

Climate for Communities

Year 1 Learning Report June 2026

Our aim is for people in Brighton and Hove who experience poverty and exclusion to feel that “climate action is for me.”



Prepared by Cat Fisher, Learning and Evaluation Lead on behalf of Climate:Change.
With huge thanks to all the partners who co-created the insights contained within it.



Thanks to National Lottery players, the Trust for Developing Communities has been awarded almost £1.3 million over three years to empower under-represented communities in Brighton & Hove to participate in climate action.



About the Project

The Climate for Communities partnership was set up so that members of communities experiencing poverty and exclusion, who are not usually involved in climate action, are empowered to take climate action and have greater involvement and influence in the design and delivery of the city's climate activity.

We are an innovative and diverse partnership, bringing together neighbourhood partners in areas of high multiple deprivation, communities of identity, and a diverse range of sustainability partners including hands-on circularity projects, council initiatives, a local think tank and a national climate communications partner.

This is not a behaviour change project. It is not about convincing communities to reduce their carbon footprint — the people we work with are often already living low-impact lifestyles. It is about understanding what changes are needed across the system to make it more inclusive.



Picture: Illustration of the outcome at the heart of the project

Our Partners

The Trust for Developing Communities

(Lead Partner) – Charity tackling inequality in Brighton & Hove

Community Works – Supporting Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector in Brighton & Hove

Neighbourhood Community Partners

Bristol Estate Tenants & Leaseholders Association - Community centre in Whitehawk.

Hollingdean Development Trust - based in Hollingdean Community Centre

The Hangleton & Knoll Project – Community development and youth work charity

Moulsecoomb Community Market – based in St George's Hall - Community centre in Moulsecoomb

Community Engagement Partners

Bridging Change - Creating a more equal and diverse society with positive outcomes for Black and minority ethnic people.

The Carers Centre Brighton & Hove - Providing essential support for carers.

Possability People Charity - Enabling and empowering disabled people and people with long-term health conditions

Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard - Charity for LGBTQ+ people looking for a sense of community, support or information.

Brighton & Hove Speak Out - Independent advocacy organisation for adults with learning disabilities.

Sussex Interpreting Services – Charity supporting people with language needs.

Brighton & Hove Chamber of Commerce - Private sector partner

Climate Partners

Brighton & Hove City Council:

The Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere, Circular Economy Routemap Action Plan and Programme

Our City Our World: environmental education programme
Climate for Communities Schools Engagement

Brighton & Hove Energy Services Co-operative (BHESCO) – Community Energy Service.

Climate:Change Brighton & Hove - Think tank

Associates

Freegle – Reuse service

Tech Take-Back – Tech reuse and repair service

Repair Café - Community repair workshops

Evaluation partners

Climate:Change Brighton & Hove – Learning & Evaluation partner

Healthwatch - evaluation partner

Climate Outreach – National climate communication organisation and evaluation partner

Our Learning so Far

Learning is at the heart of our partnership. It is an adaptive project in which learning in year one informs what happens in subsequent years.

Together, we have identified learning questions for the lifetime of the project. These will form the framework for our data collection and joint learning .

This report was produced by the Learning and Evaluation Partner based on a participatory process of:

- data collection by partners based on conversations and activities
- a participatory workshop to identify cross project lessons
- insight generation based on data review
- verification of insights by partners
- consolidation and write up.

Thanks to all partners for the ideas and analysis that form the basis of this report.

Our Learning Questions

- What are the first steps toward engaging communities in climate action?
- What are the diverse pathways into climate action?
- How can we reframe climate action so it is normalised and community members feel it is “for me”?
- What needs to change for communities experiencing poverty and exclusion to feel empowered, resourced and able to participate?
- What should we scale from this project and how?

Contents



What are the barriers for excluded communities to engaging in climate action?



What have we learned about talking to communities about climate action?



What have we learned about the first steps to engaging communities in climate action?



What are we learning from and about working in partnership?



Picture: Community engagement at Hangleton and Knoll Project

1



What are the barriers for excluded communities to engaging in climate action?

Society is not inclusive — and nor is much climate action

Barriers to civic engagement also apply to climate action: financial and safety concerns, lack of trust in authority, lack of time and confidence, inaccessible spaces and activities where inclusion is often an afterthought.

