



Neighbourhood, Nature, Community Climate Action: The Eco Streets Story

Project Report

Prepared for: Alton Climate Action Network

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Synopsis

The *Eco Streets* project, led by Alton Climate Action Network (ACAN) in Alton, Hampshire, UK, was developed as a grassroots response to the urgent need for local climate action that is both emotionally resonant and community-driven. Spanning two phases—a pilot from May 2022 to April 2023, followed by a two-year continuation from July 2023 to July 2025—the project sought to foster deeper community engagement with the climate crisis through creative, nature-based, and inclusive outreach strategies.

At its core, *Eco Streets* was built around three key objectives. First, it aimed to promote **emotional engagement** by using creative tools—such as poetry and storytelling—to provide accessible, heartfelt ways for people to connect with the realities of climate change. Second, through **nature-centric activities** like guided ecology walks, litter picking, and efforts to protect vulnerable species such as swifts, the project invited residents to reconnect with the local environment and see their role in its stewardship. Finally, targeted **community outreach** brought these approaches directly into Alton's new housing estates, aiming to help residents—many of whom may not yet feel rooted in the area—build bonds with both their neighbours and the natural world around them.

Together, these strands formed a holistic approach to climate action: one that prioritised emotional connection, hands-on engagement, and community cohesion. This report outlines the development, delivery, and impact of both phases of *Eco Streets*, offering insight into what is possible when climate action becomes a shared, local journey, as well as exploring limitations.

Over the course of the project, we have developed a number of resources that are freely available (see Annex). We encourage other groups and institutions to use these materials. Likewise, the programmes that were developed during this project, e.g. guided ecology walks, schools workshops etc., can be made available, please reach out if you are interested.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Eco Streets is a community climate engagement project led by Alton Climate Action Network (ACAN), based in Alton, Hampshire, UK. The project was developed in response to the growing recognition that meaningful climate action must start at the local level—and that emotional connection, creativity, and community are essential tools in the process of creating behavioral change and need to go hand in hand with science communication and informative approaches.

Spanning over three years, *Eco Streets* took place in two phases: an initial **pilot project** (May 2022 – April 2023) and an extended **follow-up project** (July 2023 – July 2025). Together, these phases formed a sustained effort to reconnect people with their environment, each other, and the urgent realities of the climate crisis in a way that was creative, inclusive, and grounded in the local landscape.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The central aim of *Eco Streets* was to inspire and support community-led climate engagement in Alton's residential neighbourhoods, particularly in areas where environmental conversations had previously been limited. The project set out with three interwoven objectives:

- **Emotional Engagement:** To offer creative ways—such as poetry and storytelling—for individuals to emotionally process and engage with the climate crisis, recognising that facts alone are often not enough to inspire action.
- **Nature-Centric Activities:** To (re)connect people with the natural world through guided walks with a local ecologist, hands-on conservation efforts such as helping endangered swifts, and community litter picks—creating tangible, place-based experiences of care for the environment.
- **Community Outreach:** To bring these experiences into new housing estates in Alton, using welcoming, participatory events to build local networks, foster a sense of belonging, and promote emotional reconnection with nature in everyday spaces.

This combination of creativity, environmentalism, and social connection aimed to plant seeds of long-term climate awareness and action across Alton’s communities.

2. Project Design and Approach

2.1 The Two-Phase Model: Pilot and Follow-Up

Eco Streets was structured as a two-phase initiative to allow for learning, adaptation, and scaling over time.

The **pilot phase** (May 2022 – April 2023) served as a testing ground for core ideas and engagement methods. It focused on a smaller number of activities and areas, enabling ACAN to explore what approaches resonated most with participants, and to develop relationships with local partners and volunteers.

Following the pilot's success and evaluation, the **follow-up phase** (July 2023 – July 2025) expanded the project’s reach and ambition. This phase introduced activities into a broader range of neighbourhoods—namely newly developed housing estates—while deepening community partnerships and refining engagement methods based on pilot learnings. The extended timeline allowed for more sustained involvement, seasonal activities, and greater capacity for reflection and adaptation.

This phased approach ensured that the project could remain flexible and responsive to community needs, while building a strong foundation for long-term impact and potential replication.

