



CREATING NATURAL CONNECTIONS

Final project report



Cumbernauld Living Landscape

Has improved Cumbernauld's greenspaces for both people and wildlife, helping everyone in the community to connect with the nature on their doorstep.

We have achieved this through **Creating Natural Connections**, a four-year project connecting people to nature through Habitats and Access works, linked in with the Connecting (Young) People to Nature, Green Health and Wellbeing, and Unlocking Community Capacity. Funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). It has been a partnership led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust with North Lanarkshire Council (NLC), Sanctuary Scotland, the James Hutton Institute (JHI) and The Conservation Volunteers (TCV).

Our Vision

Was quite simply to ensure that 'Nature and people [are] at the heart of Cumbernauld's future' and we have achieved this via our outcomes of:

More people helping nature, More people helping people and Nature helping more people.



Thank you!

We would like to thank our partners, young people, volunteers, attendees and communities in the town. You have led and inspired us to adapt and deliver this project, helping our communities to grow and connect with nature - and each other. None of this would have been possible without funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund and the players of the National Lottery.

This report was written by the Scottish Wildlife Trust in August 2023 and should be cited as:
Lambert, T. & Healy Smith, L. (2023) Creating Natural Connections - Final Project Report. Edinburgh: Scottish Wildlife Trust.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust is a Scottish registered charity (charity number SC005792). It is also a company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland (registered number SC040247). Registered office: Harbourside House, 110 Commercial Street, Edinburgh EH6 6NF

Contents

Cumbernauld Living Landscape	2
Our Vision.....	2
Thank you!	2
Executive Summary	5
What we set out to achieve	6
Key Project Challenges	7
The impact of Improving Habitats and Access.....	8
Table 1. Capital works carried out 2019-2023	9
Access Improvements	9
Interpretation.....	12
Habitats improvements – Woodland management.....	13
Habitats improvements – Urban peatland restoration.....	14
Habitats improvements – Agricultural and Wildlife meadows	15
Habitats improvements – Forest Wood Fire Pond Restoration.....	17
Habitats improvements – Mosswater Local Nature Reserve	18
Habitats improvements – Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)	18
Habitats improvements – Rain Gardens	19
Connecting (Young) People to Nature (CYPN).....	22
Early Connections.....	22
Natural Connections	24
Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Training	27
Summer Schools.....	27
Wild Play Ranger	28
Events.....	28
Green Health and Wellbeing (GHW).....	29
Wild Ways Well Health and wellbeing programme	32
Wild Ways Well CPD training.....	32
Wild Ways Well Events.....	32
Wild Ways Well and Covid-19	33
Paid traineeships.....	34
Unlocking Community Capacity.....	35
Nature Ninja Volunteers.....	35
Events.....	37
Training.....	37
Networking.....	37
Artists in Residence (AiR)	40

Rowanbank Environmental Arts and Education – Go Wild	43
Communications	44
Reaching the community	44
Wild Week	46
Evaluation.....	47
CNC Project Staff	47
Reflections on the CNC partnership.....	48
Lessons learned and future opportunities.....	49
Creating Natural Connections team.....	49
Legacy plan.....	50

Executive Summary

In January 2019, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, on behalf of the project partners, was awarded a £1.37 million National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, along with generous support from North Lanarkshire Council and other donors, amounting to a £2.1 million investment in a four-year programme, putting wildlife and people at the heart of Cumbernauld's future.

The project focused on major habitat and access workstream, with tasks chosen by the community during the development phase. These tasks were linked, where possible, to the remaining three engagement workstreams of Connecting Young People to Nature¹, Green Health and Wellbeing, and Unlocking Community Capacity. The project aim was to improve greenspaces in Cumbernauld for people and wildlife, and to create a community network connecting people with nature.

These four workstreams delivered against the three over-arching outcomes of: Nature helping more people; More People helping nature and More people helping each other. There have been multiple challenges that the team has met head on, and from which they learned and appropriately adapted delivery, and they are to be highly commended for their commitment and dedication to the project.

Projects of this size work, we know they work and have demonstrated it repeatedly throughout Creating Natural Connections. Where multiple partners have varying aims but are given support and agency to work together to achieve them for the benefit of people and wildlife, we see remarkable change, and we are confident in the knowledge that the legacy will continue. It is more difficult for smaller groups to gain permissions, momentum, and to maintain that momentum to fulfil their needs. We have seen this first hand. However, when a smaller group is supported by a larger project, such as Creating Natural Connections, it helps them to be seen, spread the word of their work and to celebrate their achievements.

Creating Natural Connections has delivered what we set out to do. We listened to our community and matched that together with our professional knowledge and understanding of our environment and communities, to begin the work of creating, protecting, restoring, and enhancing greenspaces - key elements of the Cumbernauld Living Landscape vision. Evidence in support of this is presented in this report.

We have reached the audiences we said we would reach and have grown to see new audiences emerge in the aftermath of global affairs. Cumbernauld Living Landscape strives to reach as many people as we possibly can with quality delivery. Our audience reach at times has been lower than expected, however the impact on individuals speaks to the quality of engagement through their stories. That change in a single person's life, to experience the wonder of nature and the connection to it, and to other people, can be life-changing and we have found it to be the case not only for our community but also for the incredible team of people in the team who have delivered it.

It is with grateful thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and ultimately to the players of the National Lottery that we have been able to deliver Creating Natural Connections. You have made a huge difference for us, and we hope to be able to build on and nurture these connections in the future.

¹ *Connecting Young People to Nature was changed to Connecting People to Nature to reach a wider audience.

What we set out to achieve

January of 2019 saw the [Cumbernauld Living Landscape](#) securing funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver the project, [Creating Natural Connections](#). This ambitious four-year project was extended by six months due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, to allow for habitat and access works to be completed, with complementary engagement to connect the public with the sites. This report provides highlights of what we have achieved, the impact it has had, and the valuable lessons learned. Further evidence of evaluation from James Hutton Institute and the independent Evaluator, Shirley Muir, are available.

Creating Natural Connections (CNC) has built and expanded upon the [Cumbernauld Living Landscape's](#) vision to create, enhance, protect, and restore greenspaces in the town, to benefit both people and wildlife.

Delivering to new audiences, CNC has connected people to nature on their doorstep through four workstreams:

- **Improving Habitats and Access** has created the foundation of a resilient network of greenspaces.
- **Connecting Young People to Nature** has helped to nurture skills and celebrate achievements.
- **Promoting Green Health and Wellbeing** has created opportunities for people to benefit from nature.
- **Unlocking Community Capacity** has developed a network of people and organisations who can deliver change.

Each of these workstreams were independent of each other, but also had elements of cross-over that could be utilised to help the local community understand why connections between people and wildlife are vital and to see change occur that they helped implement. Taking a holistic approach has helped us to achieve the goals of **'Better greenspaces for people and wildlife'** and a **'Community network connecting people with nature'**.



Unlocking
Community
Capacity –

Staff and parents
of children
attending St
Margaret of
Scotland Primary
School, mucking
in to clear and
rejuvenate the
school garden,
2019.

Key Project Challenges

Covid19

In our first year, the project was going full steam ahead. Staff settled into new roles and were reaching out to communities and groups, to build the ties that would continue to the end of the project. Plans were made for the first round of tenders to go out to companies for the major habitat works, with two of the projects, Rewilding Cumbernauld Glen and Broadwood, Balloch, Westfield woodland works being completed. Whisperings of a flu-like illness were in the wind towards the end of 2019. Little did the world know what was about to unfold.

In March 2020, our school contacts and groups reached out to us to tell us that all association with outside groups was to end immediately. This was also the case with contractors, with everything halting and no knowledge of how long it would last. Staff were told to work remotely from home, to maintain a semblance of normality for our groups and communities and, in some part, for the staff.

However, it was not normal: project staff, used to being outdoors sharing their passion and knowledge of nature with others, were now siloed in whatever space they could find, much like everyone else at the time. Generating ideas to keep the project going is to their credit and it was helped by a Project Manager who remained focused and energised, encouraging the team to keep going and giving them the space to innovate. This remained the case for two years with a suite of activities, booklets, and videos featuring on our website and across our social media platforms. These resources will remain as a digital legacy of the project for years to come.

In the background, habitats and access works were slowly being carried out where contractors were able, but the main stay of the works were delayed. As the first lockdown eased, small groups re-emerged working to Covid safety standards. It was still a frightening time for the staff and participants: nobody wanted to cause another surge of cases, so care was taken.

The metrics we submitted during the development phase to NLHF changed to reflect this, with excellent communication between the funder, managers, and staff. Creating Natural Connections adapted. It meant, however, that a large group of habitats and access works were delayed and, in 2022, an extension was requested and agreed with the funder, to enable the peatland restoration, woodland management, interpretation installation and the four remaining access improvements to be completed. While the engagement concluded in June 2023, three access works, one remaining habitat works, and the installation of the interpretation were completed in mid-August – later than initially planned.

Staff changes

Another challenge, over and above Covid, but possibly linked to it, was the high turnover of staff. Every member of staff has changed three times over the life of the project. This is extremely unusual; however, it has been noted as a recurring issue across the conservation sector. Ensuring consistent delivery throughout periods of change was challenging. In October 2022, every member of project staff, including the Project Manager, changed once again. This added pressure to the new staff, however, the new manager was previously the Project Officer for Young People and had been with the Living Landscape since it started. She had prior knowledge of the CNC project and, whilst this helped to bring the team together, there were still challenges with only ten months left of the project. Overcoming these challenges took time, patience and hard work, and the result is the closure of an extremely ambitious project for wildlife and people, which will have a lasting effect, as evidenced throughout this report.

The impact of Improving Habitats and Access

230 HECTARES* OF WOODLAND HAVE BEEN BROUGHT INTO ACTIVE MANAGEMENT AT CUMBERNAULD GLEN WILDLIFE RESERVE, SEAFAR WOOD WILDLIFE RESERVE, GLENCRYAN, LOW WOOD AND BROADWOOD, WESTFIELD AND BALLOCH



900 TREES PLANTED IN ADDITION TO THE ORIGINAL PROJECT TARGET. THE NATURE NINJAS HAVE HELPED TO PLANT 4,290 OF THIS TARGET, WORKING WITH LAND MANAGERS AND CONTRACTORS TO COMPLEMENT THE HABITATS AND ACCESS WORKS

During the development phase (2018-19), we devised an extensive list of projects that would improve habitats across the town and improve people's access to sites. This list was prioritised to:

- Two sets of on-site interpretation installed: A1 panels detailing the sites and two activity trails per site, there are six sites with a total of 72 activity roundels for people to connect with nature.
- Eight path/boardwalk upgrades, covering approximately 3.1 kilometres by the end of the project.
- 12 habitat improvement works, including woodland and meadow management, peat bog restoration, and invasive, non-native species co-ordination.

The range of habitat works conducted across the town demonstrates the mosaic of habitats present in Cumbernauld. Improving these sites is of vital importance to the town's biodiversity and will benefit both people and wildlife. The access works ensure that connection is possible by providing a good quality surface to walk on, which is wide enough for people to pass whether they are walking, jogging, cycling, pushing a pram, or using a mobility aid. The access paths are in a better condition and allow more people to access nature on their doorstep.

Table 1 details the full list of works chosen by the community during the development phase. The access works have proven popular, with comments on social media and being passed on to the land managers who look after the relative sites. These works have ensured that people can access better and safer greenspaces.

Table 1. Capital works carried out 2019-2023

Ref	Project name	Lead partner	Status
Access works			
A1	Broadwood Loch Loop	NLC	Complete
A3	Cumbernauld Glen Links	SWT	Complete
A5	Mid Forest Links to Palacerigg	NLC/SWT	Complete
A7	Luggiebank Wood	SWT/NLC	Complete
A9	Netherwood Way path upgrade	NLC	Complete
A11	Ravenswood path link	NLC	Complete
A12	Seafar Woods access improvements	SWT	Complete
A14	St Maurice's Pond dipping platform and boardwalk	NLC	Complete
Interpretation			
A01	Interpretation Suite	SWT	Complete
A01	Roundel installation	SWT	Complete
Habitats work			
H1	Community Rain Gardens demonstration	NLC/SWT	Cancelled
H2a	Urban peat bog restoration	NLC	Complete
H3c	Wildlife Meadows	NLC	Complete
H3f	Cumbernauld Community Park - Heritage wildlife management	NLC	Complete
H4h	Reedbed creation at Mosswater – changed to woodland works, approved by NLHF	NLC	Complete
H4i	Forest Wood Wildlife Reserve Fire Pond Restoration	SWT	Complete
H6	Re-wilding Cumbernauld Glen	SWT	Complete
H7-8-9	Glencryan Woods & Landfill – Restoring a key native woodland link	NLC	Complete
H10	Low Wood Native Woodland Creation	NLC	Complete
H17	Broadwood, Westfield, Balloch Woodland Management	NLC	Complete
H23	Landscape scale INNS co-ordination	NLC	Complete
H24	Seafar Woods - safeguarding urban woods	SWT	Complete

Access Improvements

NLHF outcomes - Heritage will be better managed and in better condition

Four access projects were completed pre-pandemic. These included Netherwood, Ravenswood, Seafar Wood and St Maurice's Pond, including the boardwalk with pond-dipping platforms. All of these were warmly received by the public and a request to improve another path nearby was made. We have asked members of the local community to look out for consultations and take part in them, to voice their requests and opinions.