However, the intersection between social, financial, psychological and physical barriers to civic engagement, on the one hand, and the characteristics, narratives and actions of climate change, generates **specific and sometimes self-reinforcing barriers to engaging in climate action.**

“

“In the current climate, Black Racialised Minorities (BRM) feel unsafe/ unwelcome at times for example, on the bus or at the beach.”

— - Bridging Change

“

Events often claim to be accessible but don't consider a range of needs and aren't flexible. They rarely see other disabled people involved in climate action...

— Possability People

For people under pressure, other issues are more pressing — yet many people do care

For many people, climate change feels remote and distant from everyday life, and less urgent than everyday survival. Additional expectations around climate action can feel unrealistic and unfair.

Nonetheless, many people are interested and want to contribute.

Meanwhile, community organisations face growing expectations to respond to climate change, often without the resources to do so.

“

Carers' priorities are the people they are supporting. Everything else tends to be additional..”

— Carers Centre of Brighton and Hove

“

Expecting anything additional from us is unrealistic —difficult for disabled people right now; they are struggling to stay alive.

— Possability People

Powerlessness, overwhelm, fatigue and lack of agency

Catastrophic climate messaging can trigger protective disengagement rather than action — particularly among people whose lives are insecure or who already experience limited agency. Apparent indifference is often a form of self-protection, not lack of care.

Experience of unresponsive authorities can fuel a “what’s the point?” attitude, both to taking climate action and to making demands of those in power.

However, some groups previously excluded from climate conversations responded with curiosity rather than overwhelm to learning more about the climate.

“

..people talk about not being able to make choices..eg pre-chopped veg needed to be able to cook comes in plastic. Cheaper, more affordable clothing is mass produced. Those changes can't be made by the people, they need to come from authorities to challenge the way things work currently.

— Possability People

“

There was concern, but also a strong sense of helplessness. Many people feel the problem is too large for individuals to influence.

— Cantonese speaking service users, Sussex Interpreting Services

Anger at where responsibility is felt to be placed

Many community members expressed a desire to “do their bit,” but alongside this came real frustration at the perception that responsibility for the climate crisis is placed on individuals with the least power to address it.

This tension is likely to shape how and whether communities engage with climate action, and will be an important theme to track across the project’s remaining years.

“

.. The word climate change certainly brings up feelings of overwhelm & questioning who is responsible. Deep frustration with lack of action from people in power & business when the individual already feels like they are doing a lot in terms of personal responsibility.

— Hollingdean Development Trust

“

We are made to feel guilty about the climate, but we are not the ones doing the real harm.

— Carer

Politicisation, polarisation and identity

For some community members, climate is perceived as politically coded or associated with a particular identity, making it a deterrent — particularly for those who do not see themselves as political.

Active hostility to climate action was more present in public discourse and online than in face-to-face community settings. Neighbourhood partners were more likely to have encountered it than others.

“

.. people are passionate about wildlife, nature, food growing, reducing waste & energy but not necessarily believing in climate change

— Hollingdean Development Centre

“

Politics plays a significant role in climate change information sharing; views can be confusing, and the information may seem conflicting.

— Portuguese-speaking service users, Sussex Interpreting Services

Guilt and shame are barriers to engagement

Climate change is associated with feelings of guilt and shame that can prevent people from engaging. One reason is that climate change is seen as scientific and technical, with jargon that makes people feel they need to be an expert to have an opinion.

Another is that much of the action most associated with climate responsibility — around recycling, food choices and transport — is inaccessible to marginalised people or those on low incomes.

Notably, guilt was less present among people with learning disabilities, who have historically been so excluded from climate conversations that awareness itself was low.

“

People can be put off by all the climate jargon and feel like they don't know enough to say anything, have an opinion or do the right thing"

— Discussion in Learning & Evaluation Workshop

“

Disabled people feel blamed and guilty for not doing certain things like extensive recycling — even though these are access needs or simply not possible.

— Possability People

Negative perceptions and experiences of climate action

Media images of climate activism — confrontational, extreme, associated with specific lifestyle demands — have created a widespread impression that climate action is not for everyone.

People also reported direct negative experiences of climate activists and campaigns that showed limited understanding of community needs and realities.