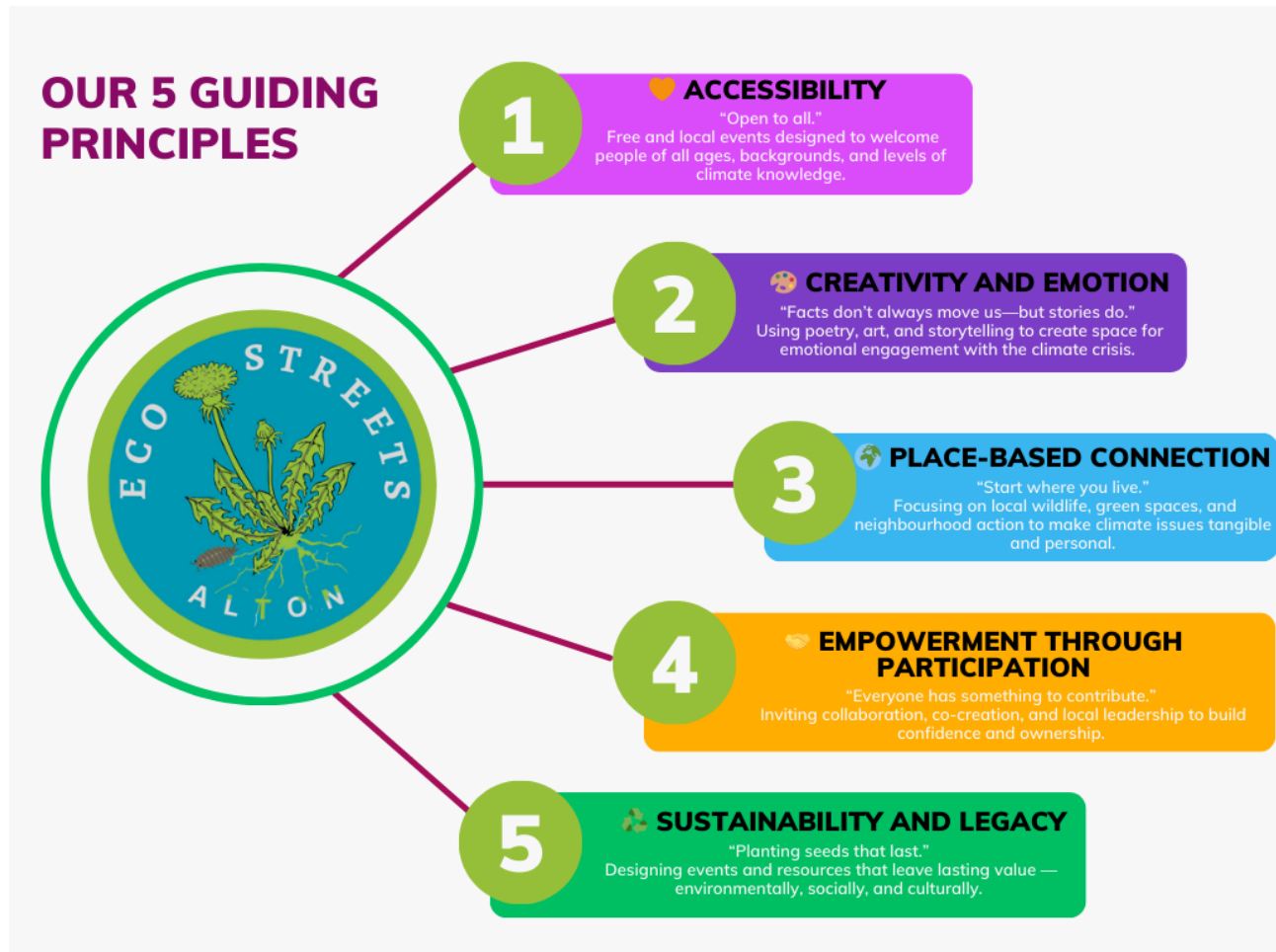


2.2 Guiding Principles and Values

The design of *Eco Streets* was underpinned by a set of core values that guided all aspects of delivery:

- **Accessibility:** Activities were designed to be open and welcoming to people of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of prior climate awareness. They were free to attend and took place in familiar neighbourhood spaces.
- **Creativity and Emotion:** Recognising that facts and data often fail to change behaviour, *Eco Streets* embraced emotional and creative entry points to the climate conversation. Poetry and music were used not only as tools of expression, but as ways to process grief, anxiety, and hope around climate change.
- **Place-Based Connection:** Rather than abstract global issues, the project focused on building a sense of connection to the immediate, local environment—trees, wildlife, footpaths, litter, and skies—helping participants to see the climate crisis as something present and personal.
- **Empowerment through Participation:** Residents were not treated as passive recipients of information, but as collaborators in climate action. The project created spaces for people to contribute their own knowledge, skills, and experiences.
- **Sustainability:** Wherever possible, the project aimed to create lasting value—whether through skills development, environmental improvements (e.g. swift & bat boxes, green talk

bench, wildflower verge), or stronger community ties.



2.3 Community-Centric Methodology

The approach taken by *Eco Streets* was deliberately rooted in the idea of “meeting people where they are”—both physically and emotionally. Rather than expecting people to come to a central event or pre-defined campaign, the project brought activities directly into neighbourhoods and local, easily accessible green spaces.

Key components of this methodology included:

- **Hyper-Local Events:** Activities were hosted within residential areas to make them as accessible and familiar as possible. Locations included new housing estates, parks, and community hubs.
- **Partnership with Local Experts:** We worked with Hampshire Swifts to put up swift boxes and provide a talk on swifts, our ecology walks were led by the project manager, who is a trained ecologist and lives locally, so is extremely familiar with the area. Local musicians composed the “Web of Life” song and wrote the accompanying play.

- **Intergenerational Appeal:** Events were designed to include families, older residents, and individuals with varying interests—from wildlife and gardening to creative writing and environmental action.
- **Informality and Welcoming Atmosphere:** Activities prioritised friendliness over formality. Tea, cake, conversation, and curiosity were as important as learning outcomes, helping to lower the barrier to entry for those who might otherwise feel excluded from climate activism.
- **Built-in Flexibility:** The project allowed space for organic ideas to emerge. Residents were encouraged to suggest activities, and the team remained open to adapting the programme in response to local interest and seasonal opportunities.

3. Phase One: The Pilot Project (May 2022 – April 2023)

3.1 Location

We selected the Whitedown area of Alton for the project because it is central to the town, easily identifiable geographically, with a mixed demography of ages and house types – from social housing to large privately owned houses, with a school and nearby allotments, and what we thought was a manageable size of about 450-500 households, capable of expansion into the rest of the ward if we wanted, with some residents who are more or less active in the wider ACAN network and could hopefully act as “influencers” and with plenty of green space which we could work with regarding improving it for wildlife.

3.2 Plan

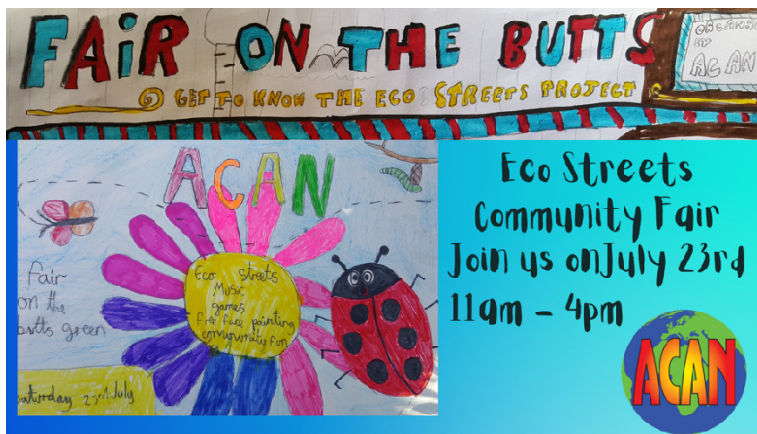
In the planning stage of the project, we attempted to define the baseline and get to know our audience’s stages of change. We also tried to get an idea of the potential obstacles to implementing change. We did this by designing and executing a neighbourhood survey. We managed to survey almost one third of all households in the project area (140 households out of 430; 120 surveyed door-to-door, 20 through an online survey). The results from this survey not only gave us a good idea of the attitudes towards the climate crisis and climate activism in the community, they also informed the choice of the first workshops we offered. We also introduced the project to key actors like the mayor, local councillors and the local primary school, as well as to people already involved with ACAN’s other activities.

