

COMMUNITY LANDOWNERS AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Reducing Carbon Emissions from Food

CLEAR Buckhaven & Methil

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND

CASE STUDY



Introduction

Scotland has declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming carbon-neutral by 2045. The community landowning sector is contributing towards this goal.

Community Land Scotland has commissioned research to document action that the sector is taking to address climate change. Alongside a report looking at the sector as a whole, six case studies have been produced.

Each of the case studies looks in depth at one asset-owning community organisation and how it is contributing to a particular aspect of climate action, namely: renewable energy; managing 'carbon sinks'; helping people to adapt to the effects of climate change, and; reducing emissions related to food, transport and domestic energy use.

Each case study also looks at the wider work of the community owner in relation to the climate emergency and the diverse benefits this is providing.

This case study features *Community-Led Environmental Action for Regeneration* (CLEAR).

CLEAR is a community anchor organisation in Buckhaven and Methil in Fife. It is reducing carbon emissions from food through its community gardens, orchards and shop.

It is also generating renewable energy, planting trees, promoting recycling and active travel, and undertaking other initiatives and campaigns.

All of CLEAR's activities have local people at their heart – providing opportunities for personal development and helping to deliver a green recovery while engaging people in environmental action.

KEY MESSAGES

Community landowners:

- ✓ are contributing to the national effort to reduce carbon emissions related to food.
- ✓ are well-placed to lead on a place-based green recovery, ensuring that this involves and benefits local people.
- ✓ take holistic climate action. CLEAR is reducing emissions from food, planting trees, generating renewable energy and promoting recycling, active travel and sustainable transport.
- ✓ provide leadership and coordinate local action. They enable people to get involved and work together to achieve shared goals.
- ✓ are helping to deliver a Just Transition to net zero. They integrate climate action with local needs and priorities.



CLEAR helps people in Buckhaven and Methil to improve their lives. It's environmental initiatives indirectly tackle deprivation and promote sustainable development. CLEAR owns buildings and leases land for community gardens.
www.clearlife.org.uk



The community gardens in Buckhaven. Photos: CLEAR.

Reducing Food Emissions and Delivering a Green Recovery

In the national Climate Change Plan¹, the Scottish Government has recognised the work that communities are doing “to reduce, reuse and recycle their waste, increase the energy efficiency of homes and community buildings, encourage active travel and the use of low carbon transport, and produce local food”.

CLEAR is working across all of these fronts in Buckhaven and Methil. In this section, we focus on the work they are doing around food; their wider work is described at the end of the case study.

CLEAR’s work around local food provides a good example of the added benefits that come when a community anchor organisation leads on climate action.

In Buckhaven and Methil, the work of CLEAR has demonstrated how community assets can be used not only to reduce

carbon emissions from food, but to do so in a way that delivers locally-rooted regeneration with benefits for people experiencing disadvantage.

In a recent update to the Climate Change Plan, the Scottish Government has “committed to delivering a place-based approach to our green recovery working closely with those communities and organisations that need change, are undergoing change or affected by change”².

This kind of collaborative approach has been adopted in Buckhaven and Methil, and the wider Levenmouth area. The idea of a green recovery has particular relevance here not just in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, but more broadly in terms of the regeneration of a place that has experienced industrial collapse.

¹ www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-governments-climate-change-plan-third-report-proposals-policies-2018

² www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032

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“The regeneration aspect, we’d be creating loads of jobs and improving the environment and changing the local economy to a booming green economy ... I suppose regenerated community is also on an individual person by person basis of improving confidence, improving well being amongst folk.”

Sam Green, Project Coordinator, CLEAR

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“There’s a whole load of local benefits that can be achieved by taking climate actions ... I think that’s the great thing about The Leven Programme partnership is that we can relate, and speak each other’s languages. We can’t just talk climate and carbon, we have to be aware of what the actual local impact is.”

Shona Cargill, Lead Officer – Climate Change & Zero Waste, Fife Council

Renewable energy industries have become a focus in strategies for the regeneration of the area. However, while this has created skilled renewables jobs, it has not necessarily benefitted local people and developed 'green skills' among the broader workforce.

Fife Council is now seeking to engage community organisations in efforts to tackle the climate emergency. CLEAR has been collaborating with Fife Council and others in the Levenmouth area to bring together action on the environment and on deprivation.

CLEAR's local food production and other activities are contributing towards a green recovery.

The organisation runs two community gardens, one in Buckhaven and one in Methil. Both gardens sit on land leased from Fife Council. The land has been transformed into productive growing space, with rows of trees producing apples, pears and plums, berry bushes, vegetable plots and a polytunnel.

CLEAR is also developing a food

production kitchen in the buildings it owns in Buckhaven. This kitchen will provide local people with educational opportunities related to cooking and food preservation, such as making jams, pickles and chutneys.

To encourage people to get involved, a kids' club was established and parents accompanied their children to open days at the garden sites. At Methil, a dry-stone amphitheatre was built, providing a space for local music events and open days; this helped to attract older children and young adults.

Time was invested in building relationships with neighbours, with all households in the surrounding area being offered a fruit tree to plant in their front garden.