Well-intentioned advocates are perceived as not allowing for nuance — for example, around the genuine needs of disabled people who may depend on products being deemed environmentally harmful.

“

I don't understand putting communities at the heart of climate action - when I think of climate action I think of XR or Just Stop Oil throwing paint at things, that is so far away from what our members will or can do

— Community of Interest rep, project kick off meeting

“

The climate action community can be militant and exclusive. They have turned off the vast majority of the disabled community we have spoken to. Many disabled people do not have the luxury of choice due to their access needs.

— Possability People

Lack of accessible information

Community members and organisations often do not know what climate action is, what opportunities exist nearby, or whether those opportunities are inclusive.

Information about actions such as recycling can be overcomplicated.

Information about activities and events is often distributed digitally only — making digital exclusion a significant barrier to climate participation.

“

Everyone who was part of the climate focus groups were highly keen to know more... but were unsure where to find ..information.

— Bridging Change

“

Accessibility is an afterthought at best. Accessible information is generally non-existent. Leaflets rarely, if ever, include accessible formats, easy read or inclusive language.

— Possability People

Global networks can bring a different perspective on climate change

For some community members, climate change is not an abstract future threat but a present reality witnessed through their global networks and life experience.

Participants in the Hangleton and Knoll Multicultural Women's Group shared rich insights about environmental changes observed in their home countries. Sussex Interpreting Services discussions with Portuguese, Arabic and Cantonese speakers reflected on direct experiences of air pollution and extreme weather events.

These global perspectives offer a powerful entry point for climate conversations — connecting lived experience to wider climate themes.

“

Participants shared that in Hong Kong, typhoons previously occurred mainly during summer months.. typhoons now last for a longer period... having a significant impact on daily life...and may lead to loss of life.”

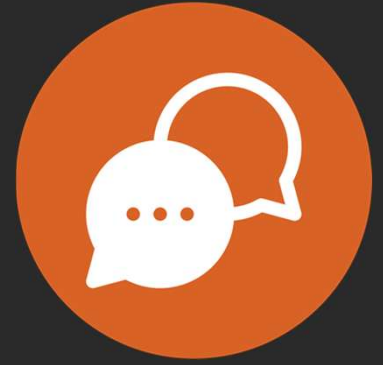
— Cantonese speaking service users - Sussex Interpreting Services

“

For many, climate change is experienced through the transformation of their home countries. By bridging these global insights with simple personal storytelling, we could gather unique perspectives and make conversations more personal.

— Bridging Change

2



What have we learned about talking to communities about climate action?

It can be difficult to talk about climate change — but it can be done

Politicisation, jargon and perceived lack of relevance make starting a climate conversation challenging and can threaten the trust community workers have built.

This was a particular challenge for workers using the Asset-Based Community Development framework, which responds to issues raised by communities rather than introducing topics from outside.

Conversations were easier when they took place within communities with a history of discussing climate-related issues, used familiar engagement or peer research approaches, or happened in welcoming, familiar spaces alongside existing events.

“

We used different wording to have conversations.

— Moulsecoomb Community Market

“

The method of casual conversation over lunch has been done a few times before on other subjects that have come up...a comfortable familiarity with the format, and knowledge that these kind of conversations typically result in a tangible benefit to the area, encourages open and honest conversation

— BELTA

Approaching climate indirectly is often more effective

A consistent finding is that the word “climate” can itself be an obstacle. Doing often works better as an entry point than talking.

The most productive conversations started elsewhere — with food, nature, community pride, everyday concerns — and moved into climate territory organically.

This requires skill, confidence and preparation from community workers, and those conditions cannot be assumed.

“

The conversation took place at a lunch provided by Sussex Surplus - food brings people together. Growing food, eating and composting all take place on site, so providing an easy illustration of the circular economy and prompting discussion. This might be why people were confident talking about reuse, repairing as climate friendly action

— BELTA

“

We have found that the term ‘climate change’ is actually a barrier to discussion.

— Hollingdean Development Trust

Make it local, relevant and positive — but do not hide the difficult truth

Connecting climate to hyperlocal, tangible examples and to what people value lowers the threshold for engagement. Simple language, images and maps support discussion.

Avoid heavily scientific, catastrophic framings and jargon.