3.3 Execute

We decided to introduce the project to the neighbourhood by means of a family-friendly event which emphasised the interactive community aspect of the project rather than the scientific content around the climate crisis. We chose an open air fair on a very frequented the local green area, Butts Green. This is an area where people from the neighbourhood come to play football and exercise their dogs. Food stands are present on the Green on several days a week and bigger events like fun fairs and circuses use the area when they are in town. As such, Butts Green is a location known to the locals but not a location where community events usually take place.

The event was preceded by a large leafletting campaign which put a flyer through every letterbox in the project area as well as an interview on the local radio station.

The local primary school was involved through having children help design the flyer for the event.



Insect-themed face painting was one of the most popular activities at the Butts Fair



A survey exploring the feelings regarding the climate crisis among 7-11 year olds was also conducted at the local primary school during this time (115 responses).

After the event, we used the summer holidays to analyse the input gathered at the event as well as the survey data from both the neighbourhood and the primary school survey.

We designed three workshops and developed ideas for collaborations with the primary school based on the survey results.

After the summer holidays, we hosted the first two workshops, one in-person workshop, “Climate Change and Community - challenges and opportunities”, attended by 4 participants, and one online, “A short guide to online campaigning”, also attended by 4 participants. Feedback on both workshops was very positive and it was decided to offer them intermittently over the course of the next six months in the hope of increasing uptake. Unfortunately, we did not manage to create more interest in these workshops and we did not end up running them again. This was despite the fact that these workshops addressed topics in which residents had expressed interest.

We devised and launched several very diverse outreach approaches to create more community interactions:

Dog Walking against Climate Change

We identified dog walkers as a possible target audience for engagement and decided to offer a weekly walk (weather permitting). During the walk, our project leader and resident environmental scientist Scott would talk about different aspects of climate change and answer some of the questions people might have. The walks were also meant to give locals a possibility to talk to each other about their climate worries and swap tips how to make their everyday lives more sustainable. Unfortunately, there wasn't any uptake for these weekly walks. We did offer this walk during the Alton Walking Festival in May 2024 with good success.



Rewild your mind - Poetry Workshop

This workshop would take a small group of people out into nature. During the walk, project leader Scott, who is also an artist, would talk about the local ecosystem, its inhabitants and functions, its hidden secrets and overt wonders. Then the group would settle down somewhere and Scott would take them through some guided contemplation and present an easy to follow outline to get everyone writing poetry based on their sensory and emotional experiences in nature. Again, we initially struggled to create enough interest in these walks. We offered the walk during the Alton Walking Festival 2024 where it was fully booked and a great success.



A Cuppa for the Climate

We met once a month at the Eco Café on Market Square for an informal chat about all things climate over a cup of tea. This initiative was inspired by a lady who commented on Facebook that she was physically unable to join us on the walks, but would love to have a chat. Unfortunately, she never ended up using the offer, but others have. Acting upon feedback from attendees, we eventually started to run these chats with a specific overarching topic. Unfortunately, uptake of this offer remained lukewarm and we eventually discontinued it.



Listen to the Children

After the impressive answers to our survey by the local primary school children, we first ran a 30-day Facebook and Instagram campaign highlighting the worries of the primary schoolers surveyed in June. We then managed to obtain a grant which allowed us to stage an exhibition to showcase the worries of 7-11 year-olds around climate change and produce an accompanying booklet. This exhibition premiered in January 2023 at the Community Centre in Alton, with the launch featuring speeches by a representative of Young ACAN, the mayor of Alton and music by local activist band the Lürxx.

After the launch, the exhibition was hosted at St. Lawrence's Church before moving on to Petersfield, returning to Alton for a second time in May, this time at the Allen Gallery in collaboration with Hampshire Cultural Trust. The exhibition at the Allen Gallery was accompanied by a poetry workshop (attended by three people) and a concert (attended by 10 people). A workshop at the Gallery (on climate change communication) did not attract any interest and the closing event of the exhibition was only attended by two people. This was despite the exhibition and all events

being advertised through ACAN as well as through the Hampshire Cultural Trust.

The exhibition offers viewers the possibility to engage with the content by encouraging them to leave a post-it with their thoughts after viewing the exhibition. This has led to interesting discussions, with some people feeling that the exhibition was too negative and “worrying” while others supported the approach. We feel that this interaction formed a key element of the exhibition - we want to encourage conversations around the climate crisis and its effect on the younger generation. The post-its gave us the opportunity to reply to questions and critique and allowed us to clarify any uncertainties, which we did on social media. This form of interaction could create a “dialogue” between adults and children, using the comments from the post-its together with the quotes by the children.

Most feedback was positive and showed that we managed to create an impressive experience. Examples of feedback included: “I just wanted to say that I have picked up a copy of your booklet Listen To The Children and read it this evening - it's excellent!” or “From the mouths of babes - there is a lot of wisdom here!”. The booklets remain available at Alton’s Goldfinch bookstore.

"Listen to the Children" is arguably one of the most important and most profound outputs from the Eco-Streets project and can be made available to other groups, institutions etc. on request.

The Web of Life

We cooperated closely with the ward’s primary school, conducting eco assemblies, offering workshops during their “Science Week”, and even producing a bespoke short musical play for them, “The Web of Life”. This play was specifically created to illustrate the intricate way that all creatures are dependent on each other, moving from the small (our own back garden) to the wider surroundings (beach) and on to the big picture (whole eco systems) and examining negative and positive human impact on these systems. The play was performed by the Year 3 class for fellow students and parents. The aim of the play was to engage the parents through working with the children - the children were required to learn the theme song which they likely practiced at home, just like their lines from the play. Parents were also involved in creating the costumes. This would have introduced the topics (gardening for wildlife, use of pesticides, plastic pollution, wildlife disturbance...) in the families and hopefully provided talking points for further discussion.

The performance was well-received by students, teachers and parents alike and one father, who was clearly very moved, even reached out afterwards to thank us.

The “Web of Life” song was performed by the students at St. Lawrence primary school and is available on ACAN’s YouTube channel. It has since been regularly used in workshops run at primary schools across the South Downs National Park by PeCAN.

The Bolle Road Wildflower verge

It was crucial to our approach to first get all the direct neighbours on board with this project before commencing work on the meadow.



LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN

If nature runs out
we'll have none
to show and pass
down to future
generations -
imagine a world
without wonder!

EXHIBITION

What are the worries of our local children regarding the Climate & Nature Emergency, what do they ask of us and how can we help them - and ourselves! - be agents of positive change?

Find out at this exhibition, curated by Eco Streets, ACAN and Young ACAN.

Sun 29th January, 12pm: Launch at The Lounge Bar, Alton, GU34 1HN with introduction & live music

Touring to various venues in Alton and Petersfield. Dates to be announced!

Follow us on Social Media @ecostreetsalton for updates!




We did this using a 2-step approach: First, we leafleted all households in the vicinity, explaining our plans and announcing a visit a couple of days later, giving an exact date and time when to expect us.

This initial leafletting campaign resulted in two emails, one very positive, informing us that the residents in question would be absent on the date we had specified but were delighted with the project, one slightly negative with a resident voicing his concern because of family members with severe allergies.

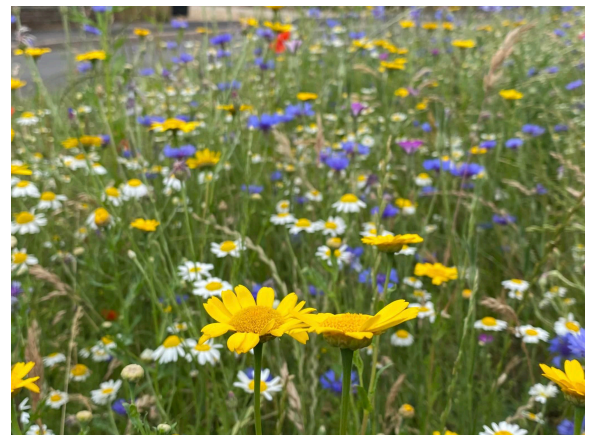
When we visited the residents, we managed to speak to almost every household, inclusive of the one with the allergy concerns, and we managed to get everyone we talked to on board with the project.

We left a note with those residents who we didn't catch at home and received another email as a response which stated that the residents were happy about the project and even willing to help.

The work party to establish the verge brought together residents and ACAN volunteers, with a total of 11 people helping out on the day.

The verge is now well established and supports a healthy insect population. Residents take care of mowing the edges without any further input needed from ACAN. Having this visible calling card proved a great asset - in the end-of-project survey, 48% of the respondents stated that they were aware of the verge, this was only topped by the Fair on the Butts (56%) and the regular leaflets (49%).

This project produced a visible and long-lasting handprint of the Eco Streets project in the neighbourhood. However, apart from one resident who has taken up the mowing of the edges, no long-term local neighbourhood volunteers have come forward to organise ongoing management of the wildflower verge, which therefore remains dependent on core ACAN volunteers.



3.4 Evaluate & Reflect

3.4.1 Getting to know the community

Getting acquainted with the community was a challenge because the Whitedown ward is a completely residential ward. There is no centre where people congregate, there are no shops, no pubs, and no neighbourhood associations. The only community hub is the primary school, which

luckily was very keen to get involved and with which we quickly could establish a good relationship.

There is also no dedicated group for this area on social media, so we basically had to throw our online content into the void. We therefore decided to introduce the project the “old-fashioned” way, by leafletting all households and hosting a family-friendly event. This proved a reasonable choice despite the cost and effort: In the end-of-project survey, 56% and 49% of the respondents reported awareness of the Fair on the Butts and the regular leaflets respectively, whereas only 10% were aware of our Instagram/Facebook.

We also reached out to people who are already involved in some way with ACAN who live in the area and began to build up an email list. By the end of the project, we had managed to collect 40 people on this email list, which we used to keep people updated on the project’s progress and on project-related activities.

Another way of reaching out to the community were the door-to-door surveys. Residents were generally happy to engage and hardly anyone refused to take part.

We feel confident that every household in the project area should have been aware of the project. This did, however, not result in any significant uptake of our offers or in a larger number of followers on social media. The end-of-project survey revealed that 22% of respondents remained completely unaware of the project.

3.4.2 Social Media

The project runs a Facebook page (117 Followers at the end of the pilot) and an Instagram account (128 Followers at the end of the pilot). There has not been very much interaction on either account despite regular posts. We trialled different approaches on our Social Media accounts (Facebook and Instagram): Simple calls to action, information about local wildlife, highlighting national and international action days, information about upcoming activities, wrap-ups of past activities, survey results, seasonal content...

We could not discern any kind of pattern regarding the interactions with the different types of posts. Engagement remained pretty low throughout, with a record of 27 “Likes” for our top post on Instagram (photos of the work party that created the wildlife verge). A strategy to make posts more interactive by expressively encouraging people to share their views in the comments (employed during September 2022) did not show any results.

It is unclear how many of the followers on either account are actually residents of the target area.

3.4.3 Survey Uptake, Results and Reaction

The uptake both for the door-to-door surveys and the online-version was good.

The results of the initial survey were not surprising per se but showed some interesting trends nonetheless: There is a high level of awareness of the importance of the topic of climate change and also an awareness that the climate crisis will affect people personally. There is also the general agreement that not enough is being done and that radical changes are needed. There is, however, very little indication of people taking any kind of action. For the project, this meant that we do not need to convince people of the seriousness of the situation on an intellectual level but rather on an emotional level. They need to engage with the situation more emotionally in order to reach the “Action” stage of Behaviour Change. The fact that most adults did not feel that the climate crisis

impacted their mental health explains why young people feel so left alone with their worries - it is because they are! We need to work on establishing a more emotional connection to nature in the adults, a connection which the surveyed primary schoolers clearly displayed in their statements. We tried to do this in two ways: Through offering free poetry workshops designed to “mindfully re-wild ourselves” and through putting on the “Web of Life” performance with Year 3 primary schoolers, designed to trigger emotion in the adults who came to see the performance.

Work with the school was delayed somewhat due to issues around the required DBS check - this is a factor that needs to be kept in mind when planning any interactions with schools: allow enough time for the background checks to be completed.

