



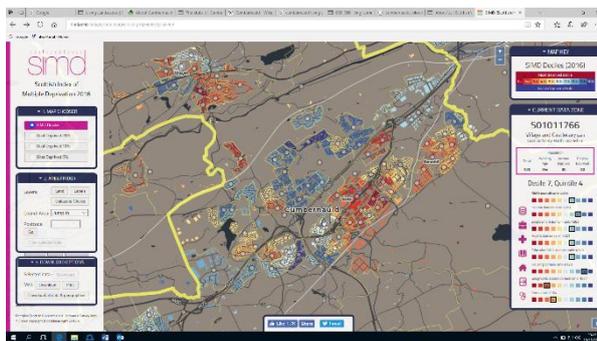
# Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land

## Cumbernauld Living Landscapes Partnership – Natural Connections

### Theme: Environmental / Conservation – working with urban communities

#### Overview

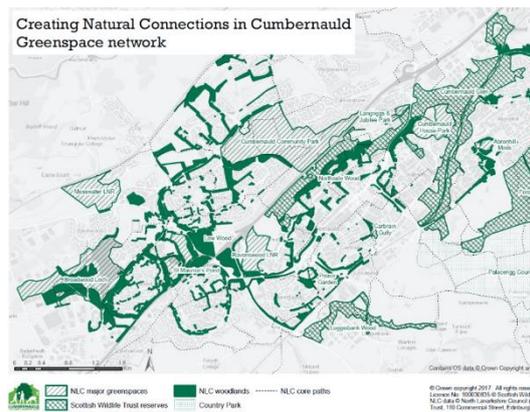
With a population of around 52,000, Cumbernauld is the tenth most populous town in Scotland, characterised by high density urban living and some of the highest areas of multiple deprivation.



However, it is also one of the greenest towns in Scotland, with over 50% of the town being greenspace.

#### Land ownership around the town is complex.

The greenspaces around the town are owned mostly by North Lanarkshire Council, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Forest Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, social housing providers and private developers.



Approaches to managing it are not joined up, and it can be difficult to track who owns what. Organisations and private owners have different resources, views and remits, and there is no one set route for how things are achieved. Land management varies considerably depending on the understanding, skills and resources of each owner. The landscape areas have therefore often been disconnected and in some cases neglected, with awareness and use of natural heritage by the local population being very low.



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[To address this Cumbernauld Living Landscape](#) used a [living landscape partnership](#) approach to bring different landowners together to develop shared approaches to volunteer-led conservation, based on community engagement and sustainability. The initiative has a long-term vision for transformational change to the towns' environment. By engaging with a wide range of interested parties, it works to benefit local people and wildlife, and to support an evolving regional economy by reinforcing and expanding existing green and blue networks, reconnecting the people of Cumbernauld to their natural environment.

Key land owners in Cumbernauld formed the initiative and this has expanded to other interested parties that now include:

- Scottish Wildlife Trust (project instigators)
- North Lanarkshire Council
- The Conservation Volunteers
- Sanctuary Scotland Housing Association
- The James Hutton Institute (research partners)
- Forestry Commission Scotland



Several community partners across the town also support individual projects within the initiative, including: Community Councils, NHS, Police Scotland, Youth Services, Fire Services, the Corra Foundation, The Prince's Trust, New College Lanarkshire, and North Lanarkshire Council Education and Social Work services.

The key objectives of the Initiative are:

- To enhance and protect the biodiversity of the sites and reconnect the wider green network
- To involve the community, local groups and schools in both decision-making and practical management of local greenspaces
- To raise community awareness and ensure more people can benefit from nature through school workshops and practical volunteering

## Approach

**To increase the awareness and use of the green spaces, the first phase of the Cumbernauld Living Landscape worked with local schools to support young people and their communities.** This drove improvements to three important wildlife sites across the town – two North Lanarkshire Council green-spaces and one Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve.

Management Plans were drafted by the relevant land owners for each area. The Living Landscape initiative then aims to work with local communities to create **Action Plans** for aspects of direct community management at each of the three sites. Communities were reluctant to take on ownership for the action plans, however, due to a combination of lack of technical knowledge, capacity, skills and dedication to co-ordinate



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multiple contributors. Plans therefore needed to be adjusted to reflect what the community could reasonably do.

Communities in the town have seen a lot of projects led by short term funding over the years. As funding ends, the projects generally also end, often leaving no real sense of legacy and a jaded view towards new proposals. The Living Landscape initiative therefore needed to take a **creative and multi-layered approach** to encourage people to get involved and establish confidence through long-term presence and visibility.

Over a two-year period, the team spoke to over 10,000 people at 84 different events using both traditional and digital media, including:

- A weekly column in the local newspaper
- Positive content on the website and social media accounts celebrating 'the green side of the town'
- A pop-up 'Living Windows' exhibition in an empty town centre shop window – telling the story and celebrating the young people's work, which was then opened up for art workshops and where people could find out more about the project
- Volunteering opportunities through weekend volunteers – the 'Nature Ninjas'. The monthly Sunday conservation group began from work with teenagers, and has now also become popular with families, younger working adults, and retirees.

