- Local policy and strategies need to account for green and blue assets [9].
- Prioritise access to green and blue spaces for those living in deprived locations [9].
- Small scale, grassroots projects seem to deliver better results compared to large scale interventions [11a].
- Change will take time, but organisations need to make sure that their strategy is designed and delivered by, and be accountable to, the communities that they serve [11b,14]

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