Starting positively does not mean being dishonest — community members cannot be permanently shielded from difficult climate realities, and avoiding them creates space for misinformation.

Resilience has emerged as a useful frame — helping people feel invested and linking to the place-based approach.

“

[Add photo here]
We made sure to include visual examples of things that service users may already be doing (or might feel that are realistic to have a go at) but don't realise are climate action..

— **Sussex Interpreting Service**

“

We also shouldn't gatekeep the truth of the crisis and threat that we're under. Start off simple, but be mindful that as conversations develop, to be honest about the crisis.

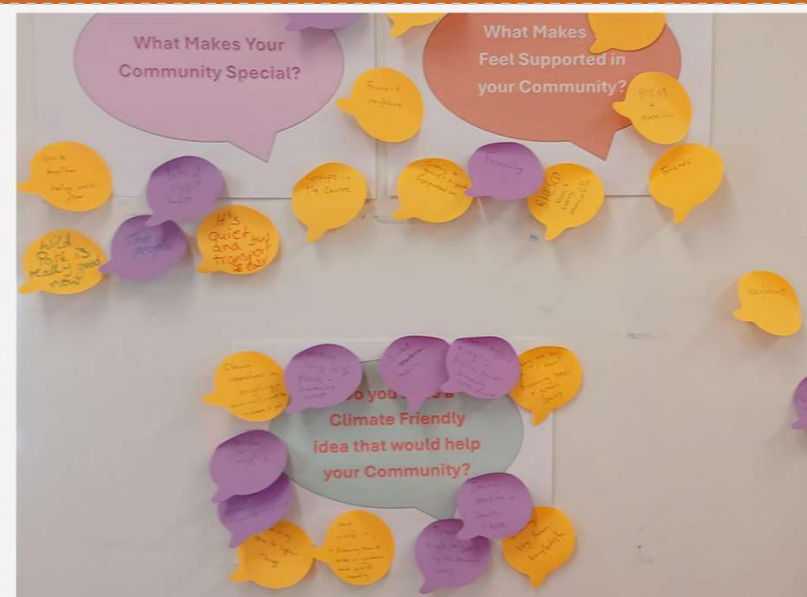
— **Brighton and Hove Speak Out**

Create non-judgmental spaces; listen before you speak

People must not be made to feel stupid, guilty or lectured to. Starting from lived experience, acknowledging that no one knows everything, and framing the conversation as collective learning creates the conditions for genuine engagement.

At the same time, partners recognise this cannot mean avoiding misinformation — how to respond to this will be a focus in later years.

Climate for Communities partner **Climate Outreach** will produce a guide to support positive climate conversations within communities.



Picture: Gathering ideas at Moulsecoomb Community Market

“

People often have more knowledge and understanding than we give them credit for. Once we open up conversations with community organisations they quickly go from ‘knowing nothing’ to participating fully.

— Community Works

3



What have we learned about the first steps to engaging communities in climate action?

Start from trust, not from climate

Engaging excluded and disadvantaged people in climate action requires a community development approach rooted in relationships, trust, local knowledge and responsiveness.

People who are already wary of outsiders, or who have had poor experiences of being made to feel guilty, need engagement led by people they already know and trust — community workers, peers, established local organisations.

Climate advocates, however well-intentioned, can sometimes be perceived as judgmental and are not always the right first point of contact.



Picture: Hangleton & Knoll Multicultural Women's group discussion

“

A strong community development approach with core values of inclusion, empowerment, voice and participation is shining through as definitely the way to go.