Broadwood, Cumbernauld Glen, Mid Forest Links and Luggiebank Wood upgrades were severely delayed with issues linked to gaining contractors, due to Covid-19. The remaining four access works were completed in 2022-23, with thanks to the six-month extension granted by NLHF. The change has been remarkable, and the images, below, demonstrate the change for Luggiebank Wood. This reserve is accessed by children and staff from Woodlands Primary School, who use the reserve for lessons, and this road crossing will make it much safer for them in the future.

A total of 3.1 kilometres of path have been upgraded across the town making it easier for people to access nature on their doorstep now – and for many years to come. These paths provide a firm surface for all abilities, the routes are wider and more open, letting in more light to provide a more

welcoming environment for people to explore their local greenspaces. Ground water flooding has been addressed by raising the path profiles, where required.

Access highlights include Luggiebank Wood (*see below*), with the new road crossing installed. This will help school children cross an extremely busy road, which tends to have all sizes of vehicle exceeding the speed limit. In addition, the Broadwood Loch woodland walk was upgraded, where previously, approximately 20 metres of path was approximately 15 centimetres under water, following rain. The town experiences a lot of rainfall, resulting in this path being under water for large periods of time every year. The drain has now been partially cleared, and the path raised, to prevent long-term flooding on this section.



At Broadwood Loch, the walking route around the woodland area that was prone to heavy flooding has now been addressed, with the route being made accessible after many years of people saying they were only able to walk the route wearing wellingtons. The stairs at this location have been replaced, thereby ensuring the lifespan of this route for years to come. Adversely, the stairs at Cumbernauld Glen have been removed for safety reasons. These stairs were positioned very close to the roadside entry to the Theatre, Glen and House. With the increase in traffic, the decision was made to remove this access route and upgrade the existing and well-lit core path route, ensuring a safer experience for visitors to and through the reserve. The path on the opposite side of the stair route was also removed, with soil and grass seed added to let it blend in with existing greenspace. Upgrading of the existing core path route with the addition of a handrail will assist anyone with mobility issues.

These routes have already received positive feedback, particularly at Broadwood Loch, where a much-loved walking route is now accessible once again.

“It is brilliant to be able to access the woodland walk again, without your wellies, it was flooded all the time but now it is clear and wide enough for people walking and for bikes too!”

Local resident of Blackwood.



Broadwood Sitka plantation

Old plantation, very dark understory with no plant life on the ground. Perceptions of safety through this area were low, but this has now changed with the increased light level and better line of sight. The woodland was also prone to wind damage and disease. This compartment was successfully clear-felled and planted with 3,900 native broadleaf trees, creating a haven for wildlife.

Broadwood Broadleaf mix woodland

The changes seen at Broadwood are incredible, plant life is thriving, and the trees are doing well. It has been noted that tree loss at this location has been minimal. Approximately 1% tree loss has been noted against an expected loss of 10%. The site is much lighter and as it matures light will still be able to penetrate the understory.



“The change here is amazing, there is so much light now, I see the buzzards circling above more often now, I bet there are loads of mice in that bit now. I sometimes see deer too; they are so lovely, but they better not munch on the trees [laughing]”

Natura Ninja Volunteer

Interpretation

NLHF outcome - People have developed skills, learnt about heritage and volunteered time

The Interpretation brief was put out to tender during September 2021, with three bids returning. The tender was awarded to The Creative Core who presented the best tender in understanding of the project's requirements, cost and schedule of delivery. The costs returned from all three tenders were extremely high, so the decision was made to reduce the number of sites, and part of the works tendered out to a local company to try to reduce the costs and bring them in line with the available budget.

This, however, has proved to be time-consuming as the local company stalled on communications, ordered the wrong materials and could not deliver the contract. After discussion with NLHF, the new Project Manager reached out to The Creative Core to offer them the opportunity to complete the task. Works began on 14th of August 2023 and were completed within the week. The Project Manager has spoken with the headteacher at Abronhill Primary School and informed them that the activity trails were installed and would be of use for their pupils.

We installed six A1 panels detailing a map and the two trails of each site. These are located in six locations across the town. Information about the wildlife that can be found on the site, as well as some local history and fun facts are detailed on these panels, with a focus on the particular animals the trails cover. In all, 72 roundels were created with a fun activity or fact about the species they were highlighting. The roundels have been placed in the six greenspaces, six for each trail.

Families and children will be able to visit these trails and gain a better understanding of elements of each species and learn about their local greenspaces. Each walk will invite them outdoors and be interactive, encouraging them to have fun and learn about the different animals, plants and trees in the parks and reserves. We hope to see more people accessing our greenspaces responsibly and benefiting from what they have to offer. Together with our library of online materials, their experience in these wild spaces will be enhanced, informative and fun for all ages.



Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve

Orchid Trail

One of the 72 interactive roundels in situ. Six sites across the town carry two trails each covering:

- Bluebells and Oak trees
- Bumblebees and Orchids
- Frogs and Woodpeckers
- Otters and Dragonflies
- Bats and Butterflies
- Pine martens and Yellowhammers
-

Each site also has an A1 panel detailing the routes and further information on the greenspaces in the town

Habitats improvements – Woodland management

NLHF outcomes:

- *Heritage will be better managed and in better condition.*
- *Negative environmental impacts will be reduced.*
- *Local area will be a better place to live, work, play and visit.*

Of the 12 habitats improvements carried out, **Broadwood, Westfield and Balloch woodland management** proved the most challenging with local residents. Two local groups in the town were extremely unhappy with the clear-felling of an old Sitka spruce plantation, which had suffered storm damage, and thinning works around housing areas. Interestingly, these two groups attended every consultation event during the development phase, therefore, it is always worthwhile noting that people can change their minds. How we react to this is how we make a project successful.

To this end, the CNC team held a community tree planting day on an area of land that had been cleared of scrub due to unrelated utility works. The site is adjacent to the car park at Broadwood Loch and is highly visible, but it looked in a poor state. Our thoughts were to use this area as a sacrificial plot, thereby protecting from roe deer the newly planted 3,900 trees complete with guards in the clear-felled zone. Roe deer nip at the apical stems, killing off many a sapling across our woodland works.

With 600 trees donated through OVO Energy, and their links with TCV, the team arranged a day where tree planting teamed up with hot apple cider (non-alcoholic) and roasted chestnuts over an open fire pit. Expecting 30-40 people to come along, the team was astounded when over 300 people attended: each went home with a tree cookie and the GPS location of the tree they planted, all in a much happier response. To date, there have been two sessions with 900 trees planted in this area and none have required to be replanted in the clear-felled zone due to herbivory.



Broadwood Loch
woodland
management

Families and
volunteers making a
difference to their
local park, planting
900 trees during
two sessions. Each
participant took
away a tree cookie
with the GPS of
their planted tree.

Other woodland works such as **Glencryan** and **Low Wood** are not as visual as Broadwood. In Glencryan and Low Wood, works had already been conducted years before. Creating Natural Connections carried out complementary works to ensure native tree species could flourish, by planting native trees, removing smaller areas of non-native tree species and invasive species, together with coppicing and tree guard removal. An astounding 6,500 tree guards were removed

across the town's woodland areas. This action will help the trees grow properly, with no restrictions, which could cause disease or rot if left alone.

Two woodland projects (Seafar Wood Wildlife Reserve and Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve² (phase 2³)) were unable to be fully completed during the project timescale. Unfortunately, the delays created by the pandemic and subsequent shortage of specialised contractors, in addition to ecological constraints, (such as the bird breeding season and results of protected species surveys) works were not possible in the remaining timeframe despite attempts to adapt.

Whilst these works were not fully complete, 85% of woodland interventions were delivered at Seafar Wood and 65% in Cumbernauld Glen. Subsequent funding will be sought to complete outstanding works beyond this project.



Re-wilding Cumbernauld Glen
Selective thinning and dismantling of specific trees have created space and improved light penetration to the understory. Selective thinning was carried out for the maximum benefit of native tree species, reducing competition, and encouraging growth.

Habitats improvements – Urban peatland restoration

There are three urban peatbogs in the town, separate from the large peatbog on Slamannan Plateaux. Two of these bogs are very close to houses, with the remaining bog being a remnant of old farmland, and now part of a recreational area and park, Abrohill Bog and Sparrow Bog and Broadwood Bog, respectively. As degraded peatlands, each of these were at high risk of fires, whether accidental or deliberate, and the species composition is currently poor. Scrub removal, drainage blocking and damming have been carried out to promote natural hydrology across the bogs, raising the water levels and re-wetting the sites. This will reduce the risk of future fires and assist through inhibiting scrub growth. Re-wetting the site will also encourage sphagnum growth, changing the composition of plant flora over time and improving the species composition. Damming 0.2 hectares of drainage on the peatbog will help restore a total area of over 10 hectares across the three sites. A seemingly small amount of work has the potential to have a significant impact, aiding recovery and improving condition and species composition.

² It is worth noting the Long-Term Forestry plan had changed from the original prescribed works, both Seafar and Cumbernauld Glen had to now follow the new LTFP 2022-32 prescription

³ Phase 1 of Rewilding Cumbernauld Glen was completed in its entirety in 2019 with raptor nests, hedgerow, meadows, and ponds being re-instated along with 4400, trees planted.

Contractors were appointed to complete the more technical works of drainage blocking, installing of pilings, scrub removal when the scrub was greater than 10 centimetres diameter at breast height (DBH), and reprofiling of the bog. These works were also complemented by the Natura Ninjas, who cleared scrub on the smaller sites with scrub less than 10 centimetres DBH on Abronhill bog. The volunteers - together with the Unlocking Community Capacity Officer - enjoyed the experience and rated this task as highly enjoyable. Clearing a site of vegetation is instantly gratifying and they also enjoyed speaking to residents who stopped to ask them what they were doing and why, with one resident exclaiming, *“be careful you might fall in.”* They explained, with the work they were doing, it would be wetter in years to come, with a wider range of wildlife to be spotted at the site.



Scrub Clearance on Abronhill bog by the Nature Ninjas, complementing the contractual work being carried out, while learning about the bog and why the works were being conducted. Volunteers braved all types of weather year-round. Their work will help the bog recover quicker, with the removal of trees which were cut and kept on site providing invaluable dead habitat for invertebrates and retention of carbon.

Habitats improvements – Agricultural and Wildlife meadows

In the UK, we have lost approximately 97% of good quality wildflower meadows due to agricultural changes since the Second World War (Importance of Meadows, 2023). The loss of insect species (75% decline (Caspar A. Hallmann, 2017)) since the 1970s directly correlates with this habitat loss. Considering pollinators contribute to 75% of crop yields (Simon G. Potts, 2016) they are extremely important for us, just considering our food supply alone. But meadows have multi-faceted benefits: they hold water in their roots and reduce drought and flooding, stabilise and enrich soils thereby reducing erosion and leaching, and the roots store carbon. There is no need for fertiliser or the use of pesticides, ensuring a healthier, cleaner natural environment. They also provide a refuge for wildlife such as amphibians, birds, and small mammals.

However, it can prove difficult for the public to accept them. A true wildflower meadow contains a heavier content of grasses than flowers, which tends to look weedy and untidy towards the end of the season, therefore pressure builds on local authorities to mow and keep tidy.

This became apparent when we began to create new meadow areas. The project had originally envisioned approximately 2 hectares of meadow being created at Broadwood Loch and Cumbernauld Community Park, however, upon implementation of the meadows at Broadwood, North Lanarkshire Greenspace Development staff were faced with abuse and threats that whatever was planted would be ripped out. Both meadows at Broadwood are very close to new housing areas where, we think, landscaping has been kept tidy by factors, but we are unsure and have never been able to see this work being carried out.

We took the stance that, first, staff are entitled to work without the threat of abuse and, therefore, withdrew from the north side of the loch, and second, each time we tried to add wildflower plug plants, they were consistently mown over by 'Messers unknown'. It is demoralising for volunteers to see their work destroyed after days of very hard work, so the decision to withdraw from Broadwood was taken. We have, however, sown wildflower seed around the upgraded path network to add colour and diversity for people and wildlife. Whilst positive engagement with interested parties couldn't facilitate the creation of proposed wildflower-rich areas at Broadwood within the timeframe of this project, it has reinforced the need for education and engagement to realise similar projects in future.



Broadwood Loch wildflower meadow management

Volunteers planting plug plants at Broadwood Loch, this area has since been mown each year by forces unknown to the project.

Ravenswood, Netherwood Way, St Maurice's, Cumbernauld Glen and Langriggs have had volunteers cutting and lifting the risings each year. Training was delivered to Cumbernauld Village Community Council for the Langriggs, and they continue to borrow scything equipment available through the project each year to maintain their own wildflower area. Scything training was also delivered to the Nature Ninjas each year and has been one of the most enjoyable experiences they have reported. Scything is physically demanding, but those participating know at the end of the day it has been a job well done, and the satisfaction gained has led to the Nature Ninjas offering to help with scything and being quite persistent that it is the preferred method to cut the meadows. With the Natura Ninjas not currently in a position to form a constituted group, the management of the meadows will be delivered through North Lanarkshire Council appointed contractors, although the long-term aspiration is for these to be community managed. To date, 1.28 hectares of new meadow has been created and 4.9 hectares has been scythed each year by volunteers through the cut and lift technique.

