



Evaluation report

**Engaging communities to
enhance urban greenspaces**

October 2017



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Executive summary

In April 2015 the Cumbernauld Living Landscape partnership was awarded a grant of £75,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund under the Our Heritage scheme. Contributions from the Scottish Wildlife Trust, North Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire allowed us to deliver a programme of activities to connect people to and improve the quality of three important greenspaces. The Engaging Communities to Enhance Urban Greenspaces in Cumbernauld project built on the activities implemented through the successful Living Windows project in Cumbernauld, which was funded by Sharing Heritage in 2014.

The most recent project focused on encouraging young people from marginalised groups to learn about, value and celebrate their local natural heritage. It aimed at giving them the opportunity and skills to make real and lasting improvements to their environment. In addition, the project wanted to celebrate and promote the town's greenspaces to the wider community through activities, art and events.

The Community Action Plans created for the three sites have reinforced wildflower meadows with nearly 3,000 plug plants and areas of new meadow. Native woodland and hedgerows have been enhanced by planting 210 native trees and removing invasive species. The community value of the sites has been increased by creating a community orchard, rejuvenating a dilapidated wildlife garden and improving paths.

In total, over 200 young people spent time learning about and improving their local greenspaces. Sixty students participated in weekly "Natural Connections" workshops run in 3-month blocks, a further 24 Police Scotland Youth Volunteers took part and 157 young people attended a 5-day "SMART WEEK" event. To ensure a legacy of these activities, 16 teachers attended Continued

Professional Development (CPD) days to develop their outdoor learning skills.

To help raise awareness of and celebrate our great greenspaces, we have spoken to over 10,354 people at 84 public events and have been supported by 135 volunteers. To develop skills, we have hosted seven work placements and volunteer internships and created two paid traineeships through the Community Jobs Scotland scheme.

Our evaluation shows that the biggest impacts are:

1. An improvement in the confidence and employability of the young people involved, leading to more positive destinations.
2. The activities of the young people on the sites inspiring our community to take action, resulting in two new volunteer groups – one for practical volunteers and another for 7–12-year-olds.
3. An increase in our knowledge and understanding of the natural heritage and the community use of the sites. There is now a greater focus on active management and community participation.

During the evaluation interviews, the feedback was very positive and reflected the lessons we have learnt along the way. Forming strong partnerships with schools and other local organisations was achieved by ensuring our activities were relevant to the challenges they face. In the future, the Living Landscape project should consider carefully how it combines the efforts of volunteers and specialist contractors to deliver the improvements at a scale that will have the biggest possible impact.

What we set out to achieve

In March 2015 the Cumbernauld Living Landscape partnership secured support from the Heritage Lottery Fund to deliver the project “Engaging Communities to Enhance Urban Greenspaces in Cumbernauld”. This became known locally as the “Natural Connections” project.

This report is an evaluation of what we achieved, the impact it has had and the lessons we learnt. We built on the activities of the Cumbernauld Living Landscape to enhance, restore and reconnect green areas of the town. We wanted to ensure that both people and wildlife benefit from our natural environment.

The 2.5-year project encouraged young people from marginalised groups to learn about, value and

celebrate their local natural heritage. It aimed to give local volunteers the opportunities and skills to make real and lasting improvements to three important wildlife sites. The project planned to promote and celebrate the town’s greenspaces through outdoor artworks, events and volunteering.

Cumbernauld is located in North Lanarkshire, in the Central Belt of Scotland midway between Edinburgh and Glasgow. Although known for its grey urban landscape, an amazing 50% of Cumbernauld’s urban area is in fact made up of greenspaces, making it one of the greenest towns in Scotland. Sadly, a large majority of the population of Cumbernauld, particularly young people, are unaware of the outstanding and diverse natural heritage of their town.

Our intended outcomes

For nature

- Three valuable greenspaces in the deprived urban area of Cumbernauld will have been improved in a range of ways that will enhance community access and biodiversity value. Woodland will be enhanced through planting of native species and the removal of non-native species. Further meadow and wetland habitat will also be protected and enhanced, which will benefit a range of species.
- Local pride in, sense of ownership and appreciation of local greenspaces will be boosted, encouraging positive use of the sites and reducing damaging and anti-social behaviour which harms wildlife habitats.
- The communities surrounding the sites will have a greater awareness of their value and be able to contribute to safeguarding them.

For young people

- Seventy marginalised young people in Cumbernauld will have learnt about their local natural heritage and spent time improving their local greenspace and, as a result, they will value it more. Through this process, the young people will have gained transferable skills that will boost employability.

For communities

- The wider community of Cumbernauld will have learnt more about their local natural heritage and will have spent more time enjoying and caring for their greenspaces.
- Health and well-being of local community members will be improved through spending more time in greenspaces.
- Community will be strengthened through partnership working.

What happened

Project at a glance

Dates:	May 2015 – September 2017
Location:	Cumbernauld, North Lanarkshire
Funding:	£115,000
Volunteer contribution:	£79,700
Staffing:	Community Engagement Officer
Lead organisation:	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Partners/funders:	Heritage Lottery Fund, North Lanarkshire Council, NHS Lothian
Sites:	St Maurice's Pond (North Lanarkshire Council) Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve (North Lanarkshire Council) Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve (Scottish Wildlife Trust)

Project management

To deliver these ambitious outcomes, we created a project structure that would allow us to connect with as many people and partners as possible. Led by a full-time Community Engagement Officer for 2.5 years, we focused on skills development for young people, connecting local communities to nature and enhancing greenspaces. The financial management of the project was overseen by the Living Landscape Programme Manager and the project was supported by the Scottish Wildlife Trust's and North Lanarkshire Council's core teams.