— The Hangleton and Knoll Project

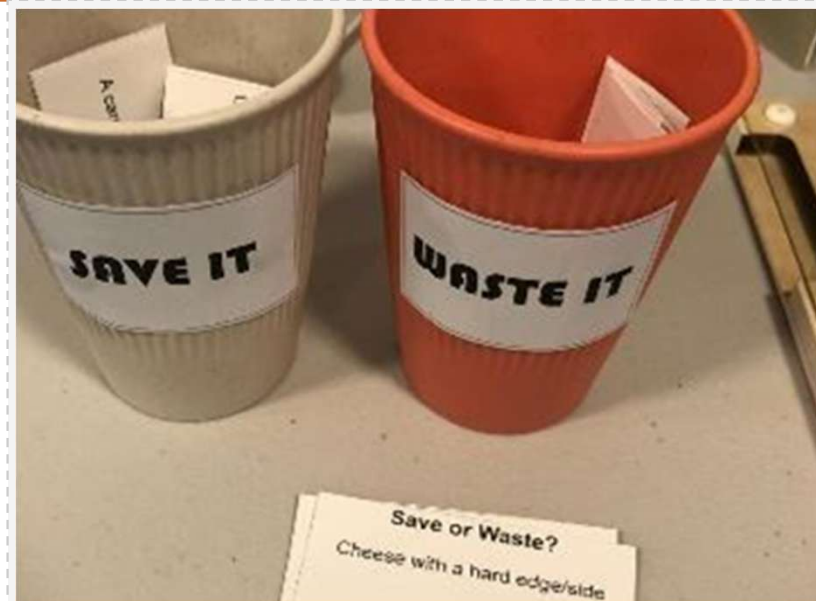
Trusted community workers need support to lead climate conversations and action

The people best placed to start conversations and initiate action can lack the confidence, training and knowledge to do so.

Community workers do not need to be experts, but they need enough knowledge to make connections between everyday topics and wider climate issues, and to understand how to respond to misinformation.

This is hard to do without support and training.

The Climate for Communities partnership can help through two-way learning between community workers and climate organisations. See section 4.



Picture: Activity at Hangleton & Knoll Multicultural Women's group discussion

“

It's often the confidence and overwhelm/time pressures of staff that takes particular topics 'off the table'. The same could be said of equality and inclusion topics — but that doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about them.

— Community Works

Entry points need to be practical, hyperlocal and have real benefits for people's lives

Food — growing, cooking, eating, avoiding waste, composting — was the most frequently mentioned entry point by communities, followed by arts and crafts, and sharing, swapping and reuse. Also regularly mentioned: gardening, engaging with nature, recycling, repairing and mending, and community identity.

Practical entry points provide a basis for conversation about wider climate and nature issues, supported by community workers confident in making those connections.

Areas considered important by partners — such as preparing for climate impacts and greater voice in decision-making — were not widely mentioned as initial entry points, but interest may emerge over time.



“Cooking sessions for food waste reduction led to a lot of enthusiasm, higher turnout than expected and lots of questions on climate as a ripple effect.