3.4.4 Creating an Eco Streets “brand”

We believed that we needed to keep the Eco Streets project at the forefront of people’s minds. The only way to achieve this seemed to be through leafletting. Therefore, we devised a leafletting campaign for the second half of the project: The idea was to not only inform people but to offer them something of value with each flyer. We achieved this by offering seasonal eco tips: for Halloween, we provided information on how to fight food waste by sharing a site with 30+ pumpkin recipes. For Christmas, we offered ideas for a more sustainable Christmas, for the new year we suggested eco new years resolutions etc. Every flyer also asked people to follow us on Facebook and/or Instagram for more eco tips and to find out what is going on in the neighbourhood. Every flyer also featured one free upcoming offer, e.g. for a workshop. We intended to leaflet the entire project area once a month, however, we did not quite achieve this due to time constraints. Follower numbers on social media kept growing albeit at a slow pace but it remains unclear if the leafletting had any influence on this. Take up of our workshop offers did not increase.

3.4.5 Involving residents

Initially, we were only been able to recruit two residents to get involved with Eco Streets actively, a lady in Bolle Road who volunteered to potentially lead the wildflower meadow project and a lady who participated in the in-person workshop, who works in marketing and would like to use her skills to further our cause. Both of these offers did not materialise, although the former did help with creating the verge. Once the verge had been created, a resident approached us and offered to regularly mow the edges which he has done ever since with great care.

Past the 6-month mark of the project we started to see a little more traction, with slightly more engagement on Facebook posts, inclusive of one lady who suggested an informal gathering which would not require outdoor activity, a suggestion that led to the “A Cuppa for the Climate”. Another resident reacted to the Christmas leaflet which mentioned the planned wildflower verge and sent an email offering to get involved (which she did).

We have managed to personally engage with a fair number of residents over the course of the year, be it during the door-to-door surveys, during the Eco Fair, while talking to residents about the wildflower verge, or while out leafletting.

3.4.5.a Conversations with residents

Regularly leafletting the project area has the added benefit of offering an opportunity to talk to residents. Interactions have been overwhelmingly positive with people generally showing interest in and appreciation for the project and happy to engage in a friendly chat. For every 500 leaflets distributed, we estimate around 5 person-to-person interactions. During these informal chats one can get valuable insights in people’s “unfiltered” opinions and concerns. For future projects, it

would be helpful to keep a “log” of such chats to assess the number of interactions and the topics talked about.

Three conversations went more into detail and yielded some valuable feedback and inspirations:

a) Conversation with a participant of the “Communicating Climate Change” workshop, several weeks after the workshop took place

This lady talked about her initial reservations of attending the workshop. The two things she was most concerned about were a) that her own prior knowledge about the topic would be considered insufficient by other workshop participants and that she might get ridiculed for her opinions and b) that she would encounter other participants who might disagree with her opinions and be confrontational about it.

It can be expected that many people will share these reservations. They ideally should be directly addressed in the run-up to the workshop: It should be made very clear that the workshop is designed to be a safe space for participants and that no prior knowledge is expected. It might also help to state beforehand that everyone is invited to state their opinions and feelings but that the conversation should always come from a position of empathy and understanding and that aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated.

b) Conversation with a resident of Whitedown, 7 months into the project

A chance meeting with a resident of the Whitedown Oval, who at that point should have received 4-5 flyers over the course of the past 5 months, revealed that she remained unaware of the project. Upon learning about its purpose she was very positive and interested - we can conclude that if even an existing general interest in the topic does not translate into awareness of the flyers how much harder it might be to get the message of a project’s existence through to more disinterested people... With a little prompting, she did recall seeing the recently delivered Halloween-flyer and she did recall that it was about pumpkins (which had led to her disregarding it because she did not have pumpkins...).

c) Conversation with a resident of Bolle Road regarding hedgehogs

This was a longer conversation in June 2022 with a resident who over lock-down had gotten into helping hedgehogs and was by now very knowledgeable. This conversation did establish a lasting awareness of the project as was evidenced by an email about a perceived decline in local hedgehogs this individual wrote to us in mid-December, indicating that Eco Streets was perceived as a go-to contact for wildlife matters. This individual went on to become our hedgehog champion who spoke at two hedgehog events for ACAN which were very successful. As a result of one of these events, we can confirm that at least one hedgehog’s life has been saved!

3.4.6 General thoughts on working with the Butts Primary School

Working in a purely residential neighbourhood, we soon identified the Butts Primary School as the only type of community hub and as an important ally in raising climate awareness.

Thanks to a small number of very engaged staff, we were able to establish a great relationship with the school and could get involved with them on four different levels:

- we led regular assemblies on environmental topics

- we offered a number of workshops during their Science Week
- we staged a short musical play with their Y3 group.
- we intended to involve their Gardening Club in the upkeep of the wild flower verge, which is in close proximity to the school grounds

Through the development of this connection, the school has also approached us for expertise regarding the improvement of their recycling and development of a courtyard into a green space, possibly for growing herbs and vegetables.

This experience shows that outreach work with local schools can bear many different fruits and take on very different shapes, from a more scientific input in assemblies and workshops, to a cultural artistic approach, to a hands-on project like a wildflower verge.

All of these activities have **several layers of impact** attached to them:

The “scientific” input creates knowledge and encourages the children to ask questions and dig deeper, possibly paving the way for an interest in environmental science as well as improved general knowledge about important topics around climate change and nature conservation.

The play helps children experience the connectedness of ecosystems on different scales first hand, with art creating an emotional awareness alongside a more ‘scientific’ awareness. It also helps them experience the positive effects of taking action and reinforces the a positive feeling of communal strength. It was likely an emotional experience for the parents to see their children perform this piece and it will hopefully lead them to take action - ease off on the weed killers and pesticides, pick up that litter they see on the beach...

The establishment of a wild flower verge in the neighbourhood is a great visual output for the project and involving the children in an ecology project outside of the school grounds will not only give the children the possibility to learn about gardening for nature but it will also demonstrate how they can play an active part in improving their neighbourhood.

The Butts School was also instrumental to our exhibition “Listen to the Children”, which we developed out of the answers of students aged 7 to 11 to our Eco Streets questionnaire on Climate Change. This impactful exhibition gives the children a voice, an opportunity to present their worries about the future to the community, which hopefully will serve as an inspiration to adults to engage in climate activism.