Improving greenspace quality

Developing new relationships between organisations and the community was key to the success of this project. The initial partners, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and North Lanarkshire Council, worked together with local people to improve the greenspace they managed. Without the consent of the landowners, the Community Action Plans could not have been delivered. The partners contributed staff time and resources to support the project, and any actions that the young people and volunteers could not undertake were delivered by contractors.

The focus that this project provided created new partnerships with local and national organisations. Complementary activities with young people were delivered by the Scottish Fire Service and Police

Scotland. Volunteer training and skills development were provided by organisations such as Buglife, Butterfly Conservation and the British Dragonfly Society, and additional funding was supplied by Sanctuary Scotland Grand Ideas and Tesco Bags of Help to expand and sustain the activities.

Young people's skills and development

We created a programme of workshops for young people who had been identified as at-risk of disengaging by the schools and other organisations. These "Natural Connections" workshops were designed to fit into the time available for the groups and followed a common structure. The first interactions with the young people involved building a relationship and exploring their values and perceptions. It focused on their own aspirations, their community and their environment and also formed part of the evaluation of the project. The subsequent sessions explored the sites that were closest to the schools before creating a Community Action Plan to improve them. The young people then delivered these practical activities with the support of the Community Engagement Officer. Throughout these interactions there was a strong focus on employability and personal skills development, which was supported by the Community Engagement Officer attending school events in core skills, STEM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and numeracy.

The workshops were complemented by CPD for the teachers, which focused on building skills and confidence to use the sites adjacent to their schools for outdoor learning. Living Window artworks were created by the young people who had been involved. These were promoted at an exhibition in the town centre and were a crucial part of the project, allowing us to reach a wider audience and celebrate the work of the young people.

Connecting communities to nature

Connecting the surrounding community to nature was a key aim of the project, and we developed a program of volunteering and engagement opportunities. Three types of volunteering opportunities were created: 1) weekend practical volunteering, 2) volunteer internships and 3) events volunteers.

The Sunday volunteer group called themselves the “Nature Ninjas” and offered people the opportunity to take action to improve the local sites based on the Community Action Plans. This group was designed to be open to all and became popular with families. The volunteer internships were created through the Scottish Wildlife Trust’s internship programme and delivered projects that contributed to our overall objectives, such as surveys to improve our knowledge of the sites’ natural heritage. These volunteers made a valuable contribution to the project and in two cases we were able to provide the interns with paid employment through the Community Jobs Scotland scheme. The third group of volunteers supported outreach events, which could not have happened without them. These outreach events raised awareness of the greenspaces and the work the project was doing. We attended gala days, fun days and other events in the town. As well as promoting the greenspaces, these engagements focused on the project volunteering opportunities and were linked closely to employability events and job fayres. To raise site awareness and their natural heritage, we also ran a programme of events that ranged from fun days and wildlife ID skills to Lego photography.



Photos (top to bottom): Volunteers maintaining the Ravenswood Banter Bench; Linking nature and technology © Katrina Martin; Nature Ninjas strike again at St Maurice’s Pond © Tracy Lambert; Taking nature into the town centre with the Living Windows.

Evaluation impact

The evaluation methodology was designed to measure our impact and adaptively manage the project, making changes where necessary to achieve the best outcomes. At the outset, a simple logic model to track the inputs, outputs and outcomes was put in place and indicators were selected to try and capture the changes over time. These included simple quantitative measures, like the number of trees planted, and more involved qualitative measures, such as participant interviews. Some of these measures were informative and others less so. This report is based on the following information, and summaries can be downloaded from the Cumbernauld Living Landscape website (<http://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/>).

What we haven't included

The datasets in Table 1 are the most complete and useful records of the project; however, there was additional information that we would have liked to evaluate but were unable. For example, we wanted to examine if the impact on young people could be followed across their performance in school. We were also interested in obtaining anti-social behaviour reports from the police; however, this data was not easily available. To limit potential bias, evaluation interviews were conducted by Richard Siller, Scottish Wildlife Trust's Knowledge and Evidence Officer, who had little previous involvement with the project.