— Hangleton and Knoll Project

Make first climate experiences positive, fun, celebratory, inclusive and easy

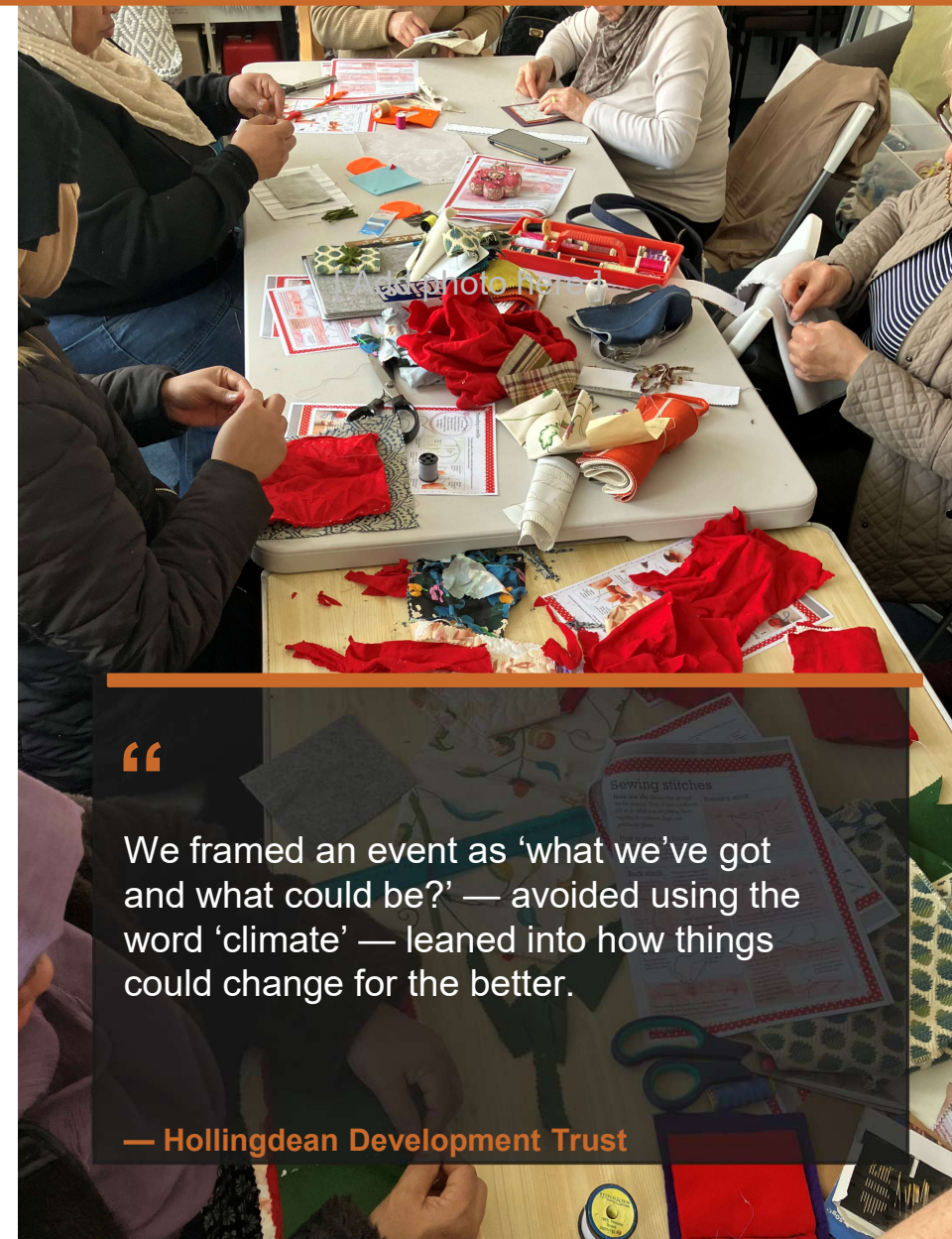
Good starting points build on people's pride in their communities, recognise what is already happening around them, consider accessibility from the outset, and keep things simple, fun — and where possible, include food.

There is strong agreement on the value of a positive start, alongside recognition that community members cannot be permanently shielded from difficult climate realities. Avoiding them creates space for misinformation.

Climate for Communities school engagement found that first steps to engaging families included:

- Building on children's interest and knowledge
- Family members' own interests
- Joyful activities and experiences
- Meeting family priorities
- Fitting it into existing schedules
- Nature connections

Picture: A sewing workshop organised by Climate for Communities school engagement in response to family member's interests



“

We framed an event as ‘what we’ve got and what could be?’ — avoided using the word ‘climate’ — leaned into how things could change for the better.

— Hollingdean Development Trust

Celebrating existing climate action can be motivating and inclusive

Community members are already taking significant climate action — frugal cooking, clothes swapping, repairing, growing food — without labelling it as such.

Recognising this shifts people's perspective from “excluded” to “contributor.”

A central assumption of the project is that celebrating existing action is part of reframing climate action as achievable and positive — helping people move away from guilt or powerlessness and towards feeling that climate action is genuinely “for me.”



Picture: Moulsecoomb Community Wardrobe

“

I didn't know what climate change was until now — this has been so educational. And I didn't realise that cooking from scratch and growing my own vegetables was my contribution.

— Multicultural Women's Group member

Consider inclusion from the start, not as an afterthought

Meeting people where they are — geographically and in terms of interests and needs — will often mean creating dedicated, accessible opportunities rather than expecting people to join existing city-wide action.

Such tailored activities may provide an “on-ramp” for some community members to access broader climate action; we will observe whether this is the case in Years 2 and 3.

Increasing the accessibility of city-wide and mainstream climate action is a parallel aim. Actions like the Preston Park Litter Pick demonstrate inclusive climate action.



Time	Agenda Item
10:00am	Sign in Tea & Coffee
10:30am	Welcome to the meeting!

“

Making events accessible is really important — to ensure that disabled people can participate, and to show other organisations that it is possible and a positive thing for everyone.

— Possibility People

Case Study: Building Inclusion from the Start — Preston Park Litter Pick

This litter-pick demonstrated how climate action can be made accessible by designing bespoke activities for groups frequently excluded from mainstream movements.