3.4.7 Interactive Elements

An important part of the Eco Streets concept was the interactive approach - it was not supposed to be yet another “service” to be consumed passively. In reality, it has proven difficult to involve people. Interactive elements that we have trialed included:

- “spill your beans” opinion poll at the Eco Fair (adults and children)
- litter-related games at the Eco Fair (children)
- “Paint our Poster” competition (children)
- surveys (adults and children)

- workshops (adults)
- workshops (children)
- musical play (children)
- choir singing (children)
- wildflower verge (adults)
- social media posts asking for comments (adults)

While it was easy to involve children in activities through the cooperation with the school, it proved exceedingly hard to “activate” adults. The regular leaflets with simple calls to action seem to have had some impact, with over 20% of the respondents of the end-of-project survey reporting that these leaflets inspired behaviour change, while 9% stated that they were already taking the suggested actions.

Nature-focused activities such as the wildflower verge or the hedgehog talk resulted in the most involvement while the workshops and other offers around the “Climate Change” topic garnered decidedly less attention.

While the uptake wasn’t great, it must be noted that the feedback from those who did participate in the workshops was extremely positive. A participant in the poetry walk described it as “magic” while another one stated that it had enabled her to perceive nature in a more mindful way. Participants of the “Communicating Climate Change” workshop felt that it enabled them to better address the topic with friends, family or colleagues in the future and the dog walkers against climate change appreciated the input given about the impact of the pet food industry on climate change and what we can do to make life with companion animals more environmentally sustainable. This positive feedback shows that it is definitely worthwhile to keep offering these type of activities. We felt that with more time we eventually could have established more interest within our adult target group.

3.5 Conclusion

The pilot project was a very valuable learning journey. One key outcome seemed to be that better engagement is achieved when targeting small groups (like the direct neighbours of the Bolle Road verge) than when targeting the whole “neighbourhood” in a more anonymous “blanket” approach.

It was also interesting to observe that it isn’t enough to ask people what topics they are interested in and then offer content on these topics, assuming people will take up the offer. Interest does not lead to action! A realisation which was also backed up by the survey results, where a vast majority of people (93%) thought climate change was an important topic and that radical changes were necessary (80%) but at the same time the same vast majority did not indicate they were making any of these changes or were even aware of, much less participating in, any of ACAN’s offers.

While most people (88%) agreed with the statement “acting as a community we can make a positive difference”, one volunteer observed “I am finding that people do not understand community action – they don’t know what the phrase means. They translate the last question into individual action, despite my attempting to guide them in their responses towards talking, sharing and thinking collectively. In my husband’s opinion, community action doesn’t exist anymore.”

We concluded that a lack of emotional involvement is key in the lack of engagement among the adult population. They possess the necessary knowledge - 78% of respondents stated that climate change is affecting or will affect them and/or their families personally. 75% stated that their level of worry about the climate crisis was 3 or higher on a scale of 1 - 5. However, 83% of respondents said that the topic of the climate crisis did not affect their mental health. These results stand in stark contrast to results from surveys among younger people. In our own primary school survey, more than a quarter of the children stated that they worried about the climate crisis on level 5 on a scale of 1-5. In alignment with being more heavily impacted, children also showed more action: 37% of children followed a plant-based diet (compared to 24% of adults) and 20% of children participated in protests (compared to only 9% of adults).

We believe that we need to find ways to connect adults to nature on a more emotional level, to re-wild their minds, so that they can be driven to action by empathy. We think that creative approaches are key to achieve this goal - we need to include the arts into our outreach work to help people open up the emotional channels that will allow them to embark on their journey towards a more sustainable future. Interestingly - considering their relative inaction - over 70% of respondents stated that they feel a moral duty to do something about the climate crisis. We conclude that helping people to act upon their moral belief will actually improve their mental health by closing the value-action gap and reducing cognitive dissonance.

We saw that people are extremely unhappy with the way politicians are handling the climate crisis - 80% of respondents agreed that politicians aren't doing enough. Paired with the overwhelming support for the statement that radical (!) changes are needed, we can see that the perceived fear of politicians to introduce "too radical" measures to combat climate change is completely unfounded. Quite the opposite: it seems people are waiting for politicians to step up and present a road map of radical changes that they then can follow.

We can confirm that even in the age of Social Media, leafletting remains an important way of outreach (only 10% of respondents were aware of the social media, compared to an almost 50% awareness of leafletting).

Visible actions like the Fair on the Butts or the Wildflower Verge were most efficient in garnering people's attention

Survey results indicate that people are willing to let the climate crisis influence their choices and in fact are already doing so - but they need easy access to the right choices! Financial and time constraints remain a challenge when it comes to living more sustainably and organisations like ACAN can definitely help with providing access to sustainable living options. In closing, we can confirm that concern about the climate crisis is high and majoritarian and that there exists a clear awareness that climate change will impact people on a personal level. We can also confirm that people are aware of the fact that radical changes are needed and remain hopeful that concerted action can bring positive results.

We felt that the pilot provided a good basis for further community work, but coaxing people into actually making these necessary changes and incorporating their knowledge about the climate crisis into their everyday actions remains a challenge.

4. Phase Two: Eco Streets “New Estates” (July 2023 – July 2025)

4.1 Building on the Pilot

Armed with the conclusions from the pilot project, we embarked on Phase 2 with a clear vision and renewed sense of purpose. Our focus would be to **emphasise Nature Connection** as an accessible and engaging route into conversations about climate change; to continue offering our much-appreciated Poetry Walk; and to maintain a consistent presence in key neighbourhoods through regular leafletting.

4.2 Expanding Reach: New Estates and Demographics

Alton has seen considerable residential growth in recent years, with several new housing estates reshaping the town’s demographic profile. Phase 2 of Eco Streets therefore targeted some of these newer developments with the dual objective of welcoming new residents into the community and engaging them early in climate- and nature-focused activities.

The demographic make-up of these estates differed somewhat from that of the pilot ward: residents were predominantly working-age adults and young families. This shift required us to partially refine our communication styles, scheduling, and activity formats to better align with the rhythms and needs of these groups.

4.3 Continued and New Activities

Drawing on the learning outcomes from Phase 1, we curated a programme that placed nature connection at its core. We offered a series of guided ecology walks, all within easy walking distance of the target estates, as well as short outdoor talks on local wildlife delivered at central, accessible spots within the neighbourhoods. In addition, we sustained our routine of leafletting and continued our social media activity to support visibility and reach.