Table 1. Datasets collected to manage and evaluate the project

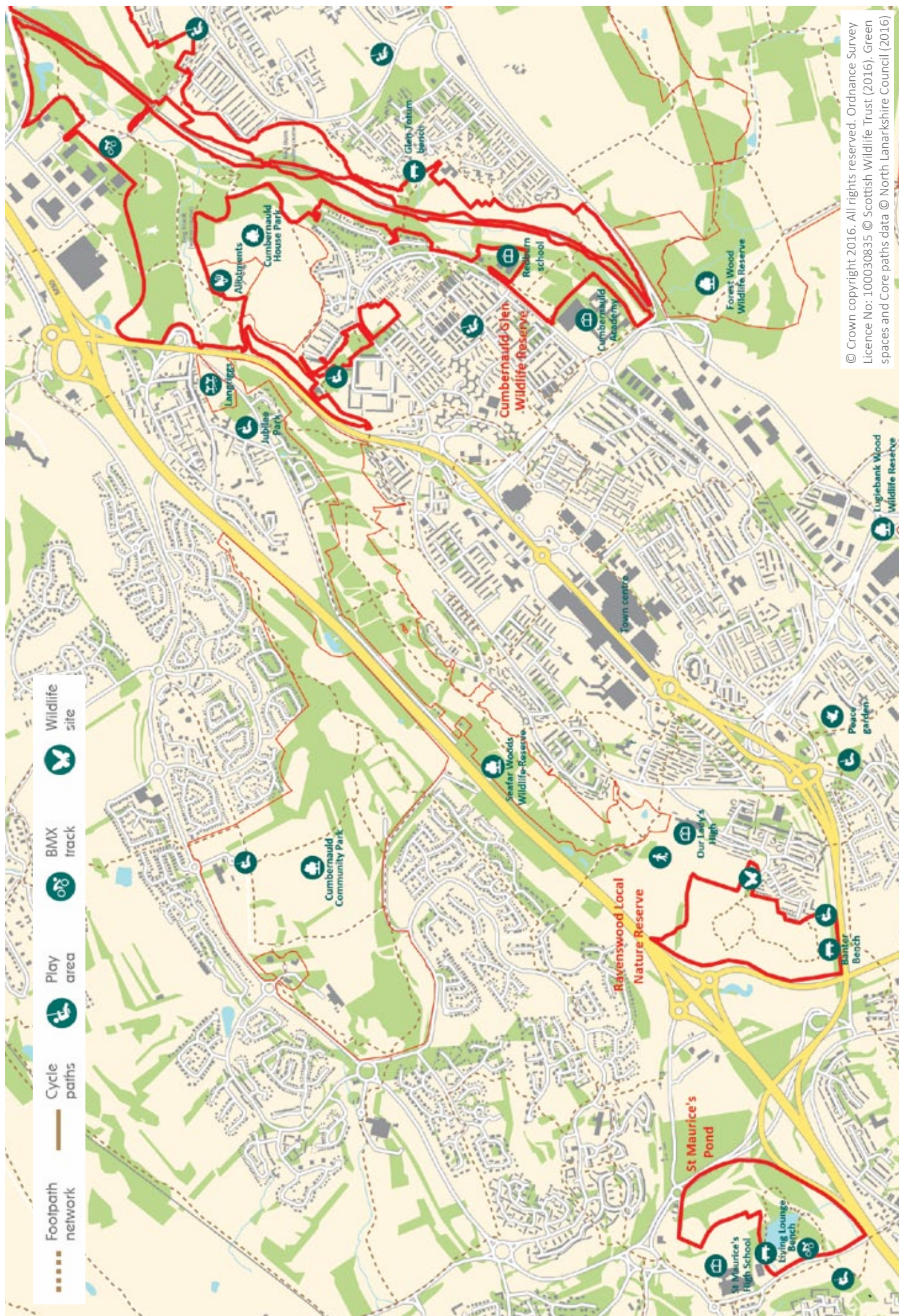
	Dataset	Description	Type
Recording activities	Project output log	Record of all project activities with quantities attached	Quantitative
	Engagement reporting	Record of attendance at events and engagement activities	Quantitative
	Digital media	Photographic and film record of the project	Qualitative
Evaluating outcomes	Evaluation interviews	12 project partners and participants were interviewed to assess the impact of the project	Qualitative
	Student and teacher surveys	60 before and after surveys evaluating skills, confidence, attendance and attitudes to local greenspace	Quantitative
	Common Cause Foundation values	Workshops with 59 young people exploring their values of social and environmental issues	Qualitative
	CPD evaluation forms	Feedback from 12 people attending CPD events	Quantitative
	Visitor user surveys	137 user surveys on the three sites by volunteers	Qualitative
	Consultations example	Information collected by direct engagements with project participants	Qualitative
	Communications reach	Google, Facebook and Twitter analytics	Quantitative
Improving our knowledge	Invasive non-native plant survey	Volunteer survey carried out at all three sites to establish scale of infestation and track changes	Quantitative
	Species list	Data collated from all possible sources to create snapshot of natural heritage of sites	Quantitative
	Phase I Habitat survey	Volunteer survey to increase knowledge of sites' natural heritage	Quantitative

Snapshot of the sites

St Maurice's Pond is a 17-hectare urban greenspace that borders St Maurice's High School. Owned and managed by North Lanarkshire Council, it is designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The St Maurice's Pond SINC has two important habitats: Ponds and Woodlands, which are included in the Scottish Biodiversity List and the UK Biodiversity List of Priority Habitats. Increased development of available land for urban expansion has caused the decline of these rich habitats, which has had a knock-on effect and reduced the biodiversity found within these habitats to alarming levels. Historically, the area was known for the quarrying of sandstone and particularly for the farming of arable crops and flax for weaving. Today, the site is used by fishermen, dog walkers and for recreation due to the good path and the BMX track.

Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve is also a 17-hectare site which has a variety of habitats ranging from valuable wetlands, scrub, Pollockshole woodlands and an orchid meadow. Owned and managed by North Lanarkshire Council, this site is also an SINC and was designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in March 2012. Historically, the area was used for farming, and Ravenswood House is known for being an early medieval retreat of the bishops and clergy of Glasgow. Today, this reserve is home to an array of wildlife, including orchids, butterflies, newts, mammals and raptors. The site is used by local residents for dog walking and health and fitness activities due to the well-built paths and it is also an escape from the hustle and bustle of new town living. This LNR is neighboured by two high schools and a primary school.

Spread over 280 hectares, the ancient woodland of **Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve** is owned and managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. It is a haven for wildlife and provides an important relaxing environment for local people. These ancient woodlands are a vital local habitat and support populations of foxes, badgers and pine martens. The Glen is steeped in a rich history: Roman legions marched through in ancient times; and later, the land was owned by the infamous Red Comyn before being seized by Robert the Bruce and gifted to the Fleming family. In more modern times, the land passed to Cumbernauld Development Corporation before being gifted to the Scottish Wildlife Trust in the 1990s. Today, it continues to be an important greenspace, with multiple generations of local people having fond memories of the Glen. The reserve is one of the most accessible wildlife sites in Central Scotland and can be explored using over 14km of path network, much of which is tarmacked.



Impact – for nature



What we did

On each site, we worked with the local schools and community to identify and prioritise actions. These became the Community Action Plans, which are available on the Cumbernauld Living Landscape website (<http://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/>). The Plans identified short, medium and long-term targets, some of which were beyond the scope of this project. We worked with the young people, volunteers and, in some cases, contractors to deliver improvements. We also ran activities to increase community use of the sites.