Jointly organised by: Speak Out, Possability People, and the Carers Centre of Brighton & Hove, with support from the UNESCO Biosphere (The Living Coast).

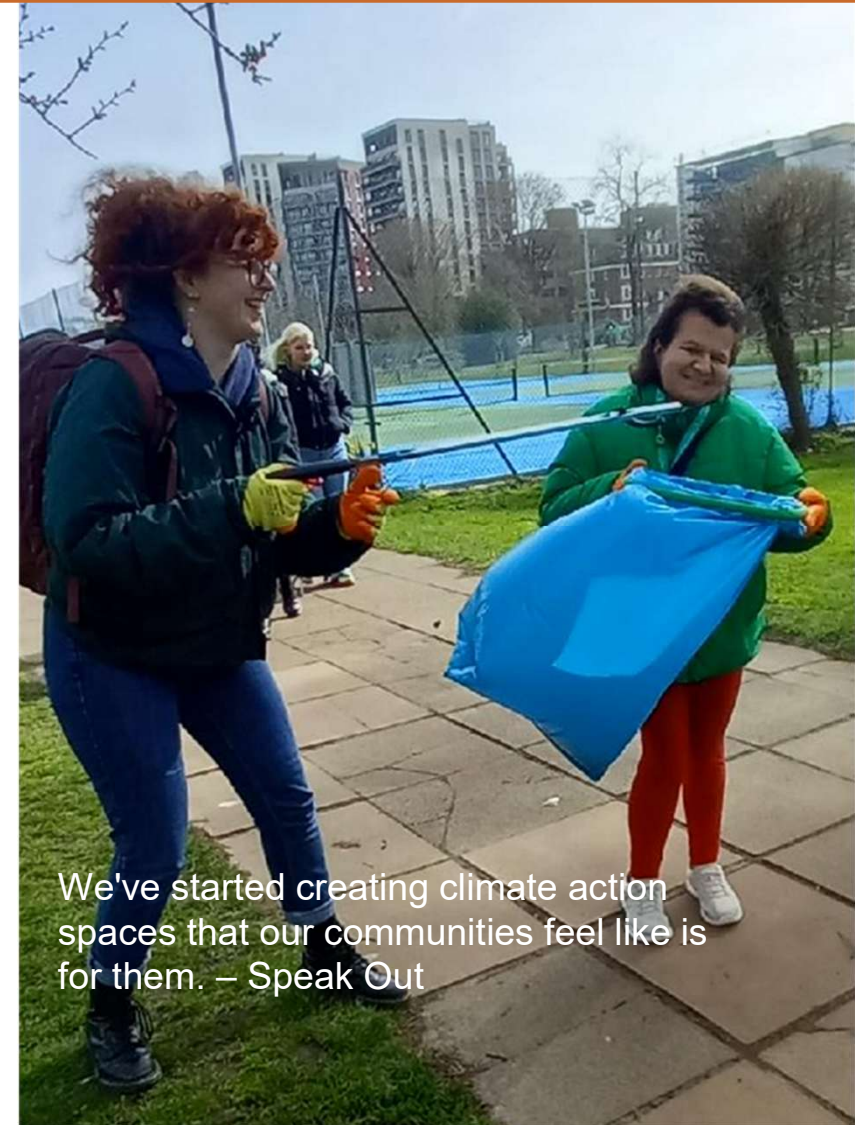
It engaged: carers, disabled people, people with long-term health conditions or poor mental health and people with learning disabilities

It took an intersectional approach, considering inclusivity for a range of different needs and motivations. The litter pick was combined with a talk on nature from the Sussex Wildlife Trust - illustrating multiple entry points to climate action.

Inclusive by design: responding to community interests (socialising, outdoors, wellbeing); Easy Read posters with images and named contacts; pre-event accessibility audit of venue, bus stops and routes.

Collaboration to overcome barriers: Pooling resources enabled economies of scale. The council-affiliated Biosphere partner bypassed bureaucratic delays to secure permission for the litter pick and provide necessary training and authority.

Outcomes: The event demonstrated that simple activities can trigger wide-ranging climate conversations; finding plastic fragments sparked discussions on ecosystems and material waste. The pilot also directly informed a larger Beach Clean, involving more partners and including a quiet gazebo for neurodivergent participants in response to feedback.