Habitats improvements – Forest Wood Fire Pond Restoration

The fire-pond restoration presented a number of learning opportunities and required more capacity and a longer duration than originally proposed. We had expected the works to only cover a few months, but the actuality was the restoration of the pond took two years to complete. Securing contractors proved difficult until the exact composition of the waste removal was known, which delayed the procurement process. We also came across asbestos which then pushed the costs of the project much higher than originally budgeted for. These works began in Year two of Creating Natural Connections and were not complete until the end of Year 4+ (the granted extension). The need for specialised equipment also narrowed the field of contractors available to quote for the works, making it difficult to comply with the procurement requirements.

Following a recommendation from the ecological report, a secondary pond was dug out to prevent the sudden influx of water shocking a stream, and potentially spreading contaminated water and waste into the river system. The primary pond drained over winter with the removal of waste in spring. A dam was placed between the two ponds allowing the primary pond to refill with rainwater and leaving the secondary pond as a site which can fill and drain freely. These two ponds now provide a cleaner mosaic of habitats for wildlife with the ability to freely move between the two.

The completion of these works also means that the fire-pond can now be used once again by the Scottish Fire and Rescue emergency services for access to water for wildfires. This is incredibly useful in areas which are heavily forested and hold a large peatland area. The condition of the pond has improved remarkably, with newts and amphibians returning.



Forest Wood Fire Pond

Before

Years of fly tipping has occurred at this site which is also of historical importance to the area. In the 1700s this was the site where the body of Luggie Jean was disposed of by her husband and his brother, they got off with a fine as domestic abuse was seen as acceptable as a husband's right at that time.

Fire Pond

After

Thankfully, the courts no longer treat domestic abuse in the same fashion, and now future staff will be able to tell the story of poor Jean and explain visually how the restored pond will be beneficial to both people (reducing the fire risk in the area) and wildlife (creating habitat for wildlife to thrive).



Habitats improvements – Mosswater Local Nature Reserve

Actions for nature on this site were identified with the support of two ecology contracts, one during the Development Phase and a subsequent survey to update delayed plans post-Covid. Over the two years of the pandemic the reedbed on site had started to expand naturally so interventions focussed on path maintenance, understory planting and fly tipping removal, thereby enhancing the area for wildlife and people. Whilst time constraints (due to contractor availability and bird breeding season) prevented activity during this project, tree thinning works, to move towards semi-native woodland, were also identified and will be built into future plans.

Habitats improvements – Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

Invasive non-native species - together with native invasive species and garden escapes - are a huge problem for the reserves in the town, causing soil erosion and increasing soil toxicity, as well as being harmful to wildlife and household pets. They also increase competition of native species, often creating monocultures, which are then subject to disease. *Rhododendron ponticum*, Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed, snowberry, salmonberry, and laurel - along with crocosmia and the garden daffodil - are prevalent in most of the greenspaces, especially where houses are close to the reserves.

A town-wide survey was planned for the delivery phase, however the costs exceeded the planned budget for this and the decision was made to reduce the scope, and conduct an INNS survey along 178 hectares of the Luggie Water catchment. This would define the quality and identify future measures that could be used for the creation of a management plan in a future project. Unfortunately, there was one landowner who would not agree to the study being conducted on private land, leaving a pocket of potential INNS seed source on the watercourse.

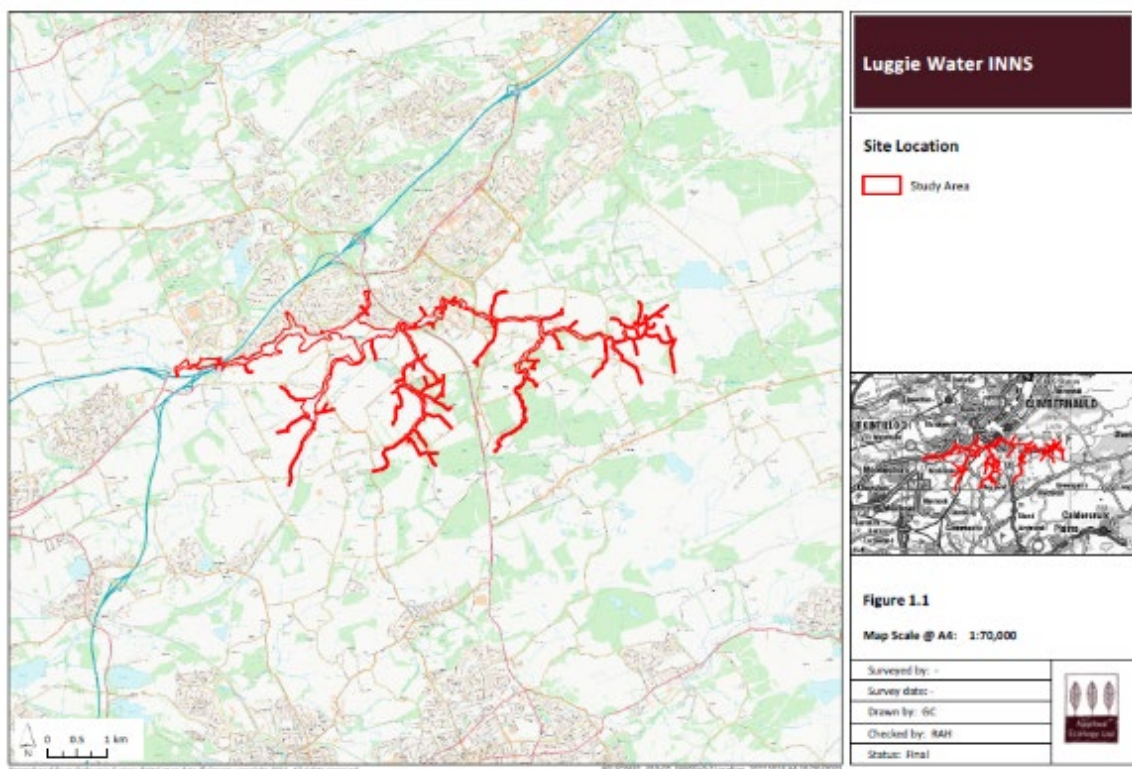


Figure 1 Extract from © Direct Ecology's ecological report showing the Luggie Water catchment.

Staff and volunteers were trained in INNS identification and this training was put to good use in other sites where they surveyed and removed non-natives and other invasive species, across sites such as

Seafar Wood Wildlife Reserve, Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve, St Maurice's Pond, Cumbernauld Community Park, Glencryan Woods and the Langriggs.

The Nature Ninjas helped to clear between 5,000 to 8,000 daffodils bulbs from Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve. These daffodils were not laid to waste, but donated to community groups around the town where garden varieties can be planted; the key is the right plant in the right place. One of the groups who partner up with the Living Landscape for the Beautiful Scotland Award - Airdriehead Allotments - were happy to take the remaining 2,000 to 3,000 bulbs and have planted them at the entrance to their allotments. Allowing a proper bedding-in time, the spring of 2024 will see a sea of yellow daffodils, creating a welcome sight to walkers and allotmenters.

Habitats improvements – Rain Gardens

The project was unable to carry out the H1 Community Rain Gardens demonstration, due to issues arising from Covid-19 as well as additional operational challenges, including a quote for a single rain garden exceeding the full budget for six rain gardens, and a proposed change of use for the locations identified - meaning the gardens would need to be removed in the near future. We also lost the two planning officers with North Lanarkshire Council, as well as the engineer. These people were championing the project, but all left through staff reallocation and retirement.

The project managed to conduct a very quick and brief Plan 'B' via the attendees of the Wild Ways Well (WWW) sessions. Here, the Project Officer delivered a walk and discussion about localised surface water flooding and spoke about ways to slow the flow – relating back to the workshops conducted in the primary schools. The WWW group then learned of an area in Carbrain Gully, prone to surface water flooding, where they scarified an area of grassland and sowed seeds of wetland mixes, while hearing how the long roots would help create a natural 'soak away zone.' This would also help those walking between the town centre and the train station, or even to and from their houses by reducing the possibility of flooding in that area.

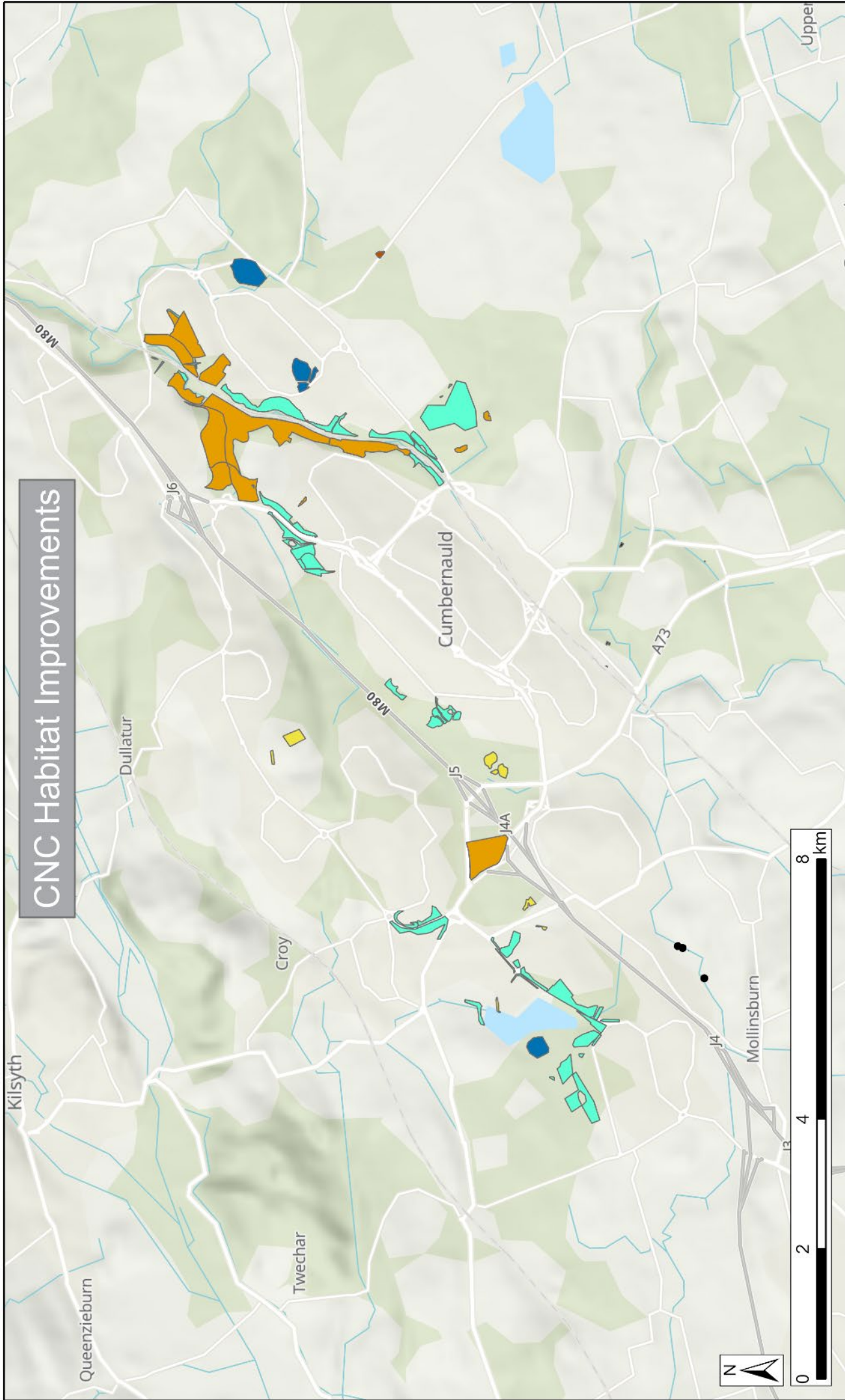
We have previously planted yellow flag iris in this area with primary school children and know it does well for wetland plants, so we look forward to seeing a small but significant bog garden growing in the years to come.



Engaging with Rain Gardens

An example of pupil involvement from Whitelees Primary School showing their understanding of rain gardens and their inspiring designs.

The following pages contain maps for the CNC Habitat Improvements and the CNC Nature Ninja Achievements detailing the spread and variety of works completed.