Where possible, we linked up with other organisations and projects to bring in expertise and specialist knowledge. This led to dragonfly and butterfly ID courses and additional meadow creation. Local funds such as the Tesco Bags of Help and Sanctuary Scotland Grand Ideas helped take forward additional projects.

The improvements that we made were community-led and consultations with local residents and users informed our actions. The outputs delivered by volunteers and contractors in Table 2 show the breadth of activities.



Photos (top to bottom): Views across St Maurice's Pond © Tracy Lambert; Ravenswood Banter Bench © Old School Fabrications; Repairing the boardwalk © Tracy Lambert; Discovering amphibians.

Table 2. Summary of outputs

	Natural heritage outputs	Community outputs
St Maurice's Pond	Wildflower meadows were improved by planting 450 plugs and sowing new areas	1km of path was maintained and 117m of boardwalk improved
	A community orchard was established with 18 Scottish heritage trees and 15 soft fruit canes	The site was used for five natural heritage training courses and one CPD session with teachers from the adjacent high school
	Invasive non-native plants were removed for 7,594m ² of the site	Go Wild at St Maurice's Pond fun day was run each year, attracting 195 people
	44 bags of litter and broken glass were removed	41 days of volunteer effort carried out improvements to the site
Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve	Scrub was cleared from 941m ² of the wetland marsh meadow and was repeatedly cleared over the duration of the project	Awareness was raised with 22 local residents through consultation on improvements to the entrance
	A hedgerow was created with 50 native trees, tree guards were removed and six Scottish heritage fruit trees were planted	Young people from Greenfaulds High School led the efforts to clear mud from 20m of path, with the remaining 118m being cleared by volunteers
	The orchid meadows were reinforced with 1,420 wildflower plug plants	1.1km of path was cleared of vegetation to make the site more accessible
	Escaped garden plants were removed from the entrance and the wildlife garden was restored	An outdoor classroom was created on an area of low biodiversity value
	A 29.6m bug hotel, hedgehog hut and hibernaculum were created in the wildlife garden	68 days of volunteer effort took place and the site was used for two training activities
Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve	160 oak trees were planted to enhance the ancient woodland	Hallow"scream" in the Glen attracted 330 people to night-time ghost walks
	318m of path was maintained by the Nature Ninja volunteers	Pop-up wildlife watch session and guided walks attracted 134 people
	1,050 wildflower plugs reinforced the meadows and 1,712 m ² of wildflowers were sown	739 people explored the site on fun days, pop-up activities and on guided walks
	20m ² habitat for wildlife was created, with brash cuttings and 210m ² of dogwood removed	66 days of volunteer effort took place and the site was used for two training activities
	The Nature Ninjas and the Friends of the Glen removed 64 bags of litter	The Glen was used as a venue for two CPD days with local teachers

The impact we had

Intended outcome: Three valuable greenspaces in the deprived urban area of Cumbernauld will have been improved in a range of ways that will enhance community access and biodiversity value. Woodland will be enhanced through planting of native species and the removal of non-native species. Further meadow and wetland habitat will also be protected and enhanced, which will benefit a range of species.

The wildflower meadows across all three sites are now being more actively managed. At St Maurice's Pond, the meadows appear to be showing an increase in species diversity, with devil's-bit scabious, common toadflax, lady's bedstraw and meadow cranesbill now present. Active management at Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve and St Maurice's Pond has increased with more interest from local communities, and the level of active management for wildlife at Cumbernauld Glen remains high.

The awareness of invasive non-native plant species has been increased through volunteer work, workshops and social media. Although attempts were made to significantly reduce invasive non-native species (INNS) on the sites, the before and after volunteer surveys showed that the infestations were wider than previously thought and more action would be necessary over a longer period to significantly reduce levels across all sites.

Our knowledge of the natural heritage of the sites has been improved, bringing together the first comprehensive list containing 358 identified species and a Phase 1 Habitat survey, which will help inform future management. Through the Community Action Plans we also have a better understanding of the tasks that can be delivered by volunteers.

Intended outcome: Local pride in, sense of ownership and appreciation of local greenspaces will be boosted, encouraging positive use of the sites and also reducing damaging and anti-social behaviour which harms wildlife habitats.

The evaluation interviews show that the project has been successful at encouraging positive use of the sites and reducing anti-social behaviour. St Maurice's Pond and Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve are now used more often by the adjacent high schools. A wider range of teachers are using these greenspaces for outdoor learning, including literacy, biology and geography. Greenfaulds and St Maurice's High Schools are planning to submit funding applications to improve links between the school grounds and the site.

Anti-social behaviour has been reduced in some areas. This has been effective near the outdoor classroom at St Maurice's Pond, with local residents reporting less fire-starting and more people using the area. The installation of the "Banter Bench" at Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve has created a place for residents and families to rest, and a group of young mothers informed us that they love to sit at the bench while their kids run about.

"Litter picking is still needed now and then, but it is noticeably better ...there is less anti-social behaviour – certainly."

Deputy Head Teacher, St Maurice's High School

Actions to reduce vegetation encroachment on the path in Cumbernauld Glen have led to unprompted comments from the public that the path feels a lot wider and safer. The wider paths have helped to improve general feelings of safety, and additional works by the Scottish Wildlife Trust have added passing places for cyclists and buggies, as well as improving disabled access.

The project has improved people's enjoyment of the sites and the installation of the "Totem Bench" in Cumbernauld Glen has created a place for residents and families to enjoy. A great example is a recent encounter with an elderly gentleman who told us that he now went to sit there every day to watch the sun shine through the leaves and listen to the nearby stream.