We've started creating climate action spaces that our communities feel like is for them. — Speak Out

Engaging excluded communities in climate action will take time

Building trust and relationships and navigating barriers to engagement takes sustained effort. People may not engage straight away — due to lack of trust or confidence, or practical obstacles.

Building motivation and confidence to take climate action among those previously excluded will happen incrementally. Change has already been noted in some communities.

Embedding climate conversations into existing activities — groups, meetings, newsletters — helps build ownership over time.



“

Climate change is urgent, but getting under-represented communities involved will take time — they have been left out of the conversation for so long.

— Carers Centre of Brighton and Hove

4



What are we learning from and about working in partnership?

The partnership is already enabling, motivating and inspiring action

The partnership has leveraged the expertise of different partners and enabled economies of scale in designing and delivering climate activities specifically for excluded communities.

It has supported greater inclusion in more mainstream activities and enabled knowledge sharing about city-wide provision.

Foundations have been built for greater collaboration in future.

“

I find it invaluable, lots of the organisations are big, we are a small community centre - the partnership gives me support and ways of doing things”

— Neighbourhood partner.

“

A year ago I wouldn't have connected with people in this group — they weren't on my radar. Now, when we roll out the Warm Homes work, I know who to reach out to.

— BHESCo

The partnership contains real and productive tensions — particularly around timeframes

There are significant differences in size, resources, focus and ways of working between partners.

The most significant tension is between **the urgency felt by climate-focused partners and the slower pace required by community development practice**, which works at the speed of trust.

Partners also differ in where they seek to bring about change — at individual, group, community or policy level — and perspectives on opportunities the green transition may hold for communities, with climate groups more optimistic about potential benefits.

These differences generate diverging ideas about outcomes for the project. A challenge for the project is navigating and working through these differences productively.



Picture: Climate protestor with slogan “Time is running out!”

“

We want the climate work to be community-led, not imposed. It therefore needs to be at a slower pace while we evolve the work and, importantly, learn as an organisation about how best to do this.

— Hangleton and Knoll Project

It has created valued space for two-way learning

Year 1 has demonstrated that the cross-sector nature of the partnership is a rich source of learning.

Climate-focused partners are gaining insight into how their communications and culture are perceived by communities and beginning to act on it. Community-focused partners are gaining knowledge, connections and confidence around climate.

Learning works best when neither side is positioned as the expert and all are recognised as having something to bring.

Subsequent years will build on trust and mutual understanding established in year 1, working to combine expertise to ensure that the communities we work with feel that climate action is “for me.”

City Of Meadows

30 schools in the city created a micro, mini or medium meadow in their grounds.

Together they created a network of pollinator habitat over 1000m² within the city.



Picture: Screenshot of “What Counts as Climate Action?” webinar run by Climate:Change

“

Coming from the climate space, it is always very important to hear from different communities facing specific challenges — and to hear how ‘climate people’ are perceived in their communications and how often this can feel elitist and off-putting.

— Climate Outreach

What Next?

Foundations are in place for a productive future. We will take action and continue to learn around three areas:

Reframing climate action

Explore how to make climate action feel normal and achievable — through celebrating existing action, tapping into community pride and belonging and tackling wider barriers in mainstream climate action.

Diverse pathways into climate action

Explore which starting points lead to further or different kinds of action, and which approaches help people feel that climate action is “for me.”

Voice, representation and benefit

Bring greater focus to participation in climate decision-making and explore how communities can influence and benefit from climate decisions.

“I think our strength will be in developing projects together.” — Hollingdean Development Trust

Further information on the Climate for Communities project:

Climate for Communities, Trust for Developing Communities

<https://trustdevcom.org.uk/project/climate-for-communities>

Tina O'Donnell, Climate Action Programme Manager



Thanks to National Lottery players, the Trust for Developing Communities has been awarded almost £1.3 million over three years to empower under-represented communities in Brighton & Hove to participate in climate action.



Fisher, C. (2026) *Climate for Communities: Year 1 Learning Report*
Climate: Change / Trust for Developing Communities, Brighton UK
With huge thanks to all the partners who co-created the insights.