CNC Habitat Improvements



CNC Habitat management

- Dark Blue: Peatbog restoration
- Light Blue: Ponds, scrapes, wet flushes and meadows
- Orange: Fly tipping clearance
- Yellow: INNS removal
- Light Green: Woodland management
- Dark Green: Meadow management

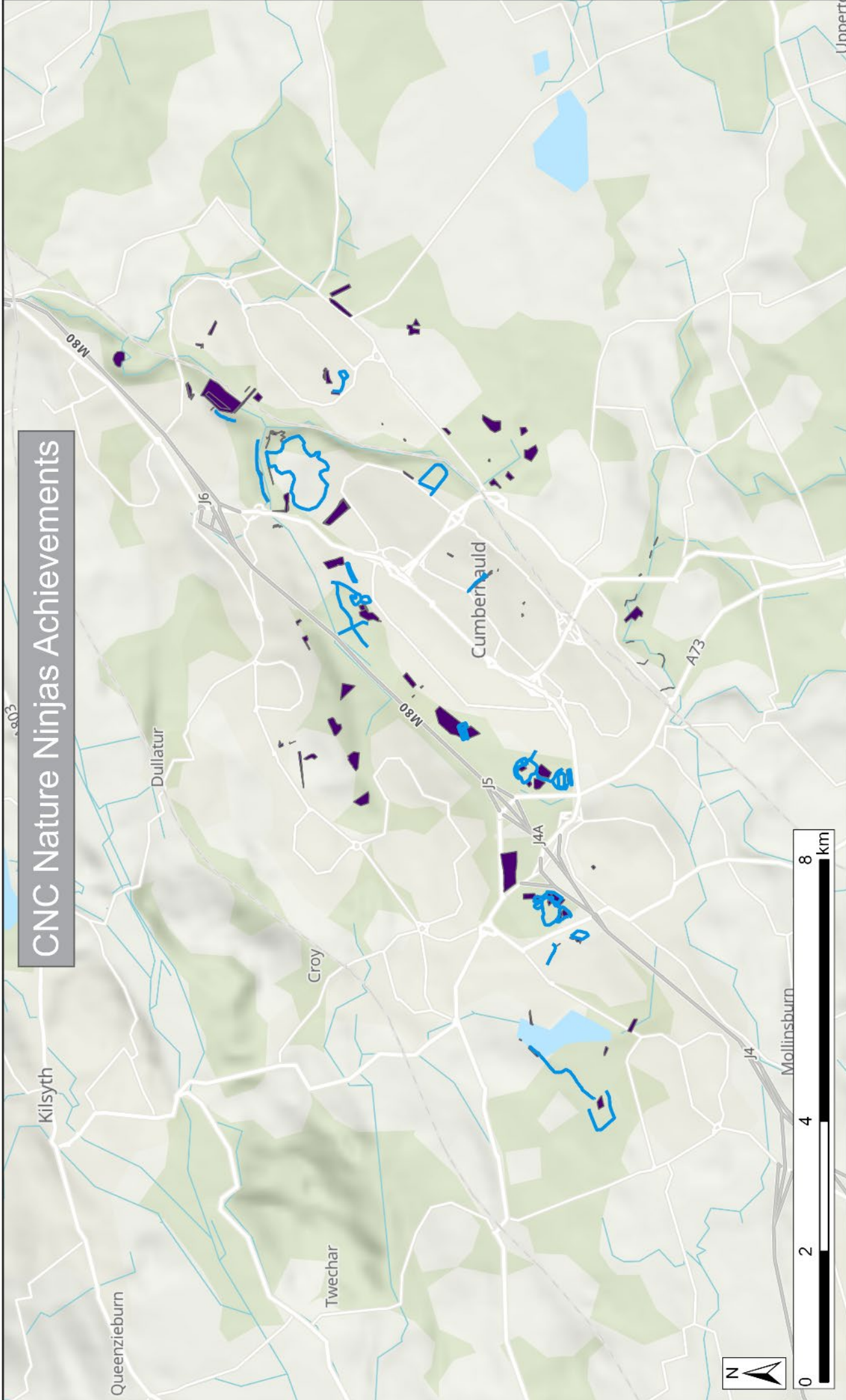
CNC INNS Points

- Black dot: CNC INNS Points
- Black rectangle: CNC INNS Polygons

© Scottish Wildlife Trust 2023
 Contains OS Data
 © Crown copyright and database rights 2023.
 Ordnance Survey Licence No: 100030835.
 Scale at A4: 1:75,000

Scottish Wildlife Trust
 Harbourside House
 110 Commercial Street
 Edinburgh, EH6 6NF
 26/09/2023

CNC Nature Ninjas Achievements



- CNC Nature Ninjas Path Upkeep
- CNC Nature Ninjas Achievements

© Scottish Wildlife Trust 2023
Contains OS Data
© Crown copyright and database rights 2023.
Ordnance Survey Licence No: 100030835.

Scottish Wildlife Trust
Harbourside House
110 Commercial Street
Edinburgh, EH6 6NF

Scale at A4: 1:75,000

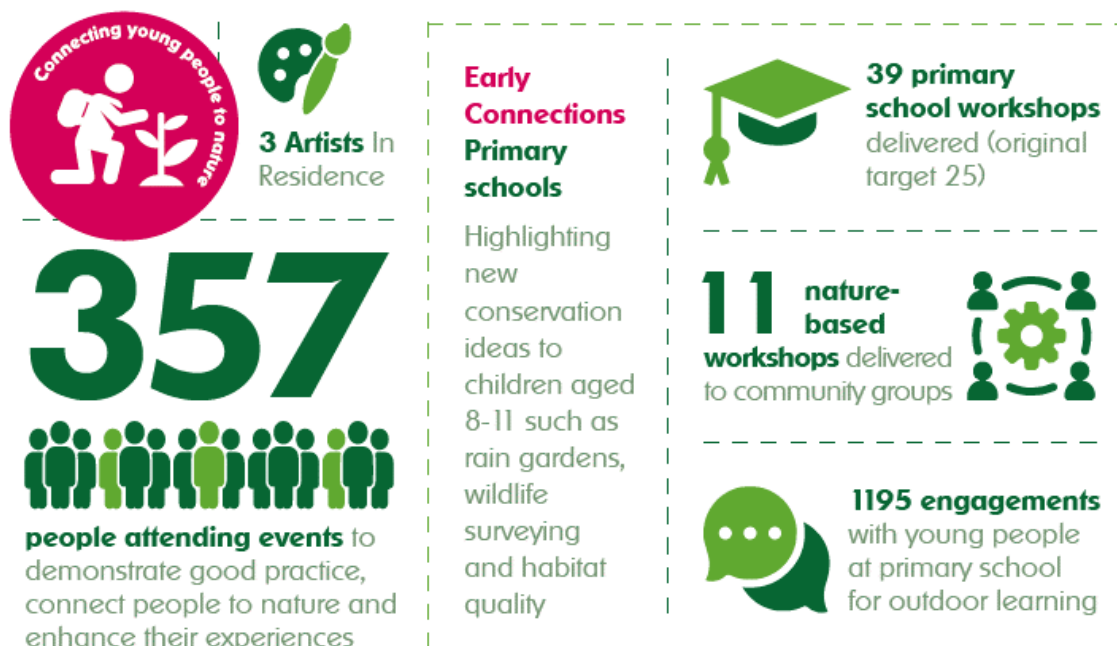
26/09/2023

Connecting (Young) People to Nature (CYPN)

NLHF outcomes for this workstream –

- *People have developed skills, learnt about heritage, and volunteered time,*
- *Local areas will be a better place to live, work, play and visit,*
- *Negative environmental impacts will be reduced.*

Early Connections



In the first year, the Project Officer for Young people had delivered workshops on rain gardens to Whitelees Primary School’s primary five, six and seven pupils, as a testing ground for the raingarden installation. These workshops helped to build an idea of how an interactive raingarden would function in a school setting - and be educational at the same time. With two workshops ready to go, the next stage was the recruitment of the Learning Assistant to expand to other primary schools, while the Project Officer focused on the High Schools and College.

Early Connections sessions were planned to be delivered to all schools in the spring of 2020. The first Learning Assistant (LA) had just been recruited, trained, and was booking schools when the pandemic hit and stopped us from delivering. The Learning Assistant role had been scoped as a fixed-term contract of thirty-two hours per annum, however it quickly became evident that, if this role was to accomplish the full objective this was not sufficient.

The pandemic gave us an opportunity to examine this further, as the first Learning Assistant resigned, due to gaining a new job with better hours. After gaining approval from the funder, we recruited for a part time Learning Assistant and, to date, have reached 1,195 young people through 39 primary school sessions, exceeding the target of reaching 600 children. They also delivered nature-based workshops to community groups, wildlife walks for the wider public, and contributed to the delivery of Career Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and group leaders.

In 2023, in a slightly amended role, the Connecting People to Nature Project Officer was approached by a local nursery after seeing an advert on Facebook for a pond dipping event we ran during the

Easter school holidays. The nursery teacher was keen to see if we could lead a similar session for a small group of children aged three to four years old. The Project Officer – along with our trainee – delivered a two-hour session at St Maurice’s Pond, including pond-dipping, a bug and beastie hunt, and nature crafts. Many of the children were delighted to find tadpoles with one exclaiming “**wow, wow, wow**” upon finding them.



Early connections

Rain garden workshops with pupils from Whitelees Primary School, learning how to slow the flow and identify locations in their school grounds that are prone to flooding. These students were totally switched on and debating where the worst spots of flooding were because they remembered their friends getting stuck and losing a welly.

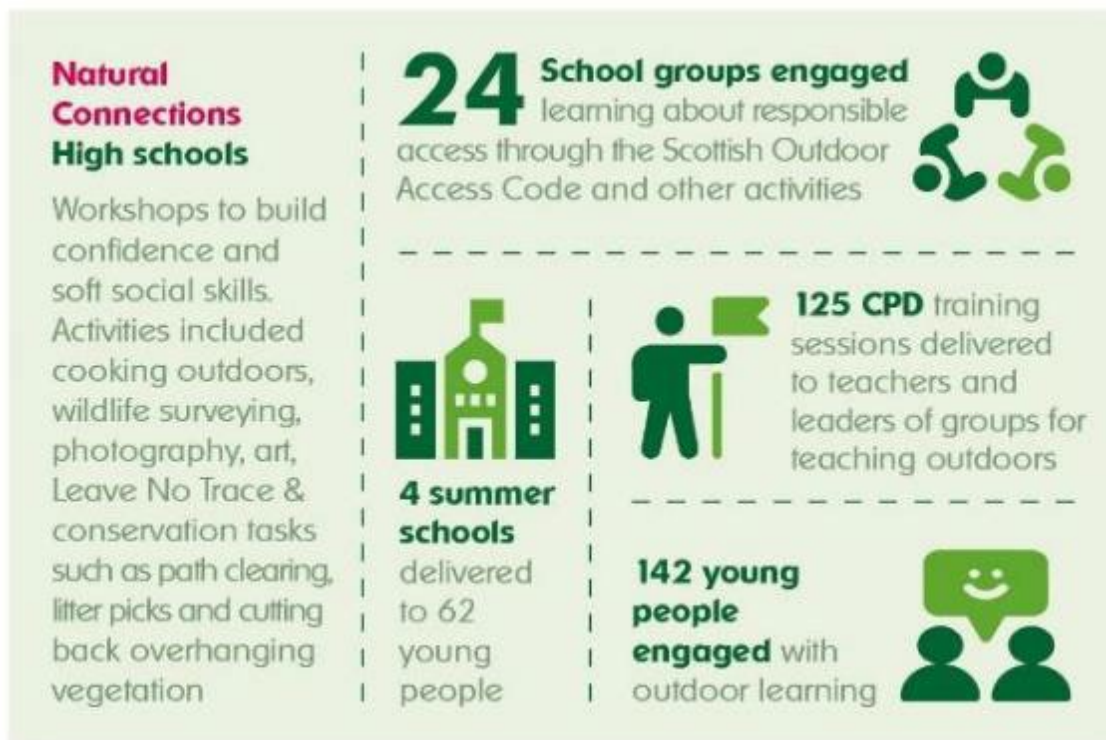


Nursery pond dipping sessions

Children from a local nursery being wow, wow, wowed by the beasties that you can find in a pond dip. Loads of tadpoles, dragonfly and damselfly nymphs to be found.

Image © Jamie McDermaid

Natural Connections



Natural Connections was our education programme, working with students at risk of disengaging at high school. Working with a small group of teenagers at sites adjacent to, or within a short walking distance from their schools, they learned about wildlife, habitats, conservation techniques and, largely, about themselves.



Natural Connections 2019

Students from Cumbernauld Academy gaining the John Muir Discover Award. These students participated through litter picks, shelter building, promoting the greenspace to their peers, and requesting sustainable change in the cafeteria to reduce food waste and throughout the school to recycle.

The programme was set up to build confidence and soft life skills such as communications, critical thinking, team and independent working, to give them transferable skills to take forward on their journey through employment after school. Staff worked with 3rd and 4th year pupils to deliver twelve, two-hour sessions over an academic year (twenty-four hours in total) which also demonstrated the seasons, the challenges of these seasons, and asked them how to address these challenges by

adapting and planning. Students also gained the 'Discover John Muir Award' for completing the twenty-eight hours required, ensuring that some work had also to be carried out in class time.

The Project Officer delivering Natural Connections had a significant challenge to overcome in the first year of Creating Natural Connections. Schools we worked with previously, during Engaging Communities, no longer had the staff or funding to allow for a teacher to be out for a two-hour period with a small group of students. Other groups had to be approached to ensure we would be able to deliver what we said we could.