Intended outcome: The communities surrounding the sites will have a greater awareness of their value and be able to contribute to safeguarding them.

By working closely with volunteers and promoting greenspaces within the local community, the project has helped to increase awareness of Cumbernauld's greenspaces and to promote their use. This was recognised by the evaluation interviewees and was supported by increased numbers of people attending our events and activities at the sites. More people are now aware of the natural heritage in their neighbourhood and a total of 1,023 people attended activities at the sites.

The visitor user surveys were designed to inform our actions so the questions did not directly detect changes in people's attitudes towards the sites. They showed that the sites were mostly used for dog walking, places to be active and also relaxation. The surveys did provide some evidence of the project's impact, for example they picked up that improvements at Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve were well received.

Our reflections

The volunteers and young people are very proud of what they have achieved over the last 2 years. The Community Action Plans were a useful tool to identify the interventions needed and who could deliver them. One of the key lessons learnt was that the scale of change you can achieve with volunteers may not match up to their expectations. Many of the tasks identified took longer than expected and were more difficult to complete.

However, combining different groups of volunteers and contractors enabled the improvements to be delivered.

Some tasks were bigger than the scope of this project and need to be tackled at a landscape scale. The efforts of the volunteers and students towards the removal of INNS (specifically, *Rhododendron ponticum*) has highlighted that the speed and spread of regrowth is too much to control in isolation. There is a need to address this issue with neighbouring landowners and to use specialists who can deal with large swathes of INNS more effectively over a longer period of time.

One of the key issues to emerge as part of this project is the management of the water levels and bank erosion at St Maurice's Pond. Further work is needed to understand what influences this and the actions that can be taken to mitigate these issues in the future. Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve will need continuous management to prevent scrub encroachment onto the orchid meadows and wetland areas. A local management committee involving representatives of the community and user/interest groups should be formed to drive the improvements identified in the action plan. Protecting the bluebell woodlands in Cumbernauld Glen is also becoming more of a challenge due to the threat of hybridising Spanish bluebells from gardens. A native bluebell campaign could help protect one of Cumbernauld's most iconic natural features.

"Working with the groups was sometimes challenging, but there were key events which deepened the engagement. One such turning point was at St Maurice's Pond when the young people came across a local nursery school outing. Many of the group had younger brothers and sisters and this brought home the importance of the site."
Community Engagement Officer

Impact – young people’s skills



What we did

In total, 84 young people spent time improving their local greenspaces. In partnership with local high schools, 60 students took part in weekly “Natural Connections” workshops run in 3-month blocks. A further 24 Police Scotland Youth Volunteers took part and 157 young people attended a 5-day “SMART WEEK” event. Sessions specifically designed for young people with complex learning/physical support needs were delivered with Red Burn and Glencryan schools. In total, 16 teachers attended CPD events to improve their outdoor learning skills, and 37 young people and eight teachers achieved accredited awards.

Through a series of workshops and practical sessions the young people were taken on a journey from introducing them to the local greenspaces through to taking action to improve them. They created the Community Action Plans and were supported to deliver them. This led to a range of practical tasks such as path clearing and wildflower plug planting. Giving young people the opportunity to explore other creative opportunities allowed us to set up a group that developed and commissioned the Living Window art installations.



Photos (top to bottom): Values workshop © Tracy Lambert; INNS removal with Cumbernauld Academy; Cookout at St Maurice’s Pond © Maurice MacDonald; Designing the Living Windows.

The impact we had

Intended outcome: 70 marginalised young people in Cumbernauld will have learnt about their local natural heritage, will have spent time improving their local greenspace and, as a result, will value it more. Through this process, the young people will have gained transferable skills which will boost employability.

The evaluation focused on the impact that the project had on the 60 young people who took part in the largest number of sessions. During the independent evaluation interviews the schools identified the main outcomes as 1) removing barriers and improving employability of young people, 2) increasing confidence and social inclusion with peers and 3) positive change in attendance and general behaviour.

In the views of the teachers interviewed, the project lifted barriers and improved employability of the young people. They have learnt transferable skills and have a more positive view of their future. At the beginning, the young people explored issues that were important to them using the Values and Frames set out by the Common Cause Foundation.

"The children that we picked for the project were marginalised and were at real risk of not reaching a positive destination. Contact with the project has turned this around. Where they were once apathetic – 'Why are we doing this? Do we have to do this?' – they have now even stepped into leadership roles, taking a pride in what they are doing and suggesting better ways to do things."
Evaluation interviewee

The results showed that although they were disconnected from the town and their future, there was a tentative connection to the environment. Over the course of the workshops we observed a change in attitudes and this was reflected when values discussions were repeated. The young

people developed a more mature attitude towards their town, environment and their own future.

In the evaluation interviews, the improvement in employability was linked closely to the increase in confidence of the young people. Examples were given of how quickly the young people's confidence improved and how this led to the confidence to apply for jobs and attend job interviews. The final celebration brought this home when four young people took to the stage and spoke about the personal impacts the project had had – not leaving a dry eye in the house! The increase in confidence was also demonstrated in the student surveys. Of the 34 young people surveyed before and after, 37% stated confidence had increased, 32% had an improved perception of their local greenspaces and half of them thought that their local environment was either Good or Excellent.

Attendance and behaviour was a common challenge for the young people who took part. This sometimes made delivery of the project challenging. However, the teachers who worked most closely with the young people noted a positive change and said the involvement in the activities gave the young people a reason to come to school.

The project has also had a wider impact, including on the people who worked with the young people. A key goal of the project was to build the skills and confidence of the group leaders and this has been achieved by building this ethos into every session. Combined with the CPD training sessions, this has resulted in the teachers themselves organising a 2-day outdoor learning event, creating learning packs for other staff and developing grant funding applications to improve the sites.