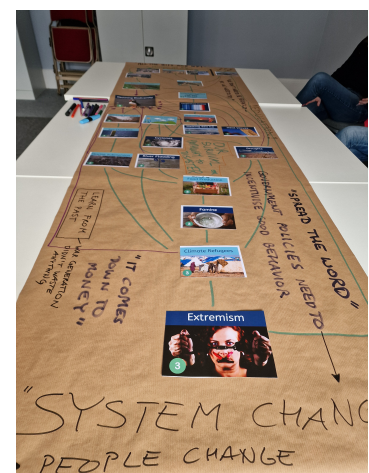
To provide a tangible and lasting legacy, we introduced a small suite of practical enhancements for local biodiversity, including free swift boxes (with installation generously provided by Hampshire Swifts), free bat boxes, and the placement of a picnic bench to encourage outdoor gathering and community use of green spaces.



Bat box at Hop Fields Estate



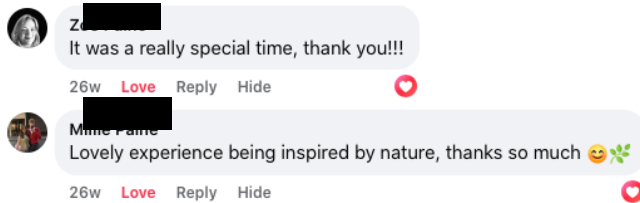
Picnic bench at Hop Fields Estate
ecostreetsalton@gmail.com



Climate Mosaik workshop

4.3.1 Evolving Creative Engagement

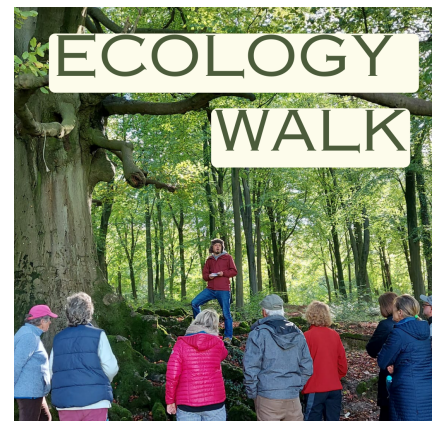
We continued our popular Poetry Walk: a 30-minute silent walk followed by guided reflection and opportunities for poetry writing. Group sizes were typically modest (3–5 participants), but the feedback remained consistently excellent. It became evident that this form of gentle, creative engagement resonated deeply with participants, offering a reflective and emotionally rich way into environmental connection. Of all our activities, it is this creative-emotive format that seems to carry the strongest transformative potential.



4.3.2 Deepening Nature Connection

Conversations with participants highlighted that many residents were surprisingly unfamiliar with nearby natural areas—despite their proximity. Leading short guided walks into local woodland proved revelatory for many, particularly for those who had never previously felt confident exploring these spaces. For newer residents, a mixture of hesitation, uncertainty about access routes, and a general “fear of the unknown” often acted as barriers.

Our walks helped dismantle these barriers. Each session included light-touch ecological education, introducing people to common plants and animals, explaining their needs and behaviours, and highlighting how climate change may affect local habitats.

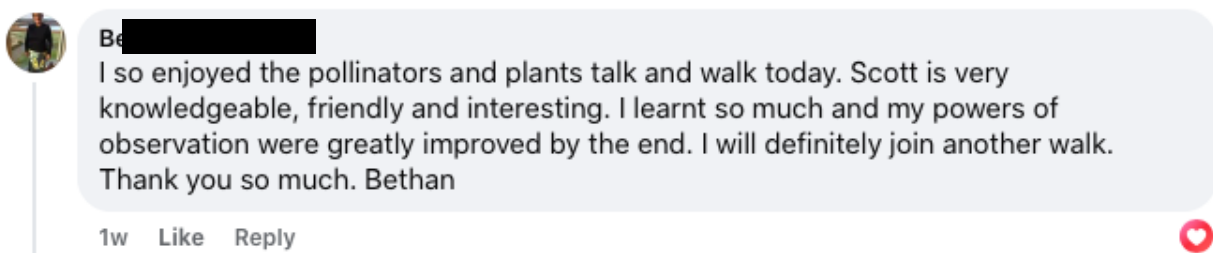


To capture immediate impressions, we developed a brief post-walk survey. Feedback was enthusiastic and varied, including comments such as:

“Love the way you teach respect for even the tiniest insects and plants.”

“The walk was informative and offered a lot of eco-hope.”

“So interesting—it makes you realise our dependence on the environment.”



“Exceeded expectations.”

“Great for families.”

“A wonderful contrast to the Christmas bustle in town.”

Participants ranged from young children to people in their 80s, demonstrating that nature connection holds a broad and intergenerational appeal.



4.3.3 Outreach Events

We made a strategic decision not to repeat a large, centralised event such as the “Fair on the Butts,” as the estates targeted in Phase 2 were geographically dispersed. Instead, we organised launch events within three of the estates—Hop Fields, Gilbert White Way, and Ackender Hill. While only Hop Fields attracted substantial footfall due to partnership with an established Residents' Association, these events still provided useful learning about local rhythms, communication channels, and the importance of hyper-local visibility.

4.4 Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms

In addition to the short feedback forms distributed after walks, we gathered responses via social media and through a limited door-to-door survey. Together, these channels offered a snapshot of engagement levels, perceptions of the programme, and areas where our outreach could be strengthened.

4.5 Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

Despite our efforts, engaging the adult population remained a persistent challenge. Ensuring that information about our activities actually reached residents required a considerable investment of time and resources. Although the combined strategy of online posts, leafletting, and posters in central locations generated some awareness, the overall level of recognition remained modest in proportion to the effort expended.

A further challenge was encouraging participation in the more climate-specific elements of the programme. Activities explicitly framed around climate change tended to attract fewer participants than those centred on general nature connection. This suggests that, for many residents, nature-based experiences serve as an accessible entry point, whereas climate-focused workshops may require different framing, timing, or supportive pathways to achieve comparable engagement.

5. Results from the Phase Two Survey

The 2023 Eco Streets survey of one of the target estates (Ackender Hill) — covering approximately one quarter of its households—provided valuable insight into the attitudes, concerns, and needs of a predominantly working-age community. The findings reinforce patterns observed in previous Eco Streets surveys (Whitedown 2022; Primary Schools 2022) and highlight clear opportunities for future engagement.