We were very fortunate that North Lanarkshire Active Learning, via Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), were looking for activities such as ours for young people, so began a partnership that led to CNC surpassing their four-year target in the first year. The first year of any programme that finds itself working with schools for a full school year, needs to wait until the new year term in August to ensure continuity of students. With DYW project staff, we were able to work with them straight away, providing the project with a stream of young people to engage with.



Natural Connections 2019

Students from North Lanarkshire's Active Learning group -Developing the Young Workforce teams.

Clearing an overgrown path making it safer for residents to walk along. The vegetation encroachment was creating a trip hazard and the hard work from these young men removed that risk, they also helped to cut back the overhanging vegetation removing striking hazards.

"Thank you so much for clearing this for us, it is a path we used to use a lot, but it was getting so overgrown. Now I can take the dog to the park and not trip while doing so, you have made such a difference". Resident from Westfield area

We also worked with Prince's Trust students at the New College Lanarkshire and connected both groups to the Unlocking Community Capacity Officer. This gave them the opportunity to take part in volunteer tasks and the Wild Ways Well officer gave them the knowledge to build techniques which could help them to look after their own mental health - as well as building confidence and soft skills through the knowledge gained via the Connecting Young People to Nature Officer. To date, there are 27 educational packs on our website for schools and group leaders to access, with some schools in North Lanarkshire also having our CPD packs on their intranet systems for future use.

Even though the targets for the four years had been met, Covid-19 was still very disruptive. The disconnect from schools was difficult to recover from: once staff were able to get back outdoors and, with indoors elements not being possible, the full year long Natural Connections programme was not

able to be delivered again for the remainder of the CNC project. This also meant students would no longer qualify for the John Muir Award. As project staff changed, the programme adapted to ensure young people would still get as much as they could from participating.

With local greenspaces becoming the safe refuge, thanks to social distancing, we were finding that whilst people were connecting with nature once again, they were doing so in a fashion that was damaging towards the environment. Crowds of young people were congregating in large numbers in reserves and parks where they were hidden from view. This brought its own problems through increased and intense footfall, increases in fire damage, litter, fly tipping and, sadly, vandalism. Witnessing this, CNC staff decided to deliver the newly branded Scottish Outdoor Access Code, from NatureScot, to the students which promoted positive messaging about responsible access.



Early Connections 2023

Pupils from Abronhill Primary School learning about responsible access and exploring the Oak Trail prior to the activity roundels being installed. The children chose the oak as the subject for this route. Learning Assistant Zara, linked the schools' activities with the interpretation and helped us gain an idea of activities to use on the trail. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code became very relevant in recent years.

"I am sorry to hear the project has come to an end, we had hoped to be working with you this term. I am however excited to hear about the activity trail, as we use that area a lot for Forest Schools and other outdoor lessons." - Jane Stocks, Headteacher of Abronhill Primary School

*"I am so glad we managed to work together on your projects, getting outside is so important for everyone, but especially young people who don't fit the standard method of learning. They are all incredible individuals, but they don't see that. Mental health is vitally important for them, your way of doing things removes that stigma, I hope to be able to work with you again in the future!".
Katie MacIntosh (formerly Princes Trust tutor now Mental Health Coordinator both positions held at New College Lanarkshire Cumbernauld Campus.*

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Training

The target of 160 teachers from primary schools and high schools remained the same from the start of the project to the end, with no changes due to the pandemic. In hindsight, this is something that should have been considered. Teachers were only able to take up CPD training in their bubbles: these were small groups of four to five teachers at a time for two to three hours of CPD delivery. These smaller groups hampered our ability to reach our targets for delivery of CPD sooner, and a lot of time was put into trying to source other groups who could participate. It also added pressure and stress to staff who were working tirelessly to achieve their other goals. By the end of Creating Natural Connections, 125 people had received training. The target would have been met, if not exceeded, if it weren't for a large group of approximately 40 student teachers cancelling at the last minute at the same time the Learning Assistants role was at an end. By this time, the Project Officer for Young People had already left following her resignation for another role.



CPD session – Twilight session held at Condorrat Primary School

Teaching staff were taught how to deliver bush crafts, including the safe use of Kelly Kettles and the toasting of marshmallows to their pupils. Building shelters and hammocks also made the session a highlight of their day, with much enjoyment had by all and a session to remember.

Summer Schools

Over the four years, four summer schools were delivered to 62 young people, who were transitioning between primary to high school. This offered them a taste of the school grounds and a week of activities organised via the Home School Partnership Officers. It looked like this would be a task in years two and three that would have to be cancelled, but due to the perseverance of the new Project Officer for Young People and the Learning Assistant, three of the sessions were able to be carried out and have their target met.

Wild Play Ranger

During the development phase, we reached out to a company who could deliver ‘Wild Play – Loose Materials’ for us, in conjunction with the Living Landscape, partnering with the local YMCA. At the time we asked if any prerequisites were required for staff to be trained as wild play leaders with the response being “no”. When the time came to organise dates for the training to be delivered, the response had changed to them telling us that more courses would be required. These additional courses were never budgeted for and, at the time of trying to organise this with a full 3.5 years to go, we could not allocate a budget for unknown quantities. It was decided to cancel this task and learn lessons from it.

Events

A large variety of events have been successfully delivered to connect and inspire diverse audiences with nature, including bat walks, a bumblebee ID Day, dawn chorus walks, pond dipping, bug and beastie hunts, tea in the dark and ‘Wild Week’ which hosted Qigong, muck-in days, tours of work in local communities, and art in the park. A celebration evening, bringing community together to share in the achievements of the project, was held at Freedom City Church, an impressive local venue where we shared the Creating Natural Connections film and art from the groups who participated with our Artists in Residence.

On the last day of Wild Week, we held ‘Go Wild’ at St Maurice’s Pond, a fitting site for such an event, as this was the location for the beginning of Creating Natural Connections. Project partners came together to celebrate nature with nature walks, a mini bioblitz, environmental arts and a wonderful production from Rowanbank Environmental Arts and Education performers, with Granny Lichen Leaf looking for her golden tea pot, with the support of tree sprites and tree hopper, Aslan. It was a magical end to a four-year project where many challenges presented themselves and were overcome due to the tenacity and passion of the staff working on the project.



Go Wild at St Maurice’s Pond

Badgemaking is always a firm favourite – what is your favourite wildlife animal?

Green Health and Wellbeing (GHW)

NLHF outcomes for this workstream –

- People have developed skills, learnt about heritage, and volunteered time,
- Local areas will be a better place to live work, play and visit,
- Negative environmental impacts will be reduced.



The Green Health and Wellbeing (GHW) workstream delivered by The Conservation Volunteers, was created to expand upon the successful pilot of Wild Ways Well. Designed in 2015 as a concept and tested in the following years to specific groups of people at risk of poor mental health, this programme became part of the Creating Natural Connections project - with an aim to expand the delivery, and reach more groups and individuals from the community, and to train professionals and demonstrate good practice. Wild Ways Well aligns with the Nature Helping People outcomes of CNC.

As part of the Green Health and Wellbeing workstream, efforts were made to publicise the Wild Ways Well project and demonstrate its techniques and success to other organisations. Talks, presentations workshops and taster sessions were delivered to a variety of local groups within Cumbernauld. Beyond Cumbernauld, presentations and workshops were delivered in locations across Scotland to organisations including TCV, The Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Badgers, Neighbourhood Networks, The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority, North Lanarkshire Council, the NHS, Flourish Dunfermline and NatureScot.

In 2019, the project was invited by NatureScot to deliver a presentation and workshop to the Europarc Federation (representing hundreds of nature-related organisations across the European Union) in Latvia as part of the 2019 Europarc Conference. This was very successful and was followed up by a later online event broadcast by the Europarc Federation. In 2022, the project was invited to deliver a workshop to TCV staff in Northern Ireland to inform their practice and help develop their own green health and wellbeing work. Later in 2022, Project staff delivered a workshop and formed part of the Q&A panel at the NHS Green Health Prescribing Forum in Midlothian. We also hosted a visit from staff at the Peak District National Park Authority who were setting up their own green health project and wanted to see what Creating Natural Connections was delivering.



Based on the New Economics Foundation Five Ways to Wellbeing, participants are encouraged to:

- **BE ACTIVE**
- **CONNECT**
- **GIVE**
- **TAKE NOTICE**
- **LEARN**

Incorporating these into our daily routine helps everyone live happier, healthier lives. Spending time outdoors in amongst nature and wild places helps, too!

Scientists have shown that playing and learning outdoors helps children (and adults!) to be happier, and healthier. It also helps with things like confidence, creativity, imagination, learning and memory.

Playing outdoors helps people to get fit, sleep better and enjoy life. It also helps families to bond together and make memories that will last a lifetime.

Wild Ways Well Health and Wellbeing programme

The WWW programme was offered to anyone at risk of poor mental health in two streams of open and closed group sessions.

Open Groups

These sessions were advertised to local groups. We placed posters in libraries and with our partners at Sanctuary Housing via the accommodation they provide and via our social media pages. The open group attendees would meet every week to walk, chat, carry out an activity and then return to the point of origin – a predetermined safe place for the group to meet. These open groups were very well received with most sessions being fully subscribed. The open group was an ongoing programme, unlike other wellbeing projects, where participants are only allowed to participate for 12 weeks and are unable to return for another block.

Closed groups

Closed sessions were organised for participants at higher risk and those in need of increased safeguarding measures. These sessions occurred as blocks of 6, 12 or 20 weeks (duration dependant on group's needs) with the option to return if further sessions were required by attendees.

Due to the continuing stigma attached to mental health, we refrained from taking photographs of attendees to protect them from negative influences. Photographs of the backs of heads or hands doing activities were acceptable to the participants if there were no identifiable features. Consideration of this should always be remembered for the safeguarding of attendees, one of the first priorities we should have when running such programmes.

A total of 24 groups have engaged with WWW, with 234 participants covering both open and closed groups. Eleven greenspaces have been mapped, showing the routes taken by participants, which paints a picture of the linkages between the urban areas and greenspaces, and are incredibly informative.

WELCOME

Cumbernauld Living Landscape is running a programme of fun and free outdoor sessions open to adults looking to improve their mental wellbeing. Whilst out amongst the trees, parks and reserves participants get a chance to slow down, relax, enjoy being in the company of other like-minded people, and participate in a variety of environmental and conservation activities structured around the **Five Ways to Wellbeing**.

JOIN IN

The Wild Ways Well open group meets on Thursdays at 12:30pm.

If you would like to join us, get in touch and we'll answer any questions you may have and arrange a meeting place. We also run regular weekend and evening sessions, check our website for details.

We run closed groups for people referred to us by other organisations, where participants work through a 12-week programme together. Contact us if you would like to discuss creating a Wild Ways Well closed group.



Cumbernauld Living Landscape is a partnership between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, Sanctuary Scotland, the James Hutton Institute and TCV - The Conservation Volunteers.

cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk
 5-7 Napier Way, Wardpark North, Cumbernauld, G68 0EH
 T 01236 617113
 E cumbernauldll@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk
 f [CumbernauldLivingLandscape](#)
 @WildCumbernauld

Partners:








Funders:






WILD WAYS WELL



OUTDOOR WELLBEING SESSIONS

THE FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

The Five Ways to Wellbeing is an internationally recognised framework for promoting good mental health that is used by organisations all over the world, including the NHS.

- 

Be active Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.
- 

Connect Meet new people. Connect with the people, with wildlife and the nature that's all around us.
- 

Give Give yourself time to be in nature. Give something back by sharing experiences and undertaking conservation tasks.
- 

Take notice Note the changing cycles of life. Use your senses. Listen to the birds, smell the flowers, live in the moment.
- 

Learn Identify plants and wildlife, try new crafts, learn new skills. Discover things about nature and about yourself.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

We take a short walk (around 20 mins) to a local nature reserve where we explore the environment and connect with the nature around us.

Activities include outdoor arts and crafts, learning practical skills like shelter building and fire making or wildlife activities such as mammal tracking and listening to birdsong.

We always take time to recharge our batteries while we sit and chat over a hot drink brewed on an outdoor kettle.



WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING?
 All you need to bring is yourself plus sturdy footwear and clothes suitable for the Scottish weather. We'll provide all tools and equipment - and the tea, coffee and biscuits!



"I used to stay in the countryside but never ventured outside unless it was to the pub. I then moved to Cumbernauld and got involved in Wild Ways Well to improve my mental health, not only has my life greatly improved but I also now have a much greater appreciation for nature and the outdoors. If it wasn't for Wild Ways Well I would never have connected with nature, or myself."

Grant, Wild Ways Well open group participant

An example of the Wild Ways Well leaflet used at events pre covid to advertise what WWW is, how we deliver it and who the programme is for.

31 | Page

Wild Ways Well CPD training

Career Professional Development (CPD) sessions have been delivered to professionals and groups to enable them to deliver a similar programme to their clients. One example of this was a day when the whole team came together to run a session at Chatelherault Country Park. We delivered WWW CPD to 200 NHS professionals, at this dip-in, 'taster session' day, with simple activities such as tea tasting, sound mapping, clay guardian modelling and discussions on delivery methods being very well received by all. This was pre-Covid and an encouraging start to the Wild Ways Well programme. Since then, 11 WWW training sessions have been held over the past four years surpassing the total of eight in the project plan.