One of the measures of the impact that this project has had is the submission to and shortlisting of the project in the Nature of Scotland Awards. It was submitted by St Maurice's High School on behalf of all the young people in Cumbernauld who have been involved.

Our reflections

Working with this number of young people from four schools across 2.5 years has not been without its challenges, and we have developed and grown alongside the young people. In fact, it is the young people who have been crucial to the success of this project. The work that they have done has inspired other people to take action and forced us to look at challenges differently. Working with this group has allowed us to engage much more deeply with a wider range of people.

Some of the challenges have been prosaic, for example around timetabling and logistics, and we have had to adapt the project timetable to fit. Forming a close partnership with the schools and understanding their specific needs was essential. At the start, we were prepared to link all our activities to the Curriculum for Excellence; however, after discussion with the school's senior management a strong focus on employability was thought to be more beneficial. This translated into workshops where the young people were treated more like employees and valued members of their community rather than students.

The schools that have had the greatest buy-in from their senior management right from the beginning have had the deepest involvement in the project and are now starting to spread outdoor learning throughout the school. Other schools were more difficult to engage with and only came on board in the later stages of the project. There are multiple reasons for this as, like any institution, schools have their own priorities and challenges that may not fit with an outside project. However, after we gathered momentum and could demonstrate the success, more schools started to buy-in. In the end, we ran sessions with all four of Cumbernauld's high schools.

Our duty of care when working with young people in an outdoor environment is extremely high and so we developed a code of conduct between the

project and the schools. This signed agreement set out what the school could expect from us and what we expected from them and was extremely useful in dealing with any issues that arose.

The evaluation presented here focuses mainly on the before and after student/teacher surveys and the evaluation interviews at the end of the project. Although this gives a qualitative snapshot, we had hoped to be able to provide further quantitative evidence. At the start of the project, we had hoped to follow students' attendance and attainment through the school's tracker and report systems; however, this was not possible. We would also have liked to interview more of the students once the project has finished, but we were not able to contact them.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this project from the Community Engagement Officer's point of view has been the privilege of seeing the change and growth in the young people who participated. Although very much subjective, there have been key events and turning points in the students' understanding and a growing appreciation for their local environment and community.

Finally, the marginalised young people we worked with in this project were all part of the education system; however, there is another group of young people outside this who could also benefit. The challenges and time required to work with this group would be even greater – but so are the potential impacts.

A student's story



“Natural Connections has helped me realise that I love working outdoors and helping to protect and improve the environment. Through Natural Connections I gained a 3-day work experience placement (2 full days and 1 half day). This also helped me realise that for a career I want to do a course on Countryside Management. I feel that even when I go to college and if I don't enjoy the course as much as I thought I would (very unlikely) that Natural Connections and the Cumbernauld Living Landscape have set me up with skills for further employability and life in general.”

Emma Louise McGurk (16 years)

© Tracy Lambert

Developing the young work force

Key to the success of the project has been how we have approached developing employability skills. Taking the young people out of the school environment and supporting them to deliver actions they have identified led to an increase in confidence.

Additional high quality work placements with the Scottish Wildlife Trust gave two young people a rich learning experience in a real workplace.

This approach was recognised as good practice at St Maurice's High School and contributed to their vocational learning programme.

Inspiring confidence



Young people were given the opportunity to share the impact the project had made to them.

© Paul Barclay

Impact – community



What we did

Connecting communities to nature in their neighbourhood was one of the key aims of the project. We achieved this through community events, creating volunteering opportunities and celebrating the greenspaces that make Cumbernauld a great place to live.

To help raise awareness of and celebrate our great greenspaces, we spoke to over 10,354 people at 84 public events. This involved anything from attending the local gala days to organising wildlife ID training sessions and playing with Lego in the woods. Often the people we talked to were surprised and inspired when we showed them the town's amazing wildlife, but the project has had to be creative to encourage people to get involved and so health, well-being and lifelong learning have been important in engaging a wider audience.

Our end goal was for people to take action, and improving the skills and development of local volunteers was key to this. So far, we have been supported by 135 volunteers at events, through internships and at Sunday practical sessions. Each volunteer provides different opportunities for both the volunteers and the project to learn and develop.



Photos (top to bottom): Clearing the way at Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve © Tracy Lambert; Go Wild fun day; Hallow"Scare" in the Glen; Getting close to nature at Lego photography workshop © Tracy Lambert.

We also developed volunteering opportunities through internships and work placements. In total, we hosted seven interns, with each internship lasting a minimum of 12 weeks and having a specific focus and project to help deliver the overall programme. We developed two of these into paid employment through the Community Jobs Scotland scheme. The monthly Sunday practical conservation group called themselves the Nature Ninjas and were popular with families. The hooks to attract people to this group were simple, but were not offered everywhere in Cumbernauld. The sessions were held at a time when busy working people can come, the activities were fun and the sessions were also genuinely open to all, regardless of age or ability.

One of the challenges of engaging more people with nature is how to reach the people who are not your usual audience. We tried to do this in a range of creative ways using traditional and digital media. Our weekly column in the local paper, the *Cumbernauld News*, provided us with a platform to promote events and reach a specific Cumbernauld audience, and the articles in the *Herald* reached a wider audience. Our social media and website focused on creating positive content that celebrated the green side of the town, and the reach increased from 590 at the start of the project to 1,081.

"It has been really interesting to see the range of people involved and the range of experiences and backgrounds... it is much, much further reaching than I expected. I initially thought it was a good idea but didn't expect it to be so good or so far reaching." Evaluation interviewee

The Living Windows exhibition in the town centre was seen by thousands of people in an area that nature very rarely reaches. An empty shop window was taken over to tell the story of the design process and celebrate the young people's work. This shop was then opened up for people to take part in art workshops and find out more about the project.