As well as increasing the numbers of people who have chosen to get involved in CLEAR's activities, this people-centred and locally-rooted approach extends to outreach civic work including community art, heritage interpretation and litter picking, which helps to engage local people and transform negative perceptions of their community.



Pressing apples from the community garden. Photo: CLEAR.

Outside of their own gardens, CLEAR have planted thousands more fruit trees in ‘wild orchards’ nearby, which are becoming increasingly productive. This initiative has enhanced the appearance of the area and encouraged people to get out, walk around and pick fresh fruit from the trees.

CLEAR are participating in the SEPA-led River Leven Project and the Fife Council/Transport Scotland Levenmouth Reconnected Programme, seeking to develop the area as Scotland’s ‘wild orchard capital’ with attractive travel routes. Additionally, tree planting may offer some mitigation for coastal and riverbank erosion.

Getting people involved in growing projects has had a wide range of benefits. Participants young and old have learned more about the process of growing fresh fruit and vegetables in an environmentally-friendly way, encouraging further local food production and consumption. They have begun to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables, and to take part in outdoor exercise through gardening, with health benefits. The social nature of the activities has helped people to improve their mental

health and wellbeing.

Engaging local people in climate-related projects is more difficult in deprived areas, where environmental action might not be seen as the first priority. But CLEAR have shown that people in their area are interested in getting involved, and have the skills and the resilience to achieve success if they are given the chance.

CLEAR’s work in Buckhaven and Methil shows that community-led climate action not only contributes to specific climate goals – such as reducing carbon emissions from food – but does so in a way which helps to deliver the ‘place-based green recovery’ sought by the Scottish Government.

CLEAR’s food activities have provided people with opportunities to build their confidence and skills and to improve their health and wellbeing. Their work has also strengthened local relationships and collaboration. All of this has provided a solid base for a green recovery which involves and benefits the local community.

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“With the local food growing, obviously we can cut down on the carbon footprint; we can grow local healthy food and all these things are big ticks in addressing the climate emergency But they’ve got to have an understandable benefit for folk for them to take on these initiatives or get involved.”

Sam Green, Project Coordinator, CLEAR

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“The people there are so keen and they’re really able. And just because they’ve lost the opportunity for mining and all those related economic opportunities around that doesn’t mean they lost the ability to ... come up with a solution to something.”

Shona Cargill, Lead Officer – Climate Change & Zero Waste, Fife Council



Working with the beehives at the community garden. Photo: CLEAR.



Community orchard. Photo: CLEAR.

As well as leasing land for community gardens, CLEAR own buildings which house a workshop, food production kitchen and office. They feel that ownership is necessary for investing in the energy efficiency of the buildings. They have installed **insulation** and **solar panels**, with the support of the Scottish Government.

The **recycling workshop** is used for bike repairs and wood recycling. The renovation and sale of bikes fits with CLEAR's ethos of combining local social and economic benefits with carbon reduction. The workshop provides people – and especially marginalised residents – with opportunities to take part in meaningful and productive activity, raise their self-esteem and improve their capabilities.

By providing affordable refurbished bicycles, CLEAR is promoting **active travel** in an urban area of 38,000 people which, until recently, did not

have a bike shop.

40-50 regular volunteers take part in CLEAR's planting projects. The volunteers **plant trees and wild flowers** in a variety of locations around the local area. This is helping to address the climate emergency and support biodiversity while also contributing to place-making, by enabling people to become active in enhancing their surroundings.

CLEAR's environmental activities provide opportunities for people with mental health issues or learning difficulties and for unemployed school leavers, as well as groups from local schools, college, nurseries and other groups.

Taking part involves physical activity and learning about the environment and horticulture. It also involves doing meaningful voluntary work, making a contribution to the community, and

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“Without ownership of buildings and at least secure tenure of land, you don't have necessarily the confidence or capacity to invest in longer term upgrades.”

Allen Armstrong, Secretary, CLEAR

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“We try to make it a rewarding and meaningful experience for the local people who volunteer we explain what we're trying to achieve. We get everyone's ideas and we try and implement them and let the project evolve. The original design ... changes through this way of working, which ... makes it a much more meaningful process.”

Sam Green, Project Coordinator, CLEAR

building skills and networks through working and eating together.

CLEAR is also involved in initiatives that will benefit people across the wider conurbation region. CLEAR launched the **campaign to reopen the Levenmouth rail link**, which drew in other activists and widespread community and cross-party support.

The campaign centred on the employment, health, climate and other benefits that would come from reconnecting Levenmouth with the

national rail network.

The Scottish Government responded positively by agreeing a £75 million project to reopen the line and it supported related initiatives.

By helping to drive forward this initiative, and by leading and raising funding for community action plans and participatory budgeting, CLEAR is having a positive impact on climate action that extends far beyond its immediate activities and even locality.

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“[Volunteers] come back to dig in the rain and snow because of the sociability. They feel part of something, and therefore they themselves take a little ownership in it.”

Allen Armstrong, Secretary, CLEAR



Shrub planting in Buckhaven. Photo: CLEAR.

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Project supported by:



Front cover: Community garden in Buckhaven. Photo: CLEAR.
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