*'The hooks to attract people to this group were simple, but not offered elsewhere in the town. They were held at a time when busy working people could come, activities are fun and the sessions are open to all.'*

**Project Officer – Cumbernauld Living Landscapes**

- Project based 12-week internships and work placements for young people, leading to two paid employment places through the Community Jobs Scotland scheme
- Outreach work through social events for the community such as family BBQs and 'Hallow Scream' at the local reserves

### Achievements and Benefits

*'Teaching people to take care of nature is not enough to sustain interest. Creating spaces and activities that benefit the people and have a mutually beneficial impact on the environment has been more successful.'*

**Senior Project Officer**

### Engaging with Young People

Recognising that the voice of young people in the town was not being heard, the

#### **Engaging Communities**

Project worked with young people identified by their schools as being at risk of disengaging. They provide a programme of

'**Natural Connections**' workshops which first explored the values, perceptions and explores the aspirations, community and environment of the young people involved. Once a relationship was established, subsequent sessions explored sites closest to each school





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and identified practical activities to improve them that the students could deliver. There was a strong focus on employability and personal skills development to make the project relevant to the students' individual needs.

*'Whether it is the connection to the community, nature or with the workshops there is a clear change in the students. They stand tall, are more confident and chat freely with adults where once they would mumble a response. In the first school workshop the students are asked do you feel connected with the community. The answer from every group has been a resounding No. At the end of the workshops the answer is Yes.'*

**Project Officer**

### The Multiplier Engagement Effect through Volunteering – The 'Nature Ninjas'

A major challenge for the initiative's [Engaging Communities](#) project, funded through the Heritage Lottery

Fund, was to recruit volunteers for weekend conservation work (the self-declared 'Nature Ninjas'). In the past the Scottish Wildlife Trust struggled for volunteers from the Cumbernauld area despite being in the town



since 1995. Most volunteers who worked with the Reserves Project Officers came from Glasgow, Falkirk and Stirling.

Cumbernauld Living Landscape promoted the work of volunteers across social media and celebrated the mosaic of habitats and wildlife that could be found in the town, beginning with the story of resident pine martens. Many of the weekend volunteers have also been inspired to join in and support the work they see being done by young people. By making the volunteering fun and sociable, the self-named 'Nature Ninjas' now include a more diverse range of members of the local community, ranging from families with young children, teenagers, people who are unemployed and wanting to develop for new skills to people who are working and unable to help during the week and retirees.

**Volunteering is linked to the positive benefits for both mental wellbeing and physical health.** Fitbits have been used to demonstrate the number of miles walked and calories burned in a typical volunteering session, for example. This became a big talking point on social media, with new people attracted to volunteering to stay fit and healthy without being associated with traditional 'exercise'.

### Community Awareness and Use of Greenspace has Increased

Working closely with volunteers in local communities has increased awareness of the town's green spaces and promoted their use. The community value of the three sites has been increased by, for example, creating a community orchard, improving paths, and rejuvenating a dilapidated wildlife garden. Reducing vegetation encroaching onto paths makes them feel wider and safer, with improved buggy and disabled access. People's enjoyment of the open spaces has improved, with community art benches providing space for people to 'stop and breathe'.



*'There's a sense that (the open spaces,) it's 'not for us'. Older people feel unsafe and the younger people feel unwelcome, and so the spaces become neglected and underused and targets vandalism.'*

**Local Resident**

### Learning - Particular Urban Challenges

**The experience of residents in an urban setting can be very disconnected from their wider environment.** Many Sanctuary Housing residents overlooking the Northside Wood reserve, for example, were unaware that it was public space and saw little immediate benefit of the reserve to them.

*'Our generation has been used to (things) being managed by the Council and not having to think about it, They don't see the land as 'theirs' and have no sense of ownership or responsibility for it.*

*They don't understand why I want to volunteer – 'That's the council's job' is a comment frequently flung at us. There's not the same sense of connection or understanding of landscape that you maybe still get in a rural area.'*

**Community Council Chair**

### **Working with disengaged / disadvantaged communities around conservation awareness and support is very challenging**

It takes time and perseverance.

*'It takes a huge shift in thinking; to look at the needs of local people first, putting people at the centre of projects, listen to what people are saying and the life challenges they are facing. We look for where things collide – where community needs touch on our own objectives and what we can achieve together.'*

**Programme Manager**





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For Cumbernauld Living Landscape this led to a shift in focus to developing projects that supported compassion, employability and skills development, and good mental health. Being embedded and visible in the community and working with local partners was crucial.

*'Good engagement needs the right people with the right attitude to be committed for the long term, to be recognised in the street and able to have conversations and build relationships that last. We work (as partner organisations) together to provide a platform for people to come together and share ideas and experience. Providing opportunities for people to come together socially and share food are really important for building relationships and starting informal dialogue.'*

**Sanctuary Housing Association**

*'There has been a lot of tea and cakes!'*

**Senior Project Officer**

The initiative has been working with communities at very local levels to build the connections to the environment up by connecting it directly with people's daily challenges and needs

*'In landscape and conservation terms we've probably not achieved as much as we wanted to yet, because people are mostly interested in what happens in their own neighbourhood. It's too early for the big plans. We still need to raise awareness of what we've got, building up from very small local levels.'*

**Project Manager**





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## What's Next?

The connections, relationships and knowledge built over the two-and-a-half-year project have been developed into a new Creating Natural Connections project. With the help of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the partnership has now secured over £2million investment for a 4-year project that will reach and engage with even more people and have a bigger impact on the town's green network. This work represents the most significant investment in the town's natural environment since it was created in the 1950's.

For the first time the project will closely align the capital improvements needed in the greenspaces with the activities to unlock community capacity. Groups including people at risk of poor mental health and young people at risk of disengaging from education will be given specialist support to improve their well-being, and community organisations across the town will be helped to deliver environmental improvements in their local neighbourhood.

A total area of urban woodland equivalent to 230 football pitches (230 hectares) will be sustainably managed, and more than 12,000 native trees will be planted. Three peat bogs near houses will be restored, and six new community rain gardens will help reduce the impacts of flooding. Across the network better managed urban wildflower meadows will boost pollinators and increase local biodiversity.

## Find Out More

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