The impact we had

Intended outcome: The wider community of Cumbernauld will have learnt more about their local natural heritage and will spend more time enjoying and caring for their greenspaces.

The evaluation interviews highlight how the project raised awareness for participants and the wider community. The teachers from the schools said that they and their colleagues now use the sites more and can appreciate their value. People involved in the project said that they had not only learnt about the three sites we had focused on, but they also discovered other greenspaces in Cumbernauld they didn't know existed.

The multiple types of engagement carried out have had a cumulative effect. Pupils from the participating schools were telling their grandparents what they've been doing and the grandparents have then been coming along to events to find out more. One of the evaluation interviewees told the story of a man who approached him at a gala day and said, "tell my boy the pine marten story." He said that people have heard about the pine marten, are excited by it and want others to hear about it too.

One of the key outcomes of the project is that more people have been volunteering and spending more time caring for their greenspaces. The project has created the opportunities for this to happen, but it has also led to spin-off projects that will carry on beyond the lifetime of the project. A notable success is the creation of Cumbernauld's first Wildlife Watch Group, a kid's wildlife club run by volunteers in an area in which the Scottish Wildlife Trust has in recent years struggled to recruit volunteers.

Intended outcome: Health and well-being of local community members will be improved through spending more time in greenspace.

Through the volunteering and school sessions, many of the participants had opportunities to spend more time being active in a natural environment. The benefits of this approach were recognised by the local NHS Health Improvement staff and the schools. FitBit trackers worn by the Nature Ninjas recorded their physical activity on the Sunday volunteer sessions and at events. Data from the devices revealed that they burnt around 1,500 calories and walked an average of six miles during conservation work (roughly double the calories used in a normal day at the office), and volunteers at public events took an average of 12,000 steps whilst helping to spread news. This information was a key talking point on Facebook when the volunteers were discussing the day's activities and it attracted more volunteers interested in the fitness aspect of the work.

The well-being benefits of the project became a major factor for one of the schools because it provided a space and capacity to put their mental health strategies into practice. Over the course of the project we started to understand the challenges that at-risk young people face and how we can use the natural environment in a practical way to improve their mental health. This approach has led to further development of a pilot project called Wild Ways Well. Working with partners at The Conservation Volunteers we took the well-established Five Ways to Wellbeing approach to improving mental health and applied it in an outdoor environment. The pilot was a success and weekly sessions now run in Cumbernauld greenspaces.

Intended outcome: Community will be strengthened through partnership working.

The project has strengthened the partnerships both within and between local organisations and the

community. There was broad agreement between the interviewees of the impact evaluation that the project was well received by the local community and had created new connections. Some of these were between generations whilst others were between different groups of people. Often it was the young people's actions that had inspired other people to get involved. This recognition of the work young people did was one of the keys to success of building this partnership and strengthening the community. This link between the improvement at the sites and the young people was very important and created more inter-generational connections. One of the evaluation interviewees found herself regularly pointing out, "It was the kids not the Council."

This links closely to one of the main benefits of the project for North Lanarkshire Council: it has allowed them to work more closely with communities and understand their needs and build local partnerships. This has led to additional sources of funding being identified and a better understanding of the sites. It was also recognised by one of the volunteers who saw the benefits of closer partnership working and joined-up thinking.

Our reflections

Without doubt this project has had an impact on the community in Cumbernauld, but this is just a start. The joined-up approach and multiple ways for people to participate in the project have created the start of a network that needs to be built on. Volunteers such as the Nature Ninjas delivered some of the biggest impacts at the sites and a key challenge is to develop their skills and confidence further so they can become self-sustaining. This is a long-term goal and requires continuous investment and support. The road for this type of group is not always smooth and the amount of support they will require will fluctuate in the future. Expectations on what they can deliver need to be realistic and specialists will always be required for certain tasks. The volunteering element of this project has been one of its strengths and we have achieved far more

through the help of the interns than we originally planned. Interns have delivered specialist surveys, such as the Phase 1 Habitat Mapping of all sites, and community consultations. All the interns went on to further training or education. In future, a more structured evaluation of the impact for the interns and volunteers would be useful and a more formal recognition of achievements may add value to the experience for them.

The success of the project has been recognised by different communities of interest and the project has been nominated for two RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards. The work that it has done contributed to winning the 2017 Gardens for Life Biodiversity Award. We need to build on the success of this project and use it as a springboard to create a bigger community network in Cumbernauld.

Over the course of the project our approach to public engagement shifted. At the beginning, we would reach large numbers of people at events like the Cumbernauld Gala Day and Gardening Scotland; however, the depth of engagement at these events was often relatively shallow. We shifted our focus to more local events in specific neighbourhoods and new ways to explore the sites. Children's pop-up Wildlife Watch activities during the school

holidays and themed guided walks proved popular, and we also linked to current trends, such as Lego, to attract new audiences.

We would not have been able to reach as many people without the support of the dedicated events volunteers. It takes a special type of person to turn up at public events and speak to hundreds of people about the amazing wildlife and sites in Cumbernauld. These volunteers are passionate about sharing their knowledge of wildlife and their community. In future, we should create more opportunities for different volunteers to meet and find out about other aspects of the project.

Through this project, the Cumbernauld Living Landscape partnership has strengthened by bringing on board new partners and developing a greater understanding of community need. The partnership now includes the town's largest registered social landlord, Sanctuary Homes, and experts in community volunteering, The Conservation Volunteers. For the first time in the Cumbernauld Living Landscape's history we now have a meaningful collaboration with researchers from The James Hutton Institute to evaluate how our actions change people's perceptions of greenspace in detail.