Chatelherault Country Park CPD Day to 200 NHS professionals

Savour the flava – tea-tasting session on mindfulness.

Wild Ways Well Events

There are times when it is extremely difficult for an individual to take that first step outside and join a group such as Wild Ways Well; it takes them well outside their comfort zone. To counter this, we offered short events as tasters and added more later, due to high demand. Guided walks will always draw a group of people together, and offering a variety of different topics helps to cover a lot of interests. An individual may only want to know their way about a reserve but will also absorb information about the wildlife they may encounter and the best routes to take. This is covered in a guided walk as generic information.

What is added through WWW events are the *stories* we tell about the species we find (**keep learning**), the opportunity for people to add their stories and understanding (**connect**), they may wish to take part in picking up litter in a discrete area (**give**), while noting why the area is special (**take notice**) and all doing so while walking (**be active**). Each is a single step to improving wellbeing.

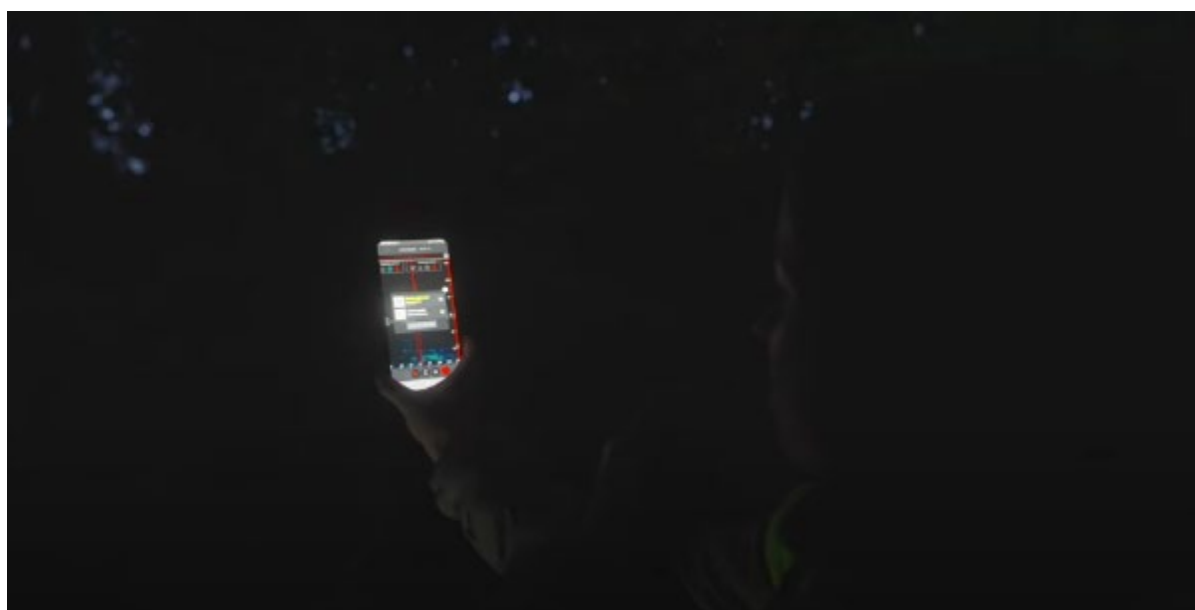
Once these five steps are pointed out to them, they then realise that the WWW sessions are no different to the walks they were attending. That understanding reduces their fears and welcomes

them to new topics to discover and explore. Twenty-five WWW special events were held, ranging from a winter tree ID session to bat walks, with many participants joining the WWW open sessions at later dates. There were three events held specifically for Neighbourhood Networks including tree planting, team building and an open day to facilitate staff and encourage participation from their clients. These events gave the staff a greater understanding of WWW and how they could be adapted for their clients. Other events included winter and summer solstice, Easter, and weekend events, which we ran out of normal hours to engage different people and to allow the attendance of those who were working during the week.

During the gap between the two lockdowns, we held two sessions, one for families and the other specifically for parents.

“Lockdown hasn’t affected everyone equally. These families have been stuck indoors, sometimes in very small houses without gardens. Giving them access to events like this outdoors at a time where most people weren’t giving them chance has been so important.”

CLD worker with North Lanarkshire Council



Wild Ways Well - bat walk

We have found our bat walks are very well received with participants squealing with excitement at seeing their first bat – or maybe that is just the staff.

Wild Ways Well and Covid-19

As alluded to earlier in the report, the team changed their working practices to fit around the restrictions. It was vitally important to maintain Wild Ways Well in some format - especially at a time when everyone was being kept from meeting in public and remaining isolated indoors, and only being allowed out for short periods of time. People subject to loneliness and lack of social contact were being enforced to remain so. Wild Ways Well responded to this by meeting via Zoom sessions, where they shared their encounters with wildlife spotted during their rare, but isolated, walks outdoors. The group members told and listened to stories, learned more about wildlife identification, and connected to each other as a support network. For many, this became an essential part of their week to see them through.

As restrictions eased, small groups were able to go back out, but it was also requested that the online sessions stayed for those who couldn't travel outside their five-kilometre zone. It quite simply became a lifeline for those individuals.

"I am so glad we still met up each week even if it was just online, without those WWW sessions I really don't know what I would have ended up doing, your sessions kept me sane."

WWW participant living outwith the Cumbernauld area.

Paid traineeships

Six paid traineeships were hosted against the original target of four. These traineeships have been stepping-stones for those taking part in new roles in employment, with most of them remaining in conservation. One trainee enjoyed her time with the schools so much she applied to become a primary school teacher and is now (2023) in her placement year in a primary school, here in Cumbernauld. Two trainees have moved on to work with our partners TCV, another is now working with a high school in Stirling, delivering employability to school students. Another left to become an ecologist in Cornwall. The last trainee is now a sessional worker with TCV and is volunteering with the Scottish Wildlife Trust as the West Central Scotland Volunteer and a Wildlife Watch volunteer.

Training varied for each trainee, depending on the role they were working with and what their preference was, in order to help them gain the experience required for future employment. Training included first aid at work/outdoor first aid (depending on preference), ride-on grass cutting training, brushcutting, scything, species identification, tree planting, coppicing, silviculture, risk assessment/health and safety, and safeguarding.

The traineeships also helped Project Officers, especially in instances where the safeguarding of both staff and participants was at risk due to the partners' policies. With the addition of the trainee, these sessions could continue with the trainee getting the maximum benefit of the session being carried out, learning on the ground.



Three Creating Natural Connection trainees.

Katie, Rozelle, and Alex enjoying a brew after a hard day of being outside in nature learning new skills and sharing their knowledge too.

Unlocking Community Capacity

NLHF outcomes for this workstream

- *People have developed skills, learnt about heritage, and volunteered time,*
- *Local areas will be a better place to live work, play and visit,*
- *Negative environmental impacts will be reduced.*



The Unlocking Community Capacity (UCC) Officer (based with The Conservation Volunteers) began in the early summer of 2019. Recruitment took a while, and this delayed building the network of volunteers at the beginning of the project. However, this was remedied very quickly, when the UCC Officer set up a stall in a shop in the Antonine Centre. Within two to three months the volunteer days were over-subscribed; a great start to the project. The role of the UCC Officer was to build a volunteer base for weekday and weekend volunteering, organise and host the events, build capacity within the community, and deliver training for groups and individuals interested in learning new skills. This workload became overwhelming, and the team decided to share the events between each officer, thereby widening the audience reach and type. Unlocking Community Capacity aligns with both People helping people and Nature Helping People outcomes of CNC.

Nature Ninja Volunteers

An amazing 960 hours of time has been donated by the Nature Ninjas volunteers with a total of 261 volunteer days being held carrying out tasks such as path clearing, scrub removal from peat bogs, litter picking, tree planting, tree guard removal, invasive non-native species removal and installing mulch mats around newly planted trees to protect them from weed encroachment. While the improvements to our woodlands, peatbogs and wetlands have been achieved via the major habitats and access works, the Natura Ninjas volunteers have contributed their time and love of nature to achieve even more than what we first set out to do. Without them, the project would be good but

with them, the project has become incredible. We have learned from them as they have from us and, together, we have grown and improved our greenspaces for people and wildlife on another level.

Nature Ninja volunteering

Two weekday conservation days were offered for those interested in volunteering with 222 sessions being held over the past four years (at least one of which was halted due to Covid-19). There was a group of volunteers who had already been working with the Living Landscape during the Engaging Communities project (before CNC) at weekends. This group base helped to build a bank of volunteers who were aware of some of the tasks and could act as mentors to people new to volunteering and conservation. Interestingly, many of the weekend volunteers joined the weekday and refrained from attending the weekends after that.

Volunteers met every Tuesday and Wednesday 10am to 4pm and once a month on a Sunday with a pop in-pop out set up, for those who maybe only had enough time to meet for an hour or two but still felt the benefit from the social element and received training. Weekdays were easier to adjust if other commitments meant having to cancel or postpone.



Big Spring Clean 2023

Working in partnership with Keep Scotland Beautiful and the community, the UCC Officer (bottom left) hosted a Big Spring Clean removing 68 bags of litter from Seafar Woods Wildlife Reserve, making the reserve safer for wildlife and creating a better experience for visitors.

Events

We projected that we would reach 1,500 people per year for four years, totalling 6,000 people. We estimate that we have only been able to deliver two years of events due to the pandemic halting engagement. This has resulted in a slow delivery and uptake of events as restrictions eased, and accounts for the total of 4,122 people attending events over two workstreams. It is important to add that approximately 99% of these events were ones which we hosted as part of the CNC project, as opposed to reactive requests to attend an event organised by others, such as gala days. It is encouraging to know that there is interest for conservation-based events within the town, with a fondness for bat walks and evening events such as Tea in the Dark.

Training

Training has been offered to local community councils, groups and to individuals who participated with the Nature Ninjas. Sessions such as orchard and wildflower maintenance were carried out with the Village Veggies groups at the Langriggs, to help them look after a small orchard area within the remnants of old medieval gardens. Volunteers have gained training in coppicing, wildflower meadow management, tree planting, first aid and scything. The latter is an activity the volunteers particularly enjoyed even though their muscles were sore the next day, they knew it was for a job well done. On the ground training was delivered each session, too, with volunteers picking up information from the Officers when they described what they were doing and the importance of why they were doing it. Many volunteers felt they were picking up more skills this way, as they were actively participating with the task and found they had a passion for it.



Volunteer training
Meadow management isn't just about cutting and lifting, it is also understanding what species are already on site and helping reduce the sward by supplementary sowing of Yellow rattle, where appropriate and planting plug plants to reinforcing what is already there

Networking

Throughout the life of the project, the aim was to create a community network whilst connecting people with nature. Although our public-facing meetings were stalled by the pandemic, we were still able to attend and conduct online meetings with the Cumbernauld Forum to keep up to date with what was happening in the local community. Our connection to Cumbernauld and Carbrain Hub, Cumbernauld Resilience, and the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Baby Bank helped us to connect to these groups and relate between the groups how we were all supporting the community and each other during the lockdowns. Developing and delivering booklets that connected people to nature helped residents feel a connection to place - and gave families activities to conduct while we were all at home.

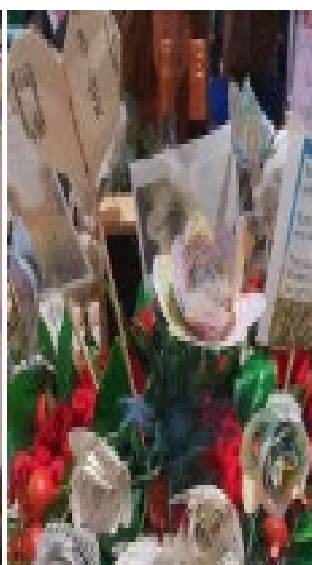
The team also attended events such as Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire's (VANL) Act Now event to bring communities together to discuss climate change and the challenges that presents. As restrictions eased, the team were able to deliver presentations to local groups such as the Cumbernauld Gardening Group, to make them aware of volunteering opportunities, and the Lothian Green Social Prescribing Forum to showcase the project's successes and inspire similar projects.

Keep Scotland Beautiful – Beautiful Scotland Award

One of the best tools available to us for connecting groups together was Keep Scotland Beautiful's 'Beautiful Scotland Award,' which the Living Landscape have organised for the past seven years. Here, we connect groups together to produce a portfolio of works completed for the three pillars of Horticulture, Sustainability and Community. Linking these groups in this way lets them be independent, show the differences and similarities they each have, while improving their local greenspaces.

Cumbernauld's 'Bloomin' Wild' entry has won successive Silver Gilt, with wins in the discretionary categories for Biodiversity and Best Overall Small City (based on population size). These awards are a great achievement for the local community, delivered by the local community too. Creating Natural Connections has given us the opportunity to be the cog that links it all together.

Our final entry in 2023 saw the Cumbernauld's Bloomin' Wild receive Silver Gilt, Overall Best Small City category and the Health and Wellbeing discretionary award. These awards were received with participants of Cumbernauld's Bloomin' Wild, attending the gala evening on the 8th of September at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. An evening of celebration and thanks for all the hard work and dedication was held for the groups and individuals that contributed over the past year. See images overleaf.