The survey confirms that climate awareness and concern are high across the community: 97% of respondents consider climate change important, and nearly three-quarters believe that the climate crisis will directly affect them or their families. Yet, despite this high level of concern, respondents reported low levels of mental health impact, suggesting that residents are not overwhelmed by anxiety but are instead open to constructive information and practical guidance. This aligns with earlier Eco Streets feedback, strengthening the case that providing accessible advice on sustainable choices remains a valuable service, empowering residents without contributing to eco-distress.

The pattern of climate-related worries is also instructive. Concerns centre strongly on Biodiversity Loss, Pollution of Rivers and Oceans, and Extreme Weather, likely influenced both by powerful media narratives (e.g., David Attenborough documentaries) and recent lived experiences of unusual weather events. In contrast, foundational systemic issues such as Fossil Fuels, Food Security, and Industrial Agriculture ranked significantly lower. This disparity suggests either limited awareness, low visibility in mainstream media, or possible resistance to topics associated with more contentious activism. Such findings point to a continued need for gentle, confidence-building climate education grounded in local relevance and everyday actions.

Perhaps most striking is residents' focus on the welfare of future generations: participants expressed much greater concern for the future of children and grandchildren than for their own. This mirrors our 2022 findings and raises important questions about the role of altruism, perceived agency, and perceived timescales of the crisis. Notably, the only respondent reporting severe mental health impacts was under 16, echoing the heightened worry levels previously documented among young people. Supporting youth with age-appropriate climate education and emotional resilience therefore remains a priority for ACAN.

The survey also reveals a strong appetite for collective action and systemic change. As in 2022, an overwhelming majority agreed that "Together we can make a positive impact," "Politicians are not doing enough," and "Radical changes are needed." The fact that 22 out of 35 respondents agreed with the deliberately phrased "radical changes" statement indicates that many residents may be more open to ambitious climate policies than commonly assumed. This offers an encouraging counterpoint to fears that bold political action will alienate the public. Instead, it suggests that people recognise the scale of the crisis and expect leaders to act accordingly.

Behaviourally, only two respondents reported that climate concerns have no influence at all on their consumption choices, demonstrating a general willingness to adapt lifestyles when practical options are made visible. When asked about local priorities, residents expressed strongest interest in wildlife-friendly gardening, reducing energy consumption, reducing litter, and growing food. These priorities closely map onto their top environmental concerns, and they point to clear actionable pathways for community-led initiatives. While interest in growing food may be driven more by cost-of-living pressures than by concerns about food security, it still represents a useful entry point to discussions about resilience and sustainable food systems.

Finally, awareness of ACAN's work remains moderate, with around one-third of respondents familiar with the organisation. This underlines the importance of continued, targeted outreach. In response to the survey, we distributed a tailored flyer to all households summarising the support and resources offered by four ACAN subgroups most aligned with residents' expressed concerns.

Overall, the 2023 Ackender Hill survey confirms that the Eco Streets approach—combining nature connection, practical climate education, and locally grounded engagement—resonates strongly with residents. People care deeply about environmental issues, are motivated by concern for future generations, and are broadly receptive to both individual and systemic solutions. These findings will

continue to inform ACAN’s strategy as we refine our outreach, strengthen visibility, and support communities in building practical, hopeful, and meaningful pathways toward climate resilience.

6. Conclusion

The Eco Streets project has demonstrated that meaningful climate engagement at the neighbourhood level is both possible and powerful when it is grounded in **connection, continuity, and practical support**. One of the most successful aspects of the programme has been the programme of **guided ecology walks**, which consistently proved to be an effective gateway for residents to discover local green spaces and begin conversations about climate change and nature protection. By offering these walks regularly, free of charge, and within easy reach of participants’ homes, we created repeated opportunities for people to deepen their knowledge and confidence. Even during periods of low attendance, maintaining the offer was essential—continuity builds trust, and trust ultimately builds participation.

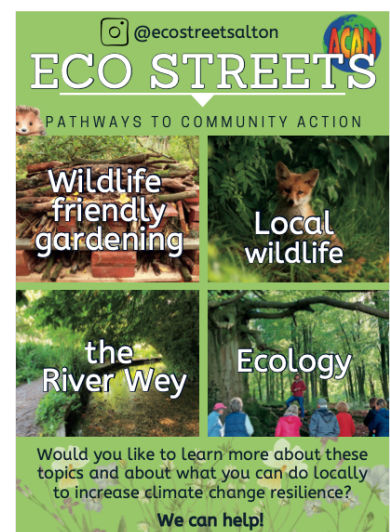
The project also confirmed that **creative activities** are uniquely suited to fostering emotional connection with nature. Experiences such as the Poetry Walk enable participants to slow down, reflect, and form a more personal relationship with their environment. However, these activities must feel safe and accessible. Many people worry about “not being creative enough” or “doing it wrong,” so removing barriers and offering gentle, welcoming formats remains crucial for broad participation.

Working with children and schools continues to be one of the most effective strategies for community-wide impact. Children absorb new ideas readily, embrace sustainable behaviours with enthusiasm, and often bring these habits home to their families. Through them, we can reach not only young people but also teachers, parents, and caregivers —making schools powerful conduits of awareness and change.



The installation of swift boxes, bat boxes, and other **hands-on biodiversity improvements** proved equally impactful. These practical measures give residents a clear way to make a positive difference and foster a sense of stewardship for the local environment. Such visible actions also help reinforce the message that climate and ecological care are achievable at the household level.

At the same time, the project reaffirmed the importance of sustained, well-resourced outreach. **Leafletting** and in-person visibility remain indispensable, as social media alone does not reach all demographics. To maintain a constant presence and ensure that residents are aware of opportunities, interests, and local initiatives, adequate time and funding are essential. Without them, momentum and recognition risk slipping away.



Finally, Eco Streets revealed a heartening truth: people are ready for change—they are simply looking for guidance and consistency from those leading the way. Our role is not only to inform but also to model sustainable choices visibly and confidently. Whether through the refreshments we serve at events or the materials we provide, we must demonstrate the practicality of low-impact options. Normalising sustainable behaviour—such as providing only plant-based milk for tea/coffee when promoting plant-based diets—shows that change is both achievable and socially supported.