Resilient communities – delivering local priorities

Forming strong partnerships between communities, the third sector and North Lanarkshire Council has allowed us to develop our understanding of what local priorities are and how to deliver them. Consultations have highlighted local issues, and working with the Local Area Partnership has connected us to other services. A great example of this is the work we have done with the Fire Service. We taught young people how to build fires in the woods responsibly and the Fire Service followed this up with workshops about the consequences of arson and anti-social behaviour.

We targeted our actions at those with the most need and put a strong focus on skills and training to try to build capacity for communities to help themselves. A contribution of £12,000 from the Local Development Programme allowed us to leverage in £115,000 investment in communities in North Lanarkshire. This project has directly contributed to the following North Lanarkshire Council Business Plan to 2020 priorities:

- Support communities to do things for themselves with greater control over their own futures
- Enhance reputation and working relationships by how we have engaged with our communities
- Increase levels of community participation, engagement and volunteering

Volunteer Hall of Fame

Nature Ninjas



Willie Homer
Background: Community activist and artist

One of the very first Nature Ninjas on the scene, Willie has been a long-term activist within the town, always looking to help improve local greenspace. He has also assisted with events and was the artist who designed the Cumbernauld Living Landscape logo. Willie has a passion for his area, but is also more than willing to share his knowledge and time to other sites around the town.

© Tracy Lambert

Volunteer Intern



Stuart MacKenzie
Background: Mature college student, changing career looking for work experience

A keen ecologist, Stuart has produced Phase 1 Habitat reports for all three sites and assisted at public engagement events. When not surveying, his favourite task was to become Milish, the pine marten mascot, drawing on his previous film industry experience. Stuart went on to become the Assistant Operations Officer at SNH Kinlochewe and is now completing a BSc Countryside Management at Aberdeen University.

Community Jobs Scotland

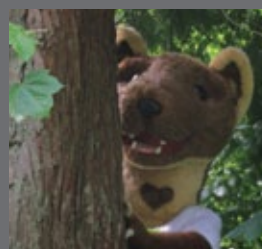


Gemma MacDonald
Background: Local resident wanting to develop her employability

Gemma is a local resident who was keen to develop her skills and employability. She became an intern and then went on to paid employment through Community Jobs Scotland. In this role she assisted with high school workshops and helped deliver practical conservation tasks. In her spare time Gemma became a Wildlife Watch leader for Cumbernauld and is now studying a BSc in Environmental Science with Outdoor Education.

© Paul Barclay

Events Volunteer



Milish, events mascot
Background: Local resident whose family is spreading through Central Scotland

Always the centre of attention at events, Milish knows how to draw a crowd and entertain people. From Cumbernauld shopping centre to Halloween "Scream" in the Glen, she was a magnet for young children giving the other events volunteers time to talk to the mums and dads. Milish is now developing her wildlife ID skills to see if she can track down and help out any red squirrels in the woods in Cumbernauld.

© Milish

Evaluation summary

Assumptions

This project is based on the premise that good quality greenspaces benefit local communities and wildlife – and there is much evidence to support this. However, the effect will not be universal and not all wildlife or people will benefit equally.

The actions we took to improve the sites need to be sustained by the landowners and the communities. Interest and momentum is high at the moment but this may need re-invigorating and reframing in the future to ensure that it stays relevant.

The young people that we worked with were identified by the schools as at-risk of disengaging, but they were still at school. For a number of young people, the evaluation showed that they reached more positive outcomes. It is unlikely that this project achieved that in isolation and this group of young people will also be supported by other services.

Although we have reached a huge number of people with this project, this is just the tip of the iceberg in a town of 50,000 people. There are still many people who are unaware of Cumbernauld's amazing greenspaces and how they could benefit from them. Our key challenge is to find out how we can make them relevant to an even wider group and sustain this for many years.

External factors

As mentioned several times, this project could only be achieved with strong partnership between the schools, local community and local organisations. This required that motivated staff and volunteers have the capacity to participate and the policy background to enable this.

Pressures on local government mean that there are less staff with fewer resources to manage greenspaces, and communities are being given

more power to take action for themselves through the Community Empowerment Act. However, in the areas that can benefit the most, communities often have the least capacity. It is an opportunity for this type of project to work with those communities to improve the skill and understanding of local people to protect good quality greenspaces.

Finally, the future sustainability of urban greenspaces, especially wooded areas, will be affected by the spread of pests and diseases. Driven by a changing climate and failings in biosecurity diseases, such as Chalara and Phytophthora, will lead to widespread loss of woodland in our towns and cities.

Key lessons learnt

The reflections in the previous sections have covered the lessons we have been learning as the project progresses. However, the following are the key points:

- Try anything you can and be as creative as possible to make natural heritage relevant to people's everyday lives.
- Build strong partnerships with schools as early as you can, ignore their timetable at your peril and make sure all parties know what is expected of them.
- Create opportunities for participants to connect with each other and find out what other people are doing. This is important for both the community and partner organisations.
- Some jobs are just too big to tackle with volunteers alone and need a more joined up approach between neighbouring landowners.
- Get the experts in to help tell the story of your project and reach new audiences. A photograph or video is worth 1,000 words (maybe even more on Facebook!)



Thank you

This project would not have been possible without the people and partnerships that have helped us. The dedicated young people and volunteers have inspired us to do more and push further. Community groups have shared their pride in our town and local organisations have helped us grow. None of this would have happened without the simple action that millions of people take each day to buy a National Lottery ticket, support a charity or campaign for our partners. We would like to thank the Heritage Lottery Fund, North Lanarkshire Council, NHS Lanarkshire and the Scottish Wildlife Trust for their financial support.