A night of celebration

Facebook post taken from Carbrain and Hillcrest Community Council page, celebrating the work of Cumbernauld Living Landscape and the Nature Ninjas, Village Veggies, Pride in Carbrain, Craigieburn Community Gardens, Airdriehead Allotments, Kyle Community Gardens, Seafar and Ravenswood Community Council, Kildrum Community Council, Cumbernauld Village Community Council, Cumbernauld, and Carbrain Community Hub, Images © W Homer

It has been a pleasure to organise the entries for the award and a superb way for the project to be able to connect people together for mutual benefit and growth. Over the past year, the Project Manager has stressed that with Creating Natural Connection ending, for the awards and recognition to continue, the groups and individuals will need to come together and organise the entry themselves. We are incredibly thankful that they have agreed to do this and have seen each group pick up on demonstrating what they have been doing through their social media feeds. We wish them good luck in the future and know that they have a solid foundation to carry on from.



Two representatives of Cumbernauld's Bloomin' Wild accepting the Beautiful Scotland awards

Artists in Residence (AiR)

Three Artists in Residence were appointed in the last few months of the project. Postponement due to the pandemic gave us the opportunity to utilise this objective as a tool to celebrate Creating Natural Connections. The AiR were linked to the Beautiful Scotland entries and, primarily, to connect young people to nature and the entry via art. The theme of the 2023 Beautiful Scotland entry was mental health and wellbeing, so we saw this as an opportunity to include the Wild Ways Well participants, too. For our last week of events, we also brought in Rowanbank Environmental Arts and Education to deliver two performances at our 'Go Wild' day at St Maurice's Pond.



Local artist, Kristine J Walker, led outdoor and indoor art sessions with a Cumbernauld Brownies group. This session took place at Cumbernauld Glen.

Finding a group of young people became a challenge as the young person workstream had concluded in June 2022 after exceeding all but one target. We were very fortunate to have, as our trainee, a Brown Owl who led the 16th Cumbernauld troupe. We invited them to work with local artist, Kristine Walker, to co-design a piece of work that would tell the story of Cumbernauld. The children and artist narrowed in on trees, a very apt topic for the town and with our sharing of knowledge it was narrowed further to 'Native trees please!'.

Kristine Walker – Kristine Walker Artist and 16th Cumbernauld Brownies

Kristine created a tree that would house canvases at different levels to denote what lived in a tree and where. The children decorated leaves for the tree and wildlife for the different levels with pinecones, pipe-cleaners and google eyes. Their idea of native trees quickly disappeared because they loved the shape of non-native tree leaves, but they still learned about the importance of the right tree in the right place and the wildlife supported by native trees, but they decided to take artistic licence for their own works. A valuable lesson for us was that children will find their own way and it's important to let them do so; connecting to nature should be fun and not prescriptive, and compromise is possible, especially with art.

"I had fun, I like the trees in the woods they were so tall, and the marshmallows tasted good. I didn't know mice could climb trees, I've made a hedgehog and am taking it home, thank you, thank you, thank you." (Along with clapping – the brownie way of giving thanks)

"Our wee one has been buzzing about the art sessions with you and Kristine, she is so chuffed with her pinecone hedgehog, he is right beside her when she goes to sleep."

Parents of one of the Brownies



The final product!

The 16th Cumbernauld Brownies, helped Kristine Walker decorate the tree and learned about the creatures who call native trees home.

We displayed the artworks at our end of project celebration, which the Brownies attended with their families, and they were presented with a gift voucher for their hard work.

Katherine Gallacher – Braw Artworks and Wild Ways Well

Katherine teamed up with the WWW open group to *actively* explore Seafar Wood Wildlife Reserve, *taking notice* of the plants in the reserve. They *connected* to nature by taking leaves and some flowers and ferns, without disturbing or removing too much from the area, meaning the plants will continue to flourish each year. Back in the Trust's Cumbernauld office, they *learned* the art of Cyanotype printing and leaf printing.

They created artworks which were framed for them to take home after the celebration evening and they also created the collective artworks of cyanotypes on fragments of maps of Cumbernauld (seen on the next page), and these have been retained by the Living Landscape to use in future presentations and talks to show the effectiveness of art and the environment for health and wellbeing. The group *gave* back to the community through exhibiting and sharing their work at the celebration evening, held at Freedom City Church in June.

We have learned that a lot of residents love maps and the history around the town, but little of this is known unless those individuals interested are linked on social media. A new project looking at the mapping of the town and how the landscape has changed might be the hook to bring people not normally associated with conservation.

"I can't believe I created this work; I did not think for a second I was artistic, thank you for the opportunity to try."

Wild Ways Well participant.

Exhibiting the art works

We held our last celebration evening on the 22nd of June 2023, to thank the community, partners, and organisations for joining us on our journey to create natural connections. This seemed a fitting time to exhibit the artworks and final film by Vass Media. Over the course of the evening, short presentations were delivered along with the premiere of the film and guests were then invited to view the artworks and collect refreshments from the buffet.

Parents of the Brownies were stunned to see what their children had achieved, with the WWW participants also delighted to see their art works framed and the collective pieces on display. The exhibition solidified they had, in fact, created a beautiful piece of art, an achievement none of them had expected to do or feel within themselves.



Participants of Wild Ways Well created these cyanotypes, under the guidance of Katherine Gallacher, with items responsibly gathered from nature. It built confidence and, simultaneously, was a way to connect with nature.

“It is incredible to see everything that you have achieved for the town and the people in it, I never knew you did so much and linked so many groups and people together it has been a real eye opener for me and I think I would have been in the dark if I hadn’t worked with you as a Community Researcher it has been an amazing experience thank you.”

Kirsty Murray - Community researcher

“I would never have been able to attend a day like this [Art in the Park] if your project wasn’t able to offer it for free, it is so therapeutic and what a site [St Maurices Pond] to just sit and paint, Kristine is just an amazing teacher. Who knew we could all create beautiful works of art.”

Participant at Art in the Park

“This session [Cyanotypes with Katherine (Air)] has been brilliant, you can get so many different shades depending on how long the piece is left in the sun, I just love my misty mountains.”

Participant with WWW and Artist in Residence

Rowanbank Environmental Arts and Education – Go Wild

Rowanbank is a collective of environmentally-minded people who deliver a variety of circus, musical and whimsical performances, connecting people to nature while telling the story of climate change, biodiversity and habitat loss. These can be difficult topics for people to come to terms with and, in some cases, understand. We know this first-hand through our connection with our community. However, the performers at Rowanbank deliver in such a way that wonder is created, difficult terms are accepted as part of a story and are seen in a more positive light, with everyone leaving with an optimistic take-home message – as well as delight upon their faces. Their performances are such a colourful experience, people cannot help but be drawn in, almost like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. There's a fairytale element to what they do.

They delivered two shows at St Maurice's Pond with Azslan, the 12 foot tall treehopper, guiding them around the site to explain about the habitats and biodiversity, while asking the participants to keep an eye out for their golden teapot as Granny LichenLeaf was needing it for her elderflower tea. On the route, participants met with tree sprites, the protector of trees and dryads, who fed you so much information to keep your eyes away from the cup and ball magical act. The fairy of the seasons performed a dance to mark the end of summer, accompanied by her friend on the cello with her haunting cascade of music, it felt like summer was nearing its end.

The participants continued to follow Azslan, discovering Granny Lichenleaf, who initially scared the wits out of the children (mere seconds), but this character became a joy to watch as the children warmed to her after their first assessment. Granny told off the tree sprite for losing the teapot and so the search continued until the group came to the final fairies. One was on a trapeze practicing her flying – she was about to enter a flying competition against the insects, and while she knew she didn't have a chance against the show-off dragonflies, she still felt entering was a worthwhile experience and would be fun to meet new friends – lessons are learned in every aspect of the show. While her friend played the piano, the fairy practiced her moves and, lo and behold, found the teapot high up in a branch! The performance ended with everyone being offered a drink from Granny's teapot, and biscuits and strawberries.

These performances were met with wonder, huge smiles and lots of gratitude from the public for bringing Rowanbank to the event. Whilst they did express enjoyment with the stalls and other activities on the day, these performances were a tough act to follow.



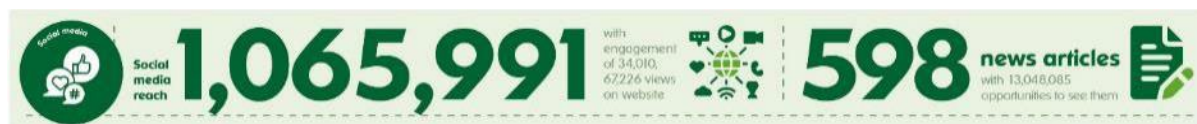
Rowanbank Fairy performer at Go Wild at St Maurice's Pond, June 2023

The question is, how did the piano get into the woods? The answer.... is pure magic!

Image courtesy of © William Lambert

Communications

Reaching the community



Our online and social media statistics demonstrate how effective our methods have been in engaging with our community. We have had a social media reach of 1,065,991 with engagement of 34,010. Across our Facebook page and our YouTube channel, we have had 23,634 views of sixty-one videos, whilst our website has had 67,226 views.

For the duration of the project, we have focused on consistent communication to relay our key messages to the widest audience possible. Social media, weekly articles in the local newspaper, posters in libraries and doctors’ surgeries, public events, pop-up stalls at local events, and our own consultation sessions are all methods we have used to keep the local community informed of – and feeling involved in – our activities.

Even when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, we quickly sought ways to keep speaking to our online audiences, as well as our volunteers and regular group attendees. In-person engagement at this time was impossible, so the team adapted and maintained contact online, through regular Facebook posts, Zoom sessions for Wild Ways Well and Nature Ninjas, and craft workshops.

We also responded to the pandemic by producing and adding many resources to the website. A series of seven activity packs entitled: “Stay Home, Stay Wild” were produced monthly by the team and these contained maps, activities, and wildlife guides about specific areas around the town. Story trails and walking routes were also produced – in addition to daily activities and weekly presentations at this time.

Digital Education packs
27

7 Staying home? Stay wild! books, **10 Wild Ways Well** activities, & **9 Creating Natural Connections Wildlife** booklets

46 Activities for families and children to inspire a connection with nature and local greenspaces

Nature Photo Challenge
There's no reason why nature art or photography can only take place outdoors... have a look around your home what items could you repurpose, what could be seen in a different way?

Without leaving your home photograph...

- A Wild Animal
- Hot and Cold
- A Flower Meadow
- A Nature Reserve—without looking out the window!
- A Tree
- The Wind

Windows on Wildlife
If you can't get outdoors to see wildlife then why not bring the outdoors in to you! All over the world there are thousands of internet connected cameras which have been set up to watch wildlife.

Many of the cameras will also have an attached forum or chatroom where people can discuss what they are watching so it can be a great social activity too.

Some good places to start looking for cameras are...

- www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/things-to-do/watch-wildlife-online
- explore.org/livecams
- www.wildlifetrusts.org/webcams
- www.visitscotland.com/see-do/wildlife/webcams
- www.africam.com/wildlife/index.php

Interacting with nature in this way is good for our minds, we have an instinctive fascination for the lives of other natural living things and connecting with nature, even through a video screen, has been shown to really benefit our mental health.

If you find a great wildlife webcam why not tell us on our social media pages to let others know? We're on twitter as @WildCumbernauld and Facebook as Cumbernauld Living Landscape

cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk

These are examples of some of the activities and resources the team produced during the pandemic. All activities, booklets and resources remain on the Cumbernauld Living Landscape website and are free to download. These downloads also include materials for Wild Ways Well and the CPD training for teachers and group leaders.

When strict rules and regulations were in place, and the future was uncertain for most, these packs offered local people a gateway to enjoy their area, discovering new things about the habitats around them, while escaping the stress of life at that point in time. In fact, these activities were free for all to download and didn't incur any cost to take part. In 2023, the activities and packs have now been rebranded to "Staying Home? Stay Wild" to form part of an impactful digital legacy, still available on our website today, and it is our hope they will remain a useful resource in the future.

Another highlight of our communications agenda was working with Vass Media, an independent videographer, to produce a celebration film to mark the end of Creating Natural Connections. This five-minute film tells the story of CNC, through the voices of the team members and some of the local community groups we worked with during the project.

"Love the video and fantastic work you do to make and keep Cumbernauld beautiful."

Kristine J Walker, Artist in Residence



The film is now on our YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/x37eQnZjCtc>) and has been shared across our social media channels and those of our partners and local community groups. Without doubt, this has proved to be an effective way to spread the word and the work of the project to local community members, and further afield.

"Thank you for everything you do and have done for our community of Cumbernauld; that was lovely to watch and very inspiring."

Comment from one of our Facebook followers.

"I can't believe how green the town is, you see it so clearly on the video, it is stunning, I always thought we were such a drab town with nothing but concrete."

Resident and attendee of the celebration event

Wild Week



St Maurice's Pond was the site for our 'Go Wild' day, the final event of Creating Natural Connections.

Rowanbank Educational Arts performed an interactive environmental circus, which captivated the children and adults in attendance on the day.

Our 'Wild Week' ran from 19th to 24th June 2023, offering people from the local community opportunities to connect with our work and their nearby greenspaces. We offered bat walks, guided walks, art in the park, qigong and community muck-in sessions which were open and free for all to attend.

This week culminated with a 'Go Wild' event at St Maurice's Pond. The day included guided walks, nature crafts, and kids' activities, delivered by our staff and partners. Rowanbank Educational Arts also delivered two interactive, environmental circus performances, reinforcing the importance of looking after our greenspaces and the wildlife living there.

Approximately 185 people attended our final 'Go Wild' day at St Maurice's Pond, engaging with the project and having fun. In our events, we have always endeavoured to educate, inspire and create awareness. We have a duty to inform people of the challenges of our work and the challenges affecting biodiversity, but we always try and temper these facts with fun experiences as much as possible. It's an effective way to get people on board.

Wild Week was going to be an annual occasion throughout the project but, unfortunately, Covid-19 didn't allow us to make this possible.

***"It was a great day, our wee one absolutely loved it."
Go Wild attendee.***

***"I live just over the way and forget about this place [St Maurice's Pond] being here. I used to go to school with you [indicating the Project Manager] we played here when we were kids. It's been a great day for the kids, they will definitely be back for the BMX track and a wander around the pond, next generations eh!"
Long time resident of Westfield***

Evaluation

CNC Project Staff

During the development phase, the original three key outcomes were:

- More people helping nature
- Nature helping more people
- More people helping each other

Evaluations were conducted through four routes: via CNC team, Community Researchers, James Hutton Insitture (JHI) and the independent evaluators Shirley Muir Associates. The CNC team findings are detailed throughout this report.

Community Researchers were recruited from within the community to interview individuals and groups to ask how the project had an impact on them. The interviews were then reviewed and analysed by JHI with the results being fed into their report 'Creating Natural Connections: Outcomes for People' (attached to final submission).

Finally, the report from Shirley Muir Associates ('Final Evaluation Creating Natural Connections') provides an external, independent view on the overall project and its impact, collating all the information from the CNC team, Stakeholders and Project Board together with the JHI Outcomes for People Report.

More people helping nature.

Throughout the life of the project, we have seen large groups of people take action to help nature. From conducting citizen science during events or educational sessions, to delivering change on the ground through the Nature Ninjas, Young people in high schools and Wild Ways Well each have contributed under their attended programmes. There has also been an army of groups who help deliver change in their local areas through the Beautiful Scotland entry. A variety of different monitoring methods have been used to record the impact of each element. Wild Ways Well and Nature Ninja participants surveys being carried out by partners TCV which have then been forwarded on to the independent evaluator Shirley Muir. Evaluations conducted in primary schools and high schools were also forwarded to Shirley and are detailed within her report.

Nature helping more people.

We instinctively know that getting out in fresh air is good for us and increasing studies have shown that our health and wellbeing is also linked to biodiversity levels, with higher biodiversity being shown to improve health and wellbeing. However, we are guilty in the hustle and bustle of life to fail to take action and get outside, and when that occurs our mental health and wellbeing declines. School students, volunteers with the Nature Ninjas and Wild Ways Well participants have gained new skills, created a community network of people who are like-minded and have a desire to maintain good health, both physical and mental.

More people helping each other.

The network of volunteers and participants continues to this day. Daily postings on Facebook show that connections are still there, and discussions seen by the manager show they will continue for some time, with many of the individuals now being firm friends. More groups are also helping each other, and the beauty of this is the organic way this has built from their connections in Creating Natural Connections. We are incredibly proud of what has been achieved with people, for people, and by people for their local greenspaces. We start with small steps, helping each other along the way and in doing so help nature and give it a voice and a hand when needed.

Reflections on the CNC partnership

As we come to the end of the Creating Natural Connections project, it is good practice to reflect on how the partnership worked and identify opportunities for improvement. No one project is perfect, there are tensions which will arise and components of the project that should be celebrated. Project managing at a level such as Creating Natural Connections requires experience and balance – learning from mistakes and celebrating successes.

Partnerships are difficult to coordinate, arranging meetings for example depends on a large group of people from multiple organisations with different demands being free at any one given time. CNC was able to get around this by projecting meetings far into the future for stakeholders and the governance board to ensure as many people could attend as possible.

Project Management was especially challenging during the pandemic, with organisations hosting staff roles having different HR approaches, for example in regard to furlough policies. To help address such challenges in the future, partners have drafted a 'Ways of working' policy to ensure project teams are fully supported and appropriately informed of similarities and differences in host organisation terms and conditions for staff, and staff management roles and responsibilities agreed in advance.

The success of managing and delivering Creating Natural Connections is, in no way to be disputed, down to the team and wider partnership that have delivered all but one habitat and access works (rain gardens) and we have gained valuable knowledge in how we approach design and delivery of novel concepts. Our engagement has hit every target and exceeded most of them bar one, (Career Professional Development for teaching staff due to a last-minute cancellation). The impact we have created will ripple out in the years to come through the network of people who are passionate about their local greenspaces. The biodiversity has improved with the increase in over 13,000 native trees across the town, and improved management of wildflower meadows, and we begin to combat the effects of climate change with the restoration of three urban peatbogs.

Team management was delivered seamlessly at the start of the project, with the team based in the Cumbernauld office, which made day-to-day management easier. This changed massively during Covid-19, and then again as we were coming out of the restrictions, which also aligned with changes of Project Managers. By the time of the last Project Manager, TCV staff were predominantly sited in the TCV Glasgow office, creating geographic and operational distance issues. Future project teams will, where possible, be based out of a single office; staff who are together have each other for support and can brainstorm ideas, keeping our delivery fresh, engaging and fun.

"The project has been through the perfect storm of change and challenges, of which the team overcame, delivered on and will hopefully take good memories of Creating Natural Connections. It is a project the partnership and team should be very proud to be associated with, I am certainly proud of them all and what has been achieved."

Tracy Lambert, CNC Project Manager.

Lessons learned and future opportunities.

Creating Natural Connections team

- 1) **Project Success:** Our approach works! Addressing a range of local needs in a joined-up way: improvements to habitat and access, education, health and wellbeing, volunteering and community. Celebrating the greenspaces of the town and awareness-raising events reaches those within and outwith the town.
- 2) **Partnership working:** Having the landowners in the partnership is key, we cannot be a conservation project operating on its own, it needs joined up thinking and execution. The partnership is able to achieve more under the umbrella of the Cumbernauld Living Landscape as it gives the project impetus. Partners working together towards shared goals through a variety of different delivery mechanisms for the community and nature is huge and should not be taken for granted. The ability to draw in staff from the partners is also a great way to reduce burn out in the core team and help cover sickness and holidays. The partnership with TCV has been crucial in this respect.
- 3) **Local power:** The project needs to be seen as local, people in communities care more for what is happening in their patch than what an organisation is doing nationally, that means having boots on the ground to deliver projects that benefit these local communities. We need to have a seat at every table and attend every event or host amazing ones of our own. We have the ability, knowledge, and passion to do this, but it needs long-term funding (15 years plus) to enable us to build year on year and demonstrate the change across the environment like the lifespan of a tree. We are too used to quick fixes and nature takes time to be restored, monitored, and maintained.
- 4) **Staff turnover:** The level of staff turnover seen within the project has been unprecedented. Reducing the negative impacts of such changes requires robust handover procedures.
- 5) **Digital technology:** The partnership experienced difficulty with the methods of reporting and differing systems, so it is imperative that this is addressed from the outset in future projects.
- 6) **Monitoring and evaluation:** It is crucial to have measurable outcomes set out early, they must be standardised and repeatable to be robust. This needs to be set out in a development phase agreed with partners and then implemented from the outset.
- 7) **Project reporting:** This needs to be simplified across the partnership to reduce time wasted on double reporting. Ideally, it should also echo the funder reporting mechanism to create a smooth transition and reduce any disparity between reporting methods.
- 8) **NHS representation:** Wild Ways Well required buy-in from the NHS for green prescribing, we saw the effect the project had on the 200 NHS professionals, and we have shown year-on-year that our approach works. This needs to be scaled up. That may require WWW to be set as a national standard with the project demonstrating best practice from our delivery, sharing that to other organisations and inviting organisations to come to us to demonstrate best practice on the ground.
- 9) **Location of staff base:** Future CLL projects must have the staff based in the Cumbernauld office in accordance with the partnership/contribution agreement. Staff who are together have each other for support and can brainstorm ideas keeping our delivery fresh, engaging and fun. This was demonstrated in the early stages as noted previously.

Legacy plan

Ref	Project name	Lead partner	Maintenance plan
Access works			
A1	Broadwood Loch Loop - access works on three paths around Broadwood Loch and woodland	NLC	Routine maintenance will be carried out during growing season to cut back encroaching vegetation and other general maintenance will be carried out where defects occur.
A3	Cumbernauld Glen Links - Access removal of old wooden steps and path, with improvements to core path	NLC	
A5	Mid Forest Links to Palacerigg - Access improvements linking Forest Wood to Palacerigg and upgrading a path at Mid Forest	NLC	
A7	Luggiebank Wood - Road crossing and upgrade of entrance under council ownership	NLC	
A9	Netherwood Way path upgrade – upgrade of collapsed section of path and extension to access play area from school route	NLC	
A11	Ravenswood path link - new path to link the ash pitches to the nature reserve	NLC	
A12	Seafar Woods access improvements - upgrade core path improving the surface and opening access	NLC	
A14	St Maurice's Pond dipping platform and boardwalk - improvements to path network and installation of new boardwalk	NLC	

Ref	Project name	Lead partner	Maintenance plan
Interpretation			
A01	Interpretation Suite	SWT / NLC	SWT Reserves Manager to add checking and maintaining to interpretation on Trust land as part of routine maintenance.
A01	Roundel installation	SWT /NLC	NLC Forestry and access manager to add checking and maintaining to interpretation on NLC land as part of routine maintenance.
Habitat works			
H1	Community Rain Gardens demonstration	-	Cancelled
H2a	Urban peat bog restoration	NLC	NLC Management and Maintenance plans - Conservation and Biodiversity dept
H3c	Wildlife Meadows	NLC	
H3f	Cumbernauld Community Park - Heritage wildlife management	NLC	
H4h	Reedbed creation at Mosswater – changed to woodland works, approved by NLHF	NLC	
H4i	Forest Wood Wildlife Reserve Fire Pond Restoration	SWT	SWT - Long Term Forestry Plan 2011-31 SWT - Long Term Forestry Plan 2022-42
H6	Re-wilding Cumbernauld Glen	SWT	SWT - Long Term Forestry Plan 2011-31 SWT - Long Term Forestry Plan 2022-42
H7-8-9	Glencryan Woods & Landfill – Restoring a key native woodland link	NLC	Cumbernauld Woodland Management Plan zip file
H10	Low Wood Native Woodland Creation	NLC	Cumbernauld Woodland Management Plan zip file

Ref	Project name	Lead partner	Maintenance plan
Habitat works cont...			
H17	Broadwood, Westfield, Balloch Woodland Management	NLC	Cumbernauld Woodland Management Plan zip file Broadwood WIG_WIAT_Final Ops Plan
H23	Landscape scale INNS co-ordination	NLC	No Maintenance required; the survey was to inform the creation of a Management plan a future project.
H24	Seafar Woods - safeguarding urban woods	SWT	SWT - Long Term Forestry Plan 2011-31 SWT - Long Term Forestry Plan 2022-42
Tools			
Hand tools	Variety of hand tools and equipment bought by GHW and UCC Project Officers	TCV	All tools have been checked against the reporting HUB and one procured via the TCV budget are now with TCV Glasgow
Events equipment	Variety of events equipment procured by PM, CYPN and Learning Assistant	SWT	Events equipment is being stored in Cumbernauld and will be available for use in future projects or for loan within the organisation. Legacy tools have been purchased and will aid the Reserve Manager in maintaining the access in future years.
Vehicles			
Branded vehicles	Nissan Leaf and Citroën Berlingo	SWT	Vehicles are retained by the Trust
Digital Assets			
Social media	Standard phase out of social media	SWT	With project staff no longer in post and no further events planned, it is not possible or reasonable to maintain the social media element for CLL. A gradual phase down was in effect from June and no further postings are planned until future funding is gained.
Website	Legacy of Communications	SWT	The Trust is committed to maintaining the CLL website for 5 years following the end of CNC. The website has been made future proof, ensuring the public are aware of the end of the project and can still access all the activities CNC created, including the teaching packs.

THANK YOU!





Cumbernauld Living Landscape is a partnership between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, Sanctuary Scotland, the James Hutton Institute and TCV – The Conservation Volunteers.

cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk

5-7 Napier Way, Wardpark North,
Cumbernauld, G68 0EH

E cumbernauld@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk

f CumbernauldLivingLandscape

t @WildCumbernauld

Partners



Funders



Cumbernauld Living Landscape is led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, a Scottish registered charity (charity no. SC005792) and a company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland (registered no. SC040247). Wild Ways Well is provided by TCV, registered as a charity in Scotland (SC039302).